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## An Ecology of Performance: Gregory Bateson's Cybernetic Performance

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An Ecology of Performance: Gregory Bateson's Cybernetic Performance

by

Daniel Matthew Blaeuer

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
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## **An Ecology of Performance: Gregory Bateson's Cybernetic Performance**

**Daniel M. Blaeuer**

### **Abstract**

This dissertation is a case study of the public performances of Gregory Bateson at The Esalen Institute. The case study is a reconsideration of the work of Gregory Bateson from the perspective of performance studies. The author brings together performativity, cybernetics, and the sacred to argue that Gregory Bateson, in his public performances, was striving for grace in encounters with others. The author has conducted archival research into Bateson's presentations and has spoken with several close to Bateson to get a sense of how his process of public presentation paralleled his ideas—a process of continually working through ideas in conversation with others. In his dissertation the author tries to present the work in a form fitting with Bateson's own process.

### **Metologue One: What are Introductions, Daddy?**

Daughter: What are you doing, Daddy?

Father: I am writing an introduction to my dissertation.

Daughter: What are introductions, Daddy?

Father: Introductions are what you say, or in this case write, when you meet someone. Sometimes it is meeting a new friend or an old acquaintance.

Daughter: Then they are short, kind of like saying, “Hello” on a busy train?

Father: Well, yes, they need to be short, and they are the nice things we say to people when we meet them in passing. In some cases, it is what you say before you actually get on with saying something.

Daughter: You are telling them twice? Once in the introduction and later saying it better or in more detail?

Father: I only hope to do it better, but yes, it is kind of a telling it twice. A teacher once told me, “Tell them what you are going to tell them, tell them, and then tell them what you told them again.” Writing is not quite so redundant, but I hope you get the point.

Daughter: So what are you going to tell them?

Father: I am writing in part about the importance of introductions. Or, if I introduce it as something that is about introduction, then people might come to see it that way. Introductions, you see, are ways to share the

order of something so that other people can enjoy it and participate in the world with you, and, of course, know what to expect in our relationship. It is a way, I imagine, of inviting people into a world of meaning that they might not share. Not at least the way I do.

Daughter: I always thought introductions were just formal places to summarize your conclusion and state your main points. My teachers want very particular things in the first paragraph of my papers; do your teachers want very clear things, too?

Father: Yes, I think they have very clear ideas about what they want. We all have expectations for our introductions. Not just in introduction but also in all our communicating together, even in this conversation, we have expectations.

Daughter: And introductions are about expectations and order and preparing people for what is to come?

Father Yes.

Daughter: And introductions are ways to understand what is going on in a paper, a way to know what to expect and to know if you should keep reading it.

Father: Yes, introductions help us know where we stand with each other. When a policeman stops us in a car, he is surely not introducing himself the same way as he would introduce himself at the park. And I do not expect to share stories with him about our children when he stops me in my car the same way I might if I met him at the park.

Daughter: But you share stories with Polly's dad, and he is a policeman.

Father: Yes, he introduced himself quite differently to me when we met. If he ever stopped me, his introduction would be like mine is now—a little more difficult. I mean, he might have to both give me a traffic ticket as well as express his desire to see us at Polly's birthday party next month.

Daughter: That might not be very nice to give you a ticket.

Father: Well, he is just doing his job. But, anyway that is another issue altogether. We are talking about the difficulty of introductions. You see, introductions state what kind of relationships we have. Sometimes a policeman wants to be sure you know he is not your friend or that your friendship is another matter altogether. Polly's father and I would still be friends even if he gives me a ticket. But our friendship has limits and pulling me over and giving me a ticket lets me know this fact. Introductions are part of the ways we define those relationships.

Daughter: Do you mean the way Nana always gives me hugs when I walk in the door is a way of telling me how important I am to her and what kind of relationship we have?

Father: Yes, she is telling you, maybe not in words, how much you mean to her. It affirms your life with her and tells you what kind of relationship you have with her. You know that you can always go to her for anything you need?



Daughter: Yes, Nana has told me that a lot of times. It seems you are changing things and saying that introductions introduce relationships and maintain relationships.

Father: Yes, I might be changing them a little, but they are also kind of practical, and in my case, telling people where to find something and what I have written about.

Daughter: Do you mean something like how after greeting our friends at the door we tell them where the restrooms are and to make themselves at home?

Father: Yes, I think so exactly. An introduction is a greeting telling people what to expect and where to find it. In my writing, I am hoping to introduce myself to my audience.

Daughter: I thought you write alone in the office—I have never seen anyone come over. What audience are you talking about?

Father: I don't always write alone—I mean, you are in here now asking me to finish aren't you?

Daughter: Now, Daddy, you said you don't mind when I come in to give you a break.

Father: Yes, of course, I don't mind. Sometimes, however, I have deadlines, which are again expectations, but we will not get into that now. By not being alone, I mean I have always thought of an audience. Right now, I have been thinking about the audience in very particular ways. Like what do they expect of me? I would hate it if they think I am

unprepared for their visit or if they thought they were going to read something altogether different than what I am about to give them.

Daughter: Kind of like the way you and Mommy were complaining about not getting fed at the last birthday party?

Father: Oh, sorry, I didn't want you to hear us joking about that. But, yes, I was expecting to eat at the party and ended up leaving quite hungry. It was my expectation that we eat between five and six and a party at dinnertime should have dinner. It is okay; we quite enjoyed the party and enjoyed our late family dinner together even more. Besides, they don't have children, and their dinnertime is much later than ours; so is their bedtime. Which gets me thinking, is it your bedtime?

Daughter: Yes, it is bedtime, but I think I am starting to get what you are saying. Introductions tell us what kind of relationship we have and what the world is like. We can have different understandings about our relationship, our world, and our expectations about each other.

Father: Yes, introductions are important. They are like picture frames that tell us the objects on the wall are art.

Daughter: Yes, and not to touch them!

Father: That too is a different matter, and I only say it to you at last resort. Some artists expect and want you to play with their art.

Daughter: So how do you know what kind of frame it is? And that other people will see it the way you do? I mean, you just said that people have different expectations, didn't you? And you can play with some art.

Father: Yes, I did. And, yes, part of the fun and work is assuming people might have very different expectations than I do.

Daughter: How can you know any of this, I mean, their expectations? It seems to make writing very difficult, doesn't it?

Father: That is a very important question, and it is also something I am hoping to introduce. I am not quite sure we can know. At least not like the way I know the Earth is round.

Daughter: But, I know that Nana loves me. You told me her hugging me when I walk in the door affirms that very relationship.

Father: Yes, of course, and I love you as well. Giving you hugs, kisses, and telling you to go to bed are all my ways of making sure you know that very fact. But, nonetheless, we don't know it the way we know that an apple will fall to the ground after breaking off a tree. It is not that sort of knowledge. It seems to me heartbreaks and happiness happen exactly when we think our knowledge is one way and not the other.

Daughter: What kind of knowledge is it?

Father: It is a knowledge affirmed in practice for sure. It is a knowledge tested at moments of need. It is knowledge affirmed in sacraments. But it is not immune from doubt. To be human is to doubt, and likewise, it is to struggle to assure those we wish not to doubt us never have a reason to do so. You know I will always love you, right?

Daughter: Yes, of course I know. Can your readers doubt you? Or can you doubt them?

Father: Yes, of course. But it would be kind of melodramatic and could result in avoiding each other if we carried it too far.

Daughter: What is melodramatic?

Father: No, I am not answering that question today. You will learn what melodrama is when you are older. I plan on making sure that you learn it by being unreasonably standoffish to any significant others you bring home for your senior prom.

Daughter: What do you mean? You will not welcome my friends into our house? It is our house, isn't it?

Father: Well, I still have some time to think about this performance. But, yes, I am sure I will not think the same of him or her as you do. I might even make that clear. I might not use words at all to say it.

Daughter: But that is just being unreasonable! Why can't you see what I see in him or her?

Father: Don't start getting melodramatic now. I have not been anything but nice so far. But I think maybe you are starting to see my point about introductions. My other point might be that your mother and I will think your response is funny. You get my point?

Daughter: Not at all. Why are you unreasonable?

Father: Because I care about you. You see, I might never know what you think of your date, and you might never know why I don't like him or her or think the same of him or her. That is what it means to be human. Kitty-boo doesn't have these feelings, and I don't expect he

mopes around our house wondering about our relationship together and if I understand his kitten ways and kitten love. But you will, and from what my father-in-law tells me from his experience with your mother, it will start when you are thirteen. I apparently started a little later at fifteen.

Daughter: Started what?

Father: Being melodramatic.

Daughter: Are you saying readers and writers can be like adolescents?

Father: That is certainly one theory of language. I don't think it is as fun.

Daughter: As fun as what?

Father: Performance.

Daughter: What is performance?

Father: We are going to have to think about that question another day. It is now your bedtime.

Daughter: You promised to read to me when you are done and I go to bed. Are you done?

Father: Sure, I think we introduced the paper.

## Chapter One: The Introduction

When I was alone in my study, or at the table at Starbucks, or at our dining room table writing, I was thinking of you a lot. I imagined what you would look like and how you would walk into the room. Were you going to be stoic and solemn, or were you going to bounce in here full of excitement? Were you coming from a meeting with an old friend or an old lover? And, if you liked him or her, then maybe you would be happy to see me here today. Maybe you were just coming off work, or you were just coming to it, and if you disliked your job, could we ever overcome this unfortunate first beginning? What expectations would you bring? Do you need structure, and do you desire definitions, or are you, like me, quite fine with ambiguity?

I pondered these questions for a long time. I often wondered what you would think of me. Would you find me, as I so often find myself, someone who keeps his words and heart close? Would I come off as blocking something or shy? Would this character trait be flawed or endearing? Would you read the expression as blocked or covering a profound lack of intellectual rigor, or worse, would it come off as lack of interest? And could I ever tell you how much you mean to me?

I once had an intense paranoia and fear of being exposed to you—exposed as someone unworthy for your company, as if I were a bad blind date set up for you by a friend that you now, after being introduced to me, no longer trust. And if it were a mutual friend who introduced us, have I failed both of you? And now, waiting, I

wondered if we would find things to say to each other and if we would find worlds of life to share? I feared I would not be well read enough and would come off as insincere and foolish at best. Maybe you would find the examples from my life and the stories I come to share with you uninteresting. Would you twirl your hair and nod your head in agreement only to harbor disdain? Would I ever come to trust that you are really interested in me, at least as a friend?

As I refilled my coffee cup, I got the pictures of my daughter and beautiful wife out to show you. I wondered if you would find them beautiful as well. Would my experiences matter to you or count for you as experiences? Would I come to matter?

Finally, after I pondered the questions for too long and with my hand shaking from caffeine, I touched my pen to this paper in a nervous citation. I stopped again only to have the paranoia return. Did I include everyone? I have banker boxes in my garage from my classes, and they may be helpful here in this study. I inserted notes in my writing to include references from those banker boxes. Sometimes I wrote the notes in C++ and imagined a recursive program writing the dissertation for me: ColdFusion™ thesis. It was a productive fantasy, cloaking me behind a clear program of study and the computer program doing the expressing for me. It is a cybernetic fantasy of language.

Eventually, I started to doubt myself even more when I thought you would never come. What follows is another fragment. I corrected the earlier one(s) with an em dash. Myself doubt kept me from placing this pencil on this page; thus, it kept me from ever meeting you. I started envisioning myself a romantic artist, out of step and out of time with you. Now, it did not matter what you said or thought of me because at least I knew.

I alone knew. As a technology of the self, the written word soon gave me a doubt that nothing important was inside me eager for expression. Now my fantasy changed from a computer program to a private language, a fantasy that what I say and express, although possibly irrelevant to you, is transparent to me. You might never know, but how could I not know? And so, the new fantasy turned on denying the pervasiveness of a shared public language.

Returning to the coffee shop and my writing, I try something new and risk writing, and soon my nervous writing develops pages while my fears and concerns abate. The uncertainty is always there. And please don't push me too hard for clarity; I am still new at this performance. The risk of the performance is primarily that I have no way of knowing: how I will come off, if you get me, if we share a world, if I matter to you, if you will be here when I need you, and if that smile is real. It is not a matter of knowing, at least not of knowing with certainty. The point of this dissertation is recognizing the finitude of my human knowing and my finite limits.

By finitude of human knowing and finite limits, I guess I mean that I no longer stay up after midnight reading philosophy. But I can change a diaper with my eyes closed. And I mean to say, the form of my thought changes as the embodied context of thought changes. Not everything is expressible or thinkable everywhere and every time, and this might be a way to phrase the meaning of the sign of times. I also mean something else by these limits. What I mean by the finitude of human knowing is not just the finite constraints on my time. The constraints of my learning and thinking are situated because I have a family that I value and take as a component of my situated



knowing. I mean that to know is to know with a human body. Knowing is an embodied act and so too are the ways I come to know you and you come to know me. In an embodied activity, we can be disappointed in this knowledge and disappointed in what it promises. At the coffee table, I have faith we can share a world, and this faith is strengthened when you come when I need you and when we laugh at misunderstandings. I imagine as I sit here writing that you could refuse to acknowledge me, and we could go on avoiding each other.

As I wrote at this coffee table, I wrote about the public performances of Gregory Bateson at Esalen, a famous countercultural retreat center in Northern California where Bateson became a burgeoning public intellectual. Gregory Bateson was born in England on May 4, 1914, to a relatively wealthy family. Gregory Bateson's father, William Bateson, was the founder of British Genetics and named Gregory after Gregor Mendel. Growing up in the center of the British Academy, Bateson enjoyed the finest schools, and he followed in his father's footsteps in biology early in his life until moving rhizomatically to anthropology, cybernetics, therapy, and psychoanalysis, and all the while linking these disciplines or these subjects back to ecology. On the journey, Bateson attempted to understand human meaning making and communication. Philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari admirably summarize the richness of Bateson's career when they request,

Let us consider the more striking example of a career *a l'americaine*, with abrupt mutations, just as we imagined such a career to be: Gregory Bateson begins by fleeing the civilized world, by becoming an ethnologist and following the primitive codes and the savage flows; then he turns in the direction of flows that are more and more decoded, those of schizophrenia, from which he extracts an interesting psychoanalytic theory; then, still in search of a beyond, of another wall

to break through, he turns to dolphins, to the language of dolphins, to flows that are even stranger and more deterritorialized. (1983, 236)

Delueze and Guatarri are correct. Bateson was born an Englishman who became a naturalized American citizen whose work in ecology, anthropology, cybernetics, and performance is nomadic in its movements through disciplines as he regularly partakes in his joy of learning and encounters.

I feel, however, it is not just Bateson's career that is nomadic, but as my mother an astrologer points out, Bateson's astrological chart is equally nomadic. Bateson was born with his astrological Sun in 18° degrees Taurus, a fixed earth sign, ruled by Venus at home in her own sign, also in Taurus. Astrologically, the Sun sign is often seen as one's conscious ego or the self one projects towards others. Bateson, with his Sun square Saturn, was well disciplined intellectually, and he most likely found his father to be distant, disciplined, and demanding. Bateson's Sun sign Taurus is in the XII<sup>th</sup> house, governing places of confinement, large institutions, and things hidden; therefore, he might have been destined to look to these places for understanding. Bateson's ascendant sign is Gemini, ruled by Mercury in retrograde 24° degrees Taurus. Mercury is the ruler of communication, and when in apparent retrograde motion, communication may seem confused. Astrologically, Bateson weaves through earth and air, from Taurus as his Sun sign to Gemini as his rising sign. As Bateson progresses through life, he becomes increasingly uncomfortable metaphorically with both earth and air to explain communication and meaning making. As a result, Bateson's work in communication merges a scientific rigor with artistic imagination. He would come to see the two—

scientific rigor and and artistic imagination—as if in a pincer movement of an organism’s walk through an ecology of ideas.

If you know Bateson’s work, you might suspect, as I do, that Bateson would hate a turn towards astrology. Yet I am prepared to argue he would have disliked a turn toward the biographical as well. Reading one against another, or astrology next to biography, is Batesonian. The two together have at least the advantage of resisting a literal or overly concrete interpretation of his life.

My study of Gregory Bateson’s performances focuses on his reinterpretation of Genesis. The story of Genesis provides first a theory of order and form emerging from formless matter. Then Genesis provides an account of human exile from the Garden of Eden. Bateson’s reinterpretation of these stories brings both the problem of order and the desire for knowledge together in a form of cybernetic romanticism. As a form of cybernetic romanticism, Bateson’s performances point to our embodied ways of knowing, which out of the Garden of Eden, take the form of muddling in ecologies of ideas. As muddling, Bateson’s performances always point toward the ordinary and everyday achievement in creating, responding, and living in a world of order and meaning. Bateson argues that ordering and meaning making are everyday activities, as easy and ordinary as children playing games and composing rules as they go. As an everyday achievement, the process of ordering and meaning making is equally an activity likely to be denied and avoided at all costs because, in a theme I will address in Chapter 4, it reveals how meaning making is not secured by a one-to-one correspondance between things and words or the promise of heaven.

With order no longer secured by the promise of heaven, Bateson suggests order is an everyday and ordinary accomplishment. Exposing, celebrating, and valuing these accomplishments is Bateson's task for performance. Bateson's principle method to expose, celebrate, and value our ordinary accomplishment is to create outlines and contrasts revealing perceptive habits and assumptions. Bateson suggests one method to Maya Deren, the famous American experimental film director, that is, the ordinary game of hopscotch as a method of artistic composition (1980). Bateson argues that combining different views and aspects of order is a way of creating a cross-cultural fugue. Weaving different elements and positions that create a new emergent whole is a main aspect of Bateson's writing. It is a weaving that in the metalogues takes the form of contrasting the voice of the father with the voice of daughter, or that in *Naven* weaves together a composite analysis of a culture to tell a story of the culture, or that in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* takes different steps to the same topic. Reading one by way of another is Bateson's project of double description, and it is what he means by the phrase "a difference that makes a difference" (1972, 459). I will discuss these methods of composition in Chapter 5, but I hope to suggest, for Bateson, order is always an ordinary activity emerging from a muddle.

My fascination with Bateson is his nomadic career with ideas. Bateson never built a discipline around himself. Yet, he remains a figure loosely connected with many disciplines. The loose connection and fluid movement among disciplines presents an obstacle and challenge to me. How do I understand Bateson in the fashion his nomadic life encourages? The struggle for understanding is a concern for writing and a concern for communication that Bateson principally addresses. Bateson argues the hope for

understanding, if it assumes it captures something as it really is, is a trap. It is the trap of misplaced concreteness or the assumption that nature and natural order exist outside of our interactions with it. The trap, as I argue in chapter two, obscures our performances and our participation in ecologies of ideas. Bateson jokes about the trap and the desire to locate him, to interpret him, and understand him throughout his work. Bateson came to argue this trap keeps us from grace and sacrament. To avoid the trap of misplaced concreteness while attempting to understand Bateson's work as a performer is the challenge of this project.

The project attempts to capture a movement in an ecology of ideas. In attempting to capture Bateson's movement as a performer moving and dancing in an ecology of ideas, the study weaves perspectives and approaches in an attempt to celebrate the ordinary achievements of ordering. As a movement I will understand Bateson's cybernetic communication from my own history in performance studies. Ultimately, I will understand Bateson's contribution through performance. As such, this study is not a biography of Gregory Bateson, and I am sure to interpret him saying things he might not have intended to say or mean. But if there are any laws of natural language, a law of unintended consequences would be fitting in a world such as Bateson's, where human meaning making exists in evolving ecologies of ideas. So my (mis)interpretations of Bateson are something he would invite as components of our lives together.

In understanding Bateson as a performer, I ask if he contributes to the field of performance studies. In performance studies, Bateson's theory of frames is often cited as contributing to frame analysis. And, the trio of scholars who introduced an

anthropological approach to the study of performances were influenced by Bateson's anthropological and communication work. Erving Goffman develops Bateson's theory of frames to study how social life is maintained by performances that are often a mutual form of collusion in impression management (1974). Victor Turner uses Bateson's theory of frames in an analysis of social drama to suggest how performance in a subjunctive mood comments on the indicative mood of social life and social structure (1987). Richard Schechner discusses Bateson's frames to explain the ethnological role of performance in his ritual braid (1988). But, is Bateson's take on performance and frames the same as this approach? Does he write more and contribute more to performance than this small essay?

Again to understand Bateson as a performer, I have studied and analyzed Gregory Bateson's own "written" work. *Written* is in quotation marks to highlight my belief that Bateson was never a writer's writer. Instead, Bateson's written work is largely a composite collection of talks and lectures (as *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* roughly is); or books largely dictated and compiled by others (as in the case of *Mind and Nature* composed with the help of his daughter, Mary Catherine Bateson, after his remission of cancer); or in some cases largely compiled or edited posthumously (such as *A Sacred Unity*, which is also largely a collection of lectures and discussions, and *Angels Fear*, which was largely completed by his daughter after his death). Bateson's written works are first performed works and performed lectures.

To understand Bateson as a performer, I have collected and analyzed nine hours of talks and transcripts from the Western Roundtable of Modern Art held at the San

Francisco School of Fine Arts in 1949, with George Boas, Frank Lloyd Wright, Kenneth Burke, Marcel Duchamp, Darius Milhaud, Mark Tobey, Andrew Ritchie, Gregory Bateson, Alfred Frankenstein, Robert Goldwater, and Arnold Schonberg (who submitted a written statement) (MacAgy 1949). I also have collected transcripts from the American Federation of Art, 1957 conference on The Creative Act from the Shamrock Hilton in Houston, Texas, with Marcel Duchamp, Rudolf Arnheim, and Gregory Bateson participating, with William Seitz moderating (American Federation of Art 1957), as well as transcripts from the open forum on *Trompe L'Oeil* held at the California Palace of the Legion of Honor in San Francisco on June 8, 1949, with Sidney Person, Douglas Macagy, Alfred Frankenstein, and Gregory Bateson participating (Howe 1949). Readers familiar with art history will quickly recognize many of the names on this list, and I hope to demonstrate how Bateson develops an important theory of performance and art within these conferences. More importantly, I feel Bateson's participation in the conferences, which has largely gone unnoticed in both performance studies and communication studies points the values of my case study in this project.

In thinking of Bateson as a performer, I have also studied close to forty hours of lectures from Esalen that make up the bulk of my discussion of Bateson's public performances. In these lectures, I ask how Bateson's performances operate as an extension of his thinking and as performative.

As for a map that shares a relationship but cannot be reduced to the territory I am about to cover in the next few chapters, I start in Chapter 2 with a reading of Gregory Bateson's discussion of transvestitism and character formation in the South China Seas. I

argue that Bateson's discussion of transvestitism can find an ally of the first order in theories of performativity, namely in the work of Judith Butler. I will argue that Bateson and Butler share a fundamental suspicion of theories of natural order that remove matter and form from the embodied contexts of the relationships that occasion them.

In Chapter 3, I begin in Bateson's familiar context of cybernetics to suggest that the government-funded work of cybernetic communication was instrumental in the later work of Avant-Garde performers and critical theory. I will argue that cybernetics studied the embodied practices of an embodied mind.

In Chapter 4, I will review Bateson's contribution to communication theory through his double bind research. I argue that Bateson reinterprets the western story of the fall from grace, presented in Genesis, as a theory of language and that he understands our human attempts to deny our condition as tragic acts of avoidance.

In Chapter 5, I turn fully to studying Gregory Bateson's public performances and lectures. I argue that Bateson's performances employ an inquiry order into the process of ordering itself that generally illustrates how he came to think in a particular way. In this way his process takes stock of ideas and opens them for others. As a result Bateson creates contentions without an argumentative case or point. I suggest Bateson's taking stock and inquiry order are attempts at making public his intellectual journey, and as such he does not stand, as a lecturer, behind a representational theory of knowledge, but on the contrary he is fully improvisational and performative. I will also weave a discussion of Bateson's own performances with his theory of performance, as it emerges in The Western Roundtable of Modern Art, The Creative Act Conference, and his selective



essays on art and aesthetic practices, to argue that Bateson understands art as restorative of grace and beauty after the fall.

In Chapter 6, I offer a brief conclusion to the study with a discussion of Bateson's ecologies of ideas as a muddle. I suggest that Bateson is always returning us to and making us think of communication as a muddle. In the process of returning us toward muddle, the intellectual emerges as someone who is always exploring ideas, habits, and thought in a passionate process of learning.

As a note on reading the chapters, I note a persistent criticism I have received in submitting this document to friends for comments and reviews has been that I do not give enough background to situate my reading of Bateson. Readers familiar with Bateson from family communication, frame analysis, or cybernetics ask for more context and elaboration to understand the other disciplines. My only answer to this criticism is that they seem to affirm my thoughts for the study in the first place. Is Bateson an interpersonal scholar, a contributor to family therapy, an ecologist, or, as I wish to argue, a contributor to performance theory? I can make a claim for Bateson being a part of all these different disciplines. Yet, I believe claiming him exclusively as part of one discipline excludes his nomadic movement in an ecology of ideas. The value of Bateson's work is to knowledge production a cartographical project mapping the world *as it really is* divorced from our participation in ecologies of ideas. Instead of a cartographical project that limits the connections among ideas and our participating in those ideas, Bateson suggests a muddle.

As a muddle this project is performative and the map and the territory co-evolve in our performative acts. As a performative act, I hope to develop community around these ideas. I understand my work as performances and as performatives that create community, or in a language more agreeable to my way of thinking, create congregation. “The search for reason is search for community”, asserts Cavell, and this means both the hope that your way of thinking can find a community and the process of making your way within a history of names (Cavell 1976). As such, my project of knowledge production and the claim of reason emerging from it rest on community and not the cartography of a field. To claim a relationship between reason, community, and performance is the legacy of performance studies I bring to this project. Performance scholar Barbara Herrnstein Smith argues the act of valuing performances and works of art facilitates convergences or divergences in communities (Smith 1988). As such, performances and works of art bring communities together or push them apart. This project as a performance itself hopes to strengthen, develop, and foster a community.

## **Metologue Two: What is a Daddy, Daddy?**

Daughter: Daddy, why do you laugh at the father playing a cheerleader on television?

Father: Do you mean those advertisements on television from the Ad Council that show fathers playing with their children in imaginative play?

Daughter: Yes, you were laughing at them yesterday.

Father: Yes, I really like the ones where the dad is doing a cheerleading routine with his daughter and the one where the father is playing an imaginary sword fight with his son.

Daughter: Is this play fatherhood? I mean, is it an example of what fathers should do when they play with their daughters and sons?

Father: Yes, I think it is about fatherhood and what fathers should do when they are fathers. It kind of sets up an evaluative context for the performance, and I imagine that some fathers don't play in this way, which would make a good reason to have television commercials about how to perform as a father.

Daughter: The father looks a little put off and not very committed to the cheerleading routine. Is his performance a bad performance? You always tell me in my performances to be committed to the character.

Father: Yes, always be committed in your performances because you are the character and you are in their world and not your audience's world.

But, this is kind of a different performance isn't it? I mean the audience are not really in seats, are they?

Daughter: You're right; the audience is not seated. Is the audience the television audience and other fathers?

Father: Yes, of course. But it isn't clear that this is really a performance the way you were a performer in Nana's adaptation of *Where the Wild Things Are*.

Daughter: Yes, I loved that performance. I was very scary, wasn't I?

Father: Yes, you were very scary. You were a great monster.

Daughter: But the father playing a cheerleader is not a very good performer, is he?

Father: He seems a little put off and not sure of the performance he is doing. I don't think he has done it before, and he might be thinking too much about the routine. Maybe he has not practiced enough. It could also be something that does not come naturally to him.

Daughter: Mommy and Nana are better cheerleaders than you are, Daddy, so is it natural for them and unnatural for you?

Father: Yes, they are better cheerleaders. Nana really misses being one, and you have even seen her wear her cheerleader jacket, but this is another point. I am not sure what it means to say it is natural—I said *naturally* to describe a performance of the father being a cheerleader. I don't know what it means to say, "It is natural."

Daughter: What is the difference, daddy?

Father: *Natural* is an adjective to describe a noun or thing and *naturally* modifies a verb or an action. I think it is fair to say in the performance with the father he is slightly put off. His acting comes across as unnaturally performed as if to imply it is not of his nature.

Daughter: You are being a little confusing today. I thought we were talking about a television commercial where a father is acting as a cheerleader. Are you saying you can refer to *naturally* to describe a performance, but not to describe the father performing?

Father: Well, I guess it has everything to do with what we take the character to be doing in his performance. And, if we think they are separate in the first place.

Daughter: So our idea of what is natural limits what we can think of as capable of coming off as a naturally performed performance? Or is it the other way around?

Father: Maybe something like that at least.

Daughter: So the joke is on a play between a nature and naturally performing.

Father: Yes, many performances seem to revolve around this issue. It seems to me difficult to know what modifies what. The performance is funny because it doesn't come off as natural or of his nature, but that is the very problem we are trying to think through, isn't it?

Daughter: Is this the same joke when animals are performing something that is not in their nature? It is funny to watch a dog talking because we don't think it's in the dog's nature to talk back at us. I don't think

many people imagine dogs having secret plans to sell the family recipe, like in the commercial about the baked beans.

Father: I think you are watching too much television, but yes, I think you are right. In some cases, it is funny to watch the father's unnatural performance. I imagine it shares something with other performances of nature and naturalism. But I don't think I can go into all of that today.

Daughter: Okay, so you just said it was not unnatural because that would modify a noun, and there is a difference between the noun and the action.

Father: Yes, there is a difference, the same difference between a map and its territory. But how we think of a map is how we come to think of a territory; sometimes, even most of the time, the map and territory can't be separated.

Daughter: How do you know what is the nature of fatherhood? You only said something about performance. What about the actor?

Father: I don't know—I learned about being a father from books, movies, and, of course, from my father. I remember what they did and how it came naturally to them, but I don't know what it would be or could be given other books, movies, or other performances.

Daughter: You mean you learn about fatherhood from performances like the ones on television?

Father: Yes, that is why I find them funny and instructive. I am also kind of disappointed in them and what they try to teach me. For example,

you and I were watching a movie the other day where the football player finds out he has a daughter about your age and has to change his whole life. You remember the daughter does all kinds of funny things, like decorates his trophies with stickers.

Daughter: Yes, I think that movie is funny, and I really like it when she dresses up his dog in a tutu. But, Daddy, aren't you forgetting that he was not a good daddy at the beginning of the film and had to choose to be and learn to become a good father? If I am right, the dance teacher taught him to be a good father.

Father: Yes, it is interesting enough that he too had to perform something "unnatural" or that did not come naturally to him. The joke of the film and its plot is how he develops into a father. And, you are right; he learned how to be a father from a woman who apparently knows fathering without having to learn. The film is funny but also disappointing because it assumes some things are natural and unnatural for men and women.

Daughter: But you just said that he is only performing being a father, but the character is something altogether different?

Father: I don't think so. The father *is* the performance. These films and advertisements only make it appear as an unnatural choice to care for and put the children's needs before their own. The opposite is also true about films about motherhood. The appearance of the natural

behind the choice of unnatural performance is kind of problematic. It is what I was writing about before you came into my study.

Daughter: Is the problem that the performances make something appear unnaturally performed but keep us thinking and assuming something is natural to men and women?

Father: I think so.

Daughter: Well, what is natural if it is all performance, Daddy? I mean, how do we evaluate these performances?

Father: Well, rocking you, changing diapers, and caring for you came naturally to both mommy and me. I imagine we can find new ways to evaluate performances or think about how our evaluating them sets up our own assumptions. Which reminds me, you need to brush your teeth and go to bed.

Daughter: Is this what Fathers do?

Father: Yes, part of it at least. Now let's get to bed.



## Chapter Two: Queer Thinking In The Sepik River Valley

Bateson's reinterpretation of Genesis starts, "In the Beginning" when it is written in scripture that "darkness was over the surface of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters"(1:1). And with his face upon the water, God, in a set of performative utterances, called forth the world and you and I in it. "I never could accept the first step of the Genesis story," states Bateson (1979, 5). In his essay "On Empty-Headedness Among Biologist and State Board of Education" Bateson again states, "The extra ordinary achievement of the Writers of the first chapter of Genesis was their perception of the problem; where does order come from?" (1972, 343).

Again referring to the performative utterances in Genesis, Bateson writes in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*:

Out of these first ten verses of thunderous prose, we can draw some of the premises of fundamentals of ancient Chaldean thought and it's strange, almost eerie, to note many of the fundamentals and problems of modern science are foreshadowed in the ancient document. 1) The problem of the origin and nature of matter is summarily dismissed. 2) The passage deals at length with the problem of the origin of order. 3) A separation is thus generated between the two sorts of problems. (1972, xxx).

Bateson takes issue with the founding performative utterances and "thunderous prose" which creates form from unformed matter, and throughout his work and life he argues against the separation of mind from nature. A few lines later in Genesis, God creates man from his word or from his breath. If order did not emerge from the "thunderous prose" out of unformed matter, then how did it emerge? If man and woman,

or Adam and Eve, did not emerge from a performative utterance, then how did they emerge?

To begin answering how the subject emerges for Bateson, I will turn to Bateson's studies of sex ethos and sex differentiation in the 1930s and follow his work through the study of character formation and anthropology. In this chapter, I will argue that Bateson in his first ethnography commits an error he was prone to criticize. Although the thrust of Bateson's work is to criticize the separation of Mind and Nature, in his 1930s discussion of transvestitism, he separates mind from nature in his theory of sex differentiation; thus, he limits his theory and practice of ecological becoming. Comparing Bateson's early work to his later ideas highlights tensions in his theory of schismogeneses, which became foundational to family therapy. To highlight the tensions, I will move to a discussion of Judith Butler's gender performativity to suggest that Bateson can find both a much needed rejoinder to his thoughts as well as an ally of the first order. Following Bateson and Butler's contribution, I will argue that the irony of Bateson's schismogeneses, which only came together within the context of transvestite performances, points to understanding the performative utterances of Genesis not as God's voice making form out of formless matter but as our own endless activities of dancing and evolving in mind and nature. This chapter continues some of my previous attempts with Elizabeth Bell at introducing performativity to interpersonal communication, and I hope to open more lines of inquiry between the two.

### ***Bateson's Ethnography as Sense Making***

Bateson's first ethnographic study is of a Papua New Guinea tribe in the Sepik River Valley. In particular, it is the study of a ritual involving a performance by the mother and maternal uncle after an achievement of adulthood by the son and daughter, nephew and niece respectively. The performances are transvestite in that "men dress as women and women dress like men," and they involve men shaking their buttocks on their nephews' legs, which action Bateson translates as anal grooving (1936, ii). Although, *Naven* contains numerous references to the performance of *Naven*, it is primarily a study of explanation. In his epilogue to the second edition, Bateson states:

*Naven* was a study of explanation. The book contains of course details about Iatmul life and culture, it is not primarily an ethnographic study, a retelling of data for later synthesis by other scientists. Rather, it is an attempt at synthesis, a study of the ways in which data can be fitted together, and the fitting together of data is what I mean by "explanation" (1991, 49-50).

Taking Bateson at face value, I assume *Naven* is not an ethnography nor particularly ethnographic, and I will focus my comments on what is entailed by his comment that "data can be fitted together."

As a study of explanation, masking as an ethnographic study, Bateson describes his methods and attempts in *Naven* to naturalize elements of a performance to make it appear as an inherent and fitting part of a culture. Bateson suggests this naturalized description is not easily obtained within traditional methods of scientific ethnography and suggests that the novel and art are more capable of giving the emotional tone of a culture. The attempt to use art and science to describe the world and its cultures is a central concern for Bateson during his entire life. Bateson is interested in how a performance

seems to “fit” and “make sense” within the whole working of a society, no matter how bizarre it appears at first. Bateson states,

If it were possible adequately to present the whole of a culture, stressing every aspect exactly as it is stressed in the culture itself, no single detail would appear bizarre or strange or arbitrary to the reader, but rather the details would all appear natural and reasonable (1936, 1).

Particularly, Bateson’s method is to make ordinary what feels bizarre and to make bizarre what feels ordinary. He states, “I shall first present the ceremonial behavior, torn from its context so that it appears bizarre and nonsensical”(1936, 3). In a way, Bateson makes the performances appear queer or bizarre only later to attempt naturalizing them by “indicat[ing] how the ceremony can be related to the various aspects of the culture” in his sense making of the data (1991, 49).

In what seems an ironic move somewhat at odds with his attempt at naturalizing the performances, Bateson, a few lines before the quotation above from the 1958 Epilogue, characterizes the activity of explaining and explanation of the scientist as “an attempt to cover with explanatory devices—and thereby to obscure—the vast darkness of the subject” (1991, 49). The attempt to cover is, for Bateson, a game of scientific explanation; however, “this game has also a deeper, more philosophic purpose: to learn something about the very nature of explanation to make clear some part of that most obscure matter —the process of knowing” (1991, 49). Bateson seems to imply that our process of description and explanation actually obscures the subject instead of bringing it to light.

Bateson locates a conjuring trick, or trap, within this game of explanation covering “the vast darkness of the subject” which is “the trap of misplaced concreteness”

(1991, 49). Bateson argues that the trap is to assume the descriptions of the scientist are *really* of the world. Instead, Bateson argues that description and explanation “only refer to scientists’ ways of putting the jigsaw puzzle together” (1991, 50). Bateson develops numerous ways to express and expose this conjuring trick throughout his work. First, what is key for Bateson’s trick is his assumption that organisms are active in calling forth and creating images of things in the world, and then after creating images, the organism responds to those images, or transforms of differences, and not to the *thing itself*. The world of thought, Bateson assumes, is not made of things and causes, but transforms representations. The often referred to Batesonian phrase, “the map is not the territory” expresses Bateson’s assumption that organisms create images in interactions with a world and that the representation and images are not the things themselves (1972, 455).

Throughout his work, Bateson argues that humans are in error or demonstrate confusion when they confuse a thing with the thing named. This confusion is one of logical types, and as I will argue in Chapter Four, the theory of logical types does not emerge for Bateson as the hope to rid language of paradoxes but to demonstrate how humans are constantly apt to confusion and wonder. In *Naven* and *Mind and Nature* this error of typing, confusion of the thing with the thing named, or misplaced concreteness, manifests itself in the assumption that our explanations and our language represents a prior world of things. Bateson argues that this confusion is based in the assumption that language represents objects, and he states in *Mind and Nature*:

Language continually asserts by the syntax of subject and predicate that “things” somehow “have” qualities and attributes. A more precise way of talking would insist that the “things” are produced, are seen as separate from other “things,” and

are made “real” by their internal relations and by their behavior in relationship with other things and with the speaker (1972, 57).

This assumption, and attempt to cover the world and the darkness, results in limiting the cybernetic circuits and connections among interacting parts. In discussing the man-axe-tree system, Bateson points to his habit of confusing the “thing” Gregory Bateson with the flows of circuits. Bateson states:

We observe that the axe flies through the air and makes certain sorts of gashes in a pre-existing cut in the side of the tree... but if I am cutting down a tree, I still think ‘Gregory Bateson’ is cutting down the tree; I am cutting down the tree. ‘Myself’ is to me still an excessively concrete object, different from the rest of what I have been calling “mind” (1972, 458-462).

Important to note here is that Bateson does not think “things” are in our “heads” (this, of course, would be another thing replacing circuits of difference) but are only the results of processes and reciprocal behavior between and among elements of the circuit. Perception is a founding recursive circle, in which a process creates an object or thing for evaluation, description, or any perceptive activity. Gregory Bateson felt trapped by his own skin and hoped to find enlarging cybernetic circuits. In the cybernetic system the man, Gregory Bateson, is too concrete and taken as a “thing” apart from a circuit in a confusion of types. Later, in his Wren Gren conference Bateson would, as chronicled in *Our Own Metaphor*, set out to make war on nouns (1972). Bateson further illustrates the difficulty in separating form from matter in his most popular book *Steps To An Ecology Of Mind*:

It is difficult to see how the dichotomy between substance and form could be arrived at by inductive argument. No man, after all, has ever seen or experienced formless and unsorted matter just as no man has ever seen or experienced a “random” event. If, therefore, the notion of a universe “without form and void” was arrived at by induction it was by a monstrous and perhaps erroneous jump of extrapolation (1972, xxv).

Bateson's concern here is the dichotomy of substance and form. First, Bateson is critical of explaining form with appeals to laws of energy. He is critical because in a world of mental operations not doing something can force someone to act, but the converse is not true in the world of energy. In a mental world not saying hello may make someone upset at you, but not kicking a ball will not get the ball to move. Yet Bateson's more significant argument is that the separation itself is erroneous because substance-and-form is a necessary unity, co-evolving and entailing one another. Organisms experience matter and form as a part of a pattern, and this pattern shapes and guides interaction with matter. How and where mind and nature come together is Bateson's principle concern. And, I do not wish to imply there is a place where they do not meet or that one has any way to understand formless matter or a random event (at least no way based in experience).

Bateson argues that form and pattern emerge out of a process of learning, sense making, and explanation. In all of Bateson's different phrasings of this idea, the process is always double, bringing in an organism's history of learning, sense making, and explanation into its current endeavors. In *Mind and Nature*, this comes across as a stochastic process in which rigor and imagination operate as twin sides of a process of thought combining a random component with a constraining activity. Bateson argues mental thought is stochastic and combines random acts of trial and error with the sense-making activity of the organism (1979). Bateson assumes that organisms' habits and patterns of thought limit any new thing or idea that they can discover. As a result, an organism's history of learning and its demands for sense making limit its capacity to

imagine new configurations, including imagining new boundaries of the subject as illustrated in Bateson's axe-man-tree system.

Learning is also *always* a contextual and embodied activity. Bateson, in the essay "A Theory of Deutero-Learning," argues learning is always dependant on prior learning and on prior contexts of learning. Bateson rejects stimulus and response models of learning that ignore how learning is always within a nested context involving proto-learning and deutero-learning (1972). Proto-learning, Bateson argues, is the learning of a task or the learning of a skill; deutero-learning is a secondary learning, or learning alongside proto-learning, that involves the context of the learning situation which influences, contextualizes, and enables proto-learning?. Bateson later elaborates these two types of learning into three levels of learning to explain how learning, like Russian dolls, is nested. I want to stress that Bateson's theory of levels of learning stresses how learning results in the emergence of a subject but also how the subject is unlearned in that process. Learning is dangerous to the subject! When discussing level III learning, which involves changes in the subject who does the learning, Bateson posits:

Even the attempt at level III can be dangerous, and some fall by the way side; these are often labeled by psychiatry as psychotic, and many of them find themselves inhibited from using the first person pronoun. ... For others more creative, the resolution of contraries reveals a world in which personal identity merges into all the processes of relationships in some vast ecology or aesthetic cosmic interaction (1972, 305-304).

I will elaborate on "aesthetic cosmic interaction" later. What I want to suggest here is that Bateson's discussion of learning involves learning to be a sexed/gendered subject; thus, he also implied the attempt to unlearn or relearn how to be a sexed/gendered subject.



In reference to the activity of explanation that *Naven* concerns, Bateson believes it is an activity of squaring data with experience. Bateson highlights how description is a circular process when he states in *Mind and Nature*, “as form is to process, so tautology is to description” (1972, 178). This means the process of description and explanation maps data back to a tautology; this appears as natural to the organism doing the description and explanation. The map, however, is not the territory, and the map refers only to the organism’s prior ideas. The tautologies taking the form of ideas are as close as an organism can ever come to knowing anything. Bateson’s explanation then refers to the organism’s squaring its encounters and experience with prior learning and sense making. The degree to which an organism can accept something as self-evident and tautological is the degree of flexibility the organism has in imagining something otherwise or the its flexibility to change in its encounters with the world. Bateson then discusses the degree of flexibility as the threshold for imagining alternative maps and tautologies in making sense of the world. I stress, for Bateson, the conjuring trick is to assume this activity of description is of the world and how it *really is*. Instead, all learning, sense making, and explanation point back to the organism and to the history of ideas it is embedded within.

### ***Bateson’s Theory of Sex and Gender***

With respect to the issue of sex and gender, the difficulty in Bateson’s work is the limit of the sense that he makes of sex and gender and thus the limits of what sex and gender can be or become in the process of imagining. In hoping to make sense of his data, Bateson hopes to naturalize behavior; this means his transvestite performances are always pointed toward attempts to make some piece of behavior fit within a culture.

In making sense of his data on these performances and on Iatmul life, Bateson relies on a position informed by, and slightly at odds with, culture and personality studies in anthropology. In Papua, New Guinea, Bateson was a struggling ethnographer, attempting an ethnography that was not quite ethnography when he met Margaret Mead and her (then) husband Reo Fortune. The encounter introduced Bateson to the methods of the Culture and Personality School that stresses configurations or cultural patterning, which results in standardized personality types or national character. This method approaches culture as mutable and varied with cultural expression assuming different patterns and configurations in different contexts. The culture and personality studies, or configuration studies, largely focus on parenting practices and explore how these practices enculture members children into active and participating members. Bateson's work in Bali provides an example of this approach, in which he argues the mothers' practice of exciting their sons sexually through manual stimulation only to stop just before climax encourages the sons to enculturate values stressing plateaus over climax (1972). Indeed, Margaret Mead's narrated film *Four Families* is a study of different parenting practices across four cultures leading to different configurations of personality (1960). Furthering the suggestion that the approach focuses on parenting practices, according to Bateson's biographer David Lipset, the living room of Mead and Bateson, who married after returning from Bali, became an important location for the study of parenting practices across cultures; Mead and Bateson entertained and housed famous guests including Lawrence Frank and Erik Erikson (1982). As an interesting historical note, Mead and Bateson's pediatrician was Doctor Benjamin McLane Spock whose books revolutionized parenting practices in America.

In alignment with the theory that cultural expression is mutable and different across cultures, the theory of sex differentiation, or sex expression, also became mutable. Mead's research demonstrates how gender expression and gender expectation change given different cultural practices. Mead argued in *Coming of Age in Samoa*, published in 1928, that gender acquisition was different in Samoa than in America. Mead's conclusion led to her argument that culture and cultural arrangements were determining factors in gender acquisition; Mead separates gender from sex as biological and innate in order to establish gender as a cultural category. As a result some critics came to argue Mead's work was pornographic and scandalous. In *When Sex Became Gender*, a book and chapter with a fitting title for the claim I am making, Shira Tarrant states, "feminist theory owes a great deal to Mead's critical insight about the cultural mutability of gender and the political consequences of how we understand feminine and masculine roles" (2006, 74). In *Margaret Mead Made Me Gay*, a book with a title equally suited to my argument, Esther Newton, whose famous ethnography of drag queens influenced Judith Butler's work *Gender Trouble*, summarizes Mead's contribution and praises her thusly:

Reading Margaret Mead's *Coming of Age in Samoa* was my introduction, not only to the concept of culture, but to the critique of culture—ours. ... Mead had already done a great deal to popularize the concept of cultural relativity. Her voice had reached into my teenage hell, to whisper my comforting first mantra; "everything is relative; everything is relative." ... Through Margaret Mead I grasped that my adolescent torments over sex, gender, and the life of the mind could have been avoided by different social arrangements. ... It [Mead's work] is a defense of cultural and temperamental difference, and that, despite my desperate attempts to go with the flow, described me: different (2000, 1).

Bateson does not fully endorse a view of gender expression as culturally determined, but he still overwhelmingly stresses learning as the process in which gender,

or sex ethos, emerges. Bateson's view is not one of a clear split between sex and gender and in a great limiting phrase he states,

Inasmuch as there are physical difference between these people and the likelihood that these physical differences are genetically determined, it is conceivable that there may be difference in innate temperament. But at least we can say that the differences are not due to peculiarities of sexual physiology (1936, 172).

Although not dismissing sex as irrelevant, Bateson still does not feel sex causes difference in sex ethos (or gender). Bateson makes a similar case in his 1942 essay presentation "Sex and Culture," wherein he argues that anthropologies should look at how sex differences are maintained, not in endocrinal or hormonal evidence, but in the process of learning. Further still, Bateson stresses the overall history of learning as key to sex ethos and he states:

It is my impression that we should look for the origins of contrasting sex ethos among the Iatmul, not in the experiences of very early childhood, but in the later training of boys and girls. We should see the two ethoses as acquired by learning and imitation rather than as springing from peculiarities implanted in the deep unconscious in the first two years of life (1991, 174).

Above, I argue that for Bateson learning is a nested activity that includes the constitution of the subject. The learning of gender is also nested in the subjects history of ideas and sense making. Instead of culture or sex as determining factor to sex ethos, Bateson suggests "some position intermediately between the two extreme theories" (1991, 178). The intermediate theory, for Bateson, needs to stress the process from which form and order emerge.

In his theory of schismogenesis, which as the word suggests is the generation or creation of a schism or a difference, Bateson suggests an intermediate theory that stresses processes over types. Bateson defines schismogenesis "as processes of differentiation in

the norms of individual behavior resulting from cumulative interaction between individuals” (1936, 175). Remember, all subjects emerge as a difference in a pattern and how that pattern is maintained in our interactions with them; therefore, schismogenesis is the study of reciprocal behavior patterns: the way the behavior of one party is a reaction to the behavior of another party, and the context for further action for both parties.

Classically, Bateson provides two forms of differentiation, *complementary* and *symmetrical*. Complementary schismogenesis is when the behavior of one party, party A, is a trigger of a *different yet complementary* behavior by party B. For example, A’s assertive behavior could lead party B to be submissive, and in turn the submissive behavior on B’s part could lead to more assertive behavior by A. Symmetrical schismogenesis, on the other hand, is a situation in which the B’s behavior leads to *similar* behavior by A. For example, B’s yelling leads to A’s yelling in return, and this leads to more yelling on B’s part. These reciprocal behavior patterns, however, are always descriptions of the relationship and not of either party itself; instead, it is more important to say that either party develops within and as a result of these patterns of interactions. A few examples can demonstrate how one party’s behavior in the process of responding to, and thus interpreting, the behavior of the others can become the basis of reciprocal behavior patterns between them. The classic example of a *symmetrical* relationship is an armaments race in which the security calculations of one country are a function of the behavior of the other country. In an armaments race, every act of arming by either country provides the context for further arming by the other country. An example of *complementary* schismogenesis, implied by Bateson, is jealousy in which expressions of jealousy lead to assurances of trust by the other party. In fact, assurances

of trustworthiness can and often do prompt more jealousy and suspicion as when quick responses from a wife or best friend proclaiming trustworthiness lead to further suspicion. More suspicion then leads to more assurances of trustworthiness. If Othello were able to see his relationship as complementary, then Desdemona might have a different fate. In the musical *Annie Get your Gun*, Frank Butler and Annie Oakley are in a symmetrical relationship—who is the better shot? The relational tensions and attempts to avoid each other end only after Annie adopts a complementary position by intentionally missing her shot and allowing Frank to win. But why did she take the one-down or complementary position? (The politics of feminism are important to keep in mind when discussing these patterns; a keeping-in-mind that neither Bateson nor family therapy did well.)

Having argued that a subject emerges in learning and relational behaviors, Bateson then argues that differentiation in sex ethos emerges within these patterns. Bateson assumes that sex differentiation results from a complementary position between the sexes and symmetrical relationships within the male ethos. Men are prompted toward harshness and pride, making displays of emotion difficult if not impossible for them to display. Women are contrariwise prompted to be nurturing and caring. These patterns of differentiation build to the point that men feel envious of women and their ease of expressing emotion. One can also imagine women might feel envious of male disinterest. Bateson then argues that the transvestitism of *Naven* is an explicit play and comment on these patterns. I have already argued that Bateson hopes to explain why an instance of behavior makes sense in relationship as a whole. In *Naven*, the uncle's transvestitism becomes a display (although full of contempt for the women's ethos) of nurturing for a

young boy and his performance becomes complementary (in a relationship that is generally symmetrical). This switch in positions provides relief to the strain of differentiation.

Fittingly, Bateson argues that gender transvestitism is a response to a situation in which one feels the need to comment on the very standardization and reciprocal patterns learned in the process of being and becoming a subject. In Bateson's way of thinking, "some component of the *Naven* situation shall act in a dynamic way to induce transvestitism" (1936, 199). In other words, some relational situation presents itself, and the organism responds partly to the situation from its own history and the history of the relationship. If my reading of *Naven* is correct, then transvestitism in the performance is a result of escalating differentiations that create the need to comment on the relationship. According to Bateson, transvestitism is a form of play and a way to change the frame on behavior and our habits. It is also a way to re-frame thinking about complementary and symmetrical differences

In his analysis of *Naven*, Bateson suggests that the performances have an integrating effect that balances the degenerative forces of progressive differentiation. In discussing the sociology of *Naven*, Bateson stresses how the performances tie the clan together by stressing and building the matrilineal ties between the maternal uncle and nephew. Bateson states: "It is evident that the naven ceremony is an expression and a stressing of the kinship link between the wau and laua" (1936, 86).

It may be fair to say that for Bateson sex and gender are ideas. As ideas, they also operate as ideals to which you find yourself falling short when reflecting or when being

measured by others. You may find that others fall short as well. The ideas and ideals may operate in numerous ways as we respond to them and with them—pulling ourselves up in a symmetrical relationship or differentiating ourselves in complementary ways. As ideas, sex and gender evolve and move through generations, being passed down from father to son and mother to daughter. The ideas an organism inculcate become its flexibility to evolve and change in its attempts to make sense of its world. In evolving through generations, ideas and ideals also need to change. Bateson ends his analysis of the Nazi film *Hitlerjunge Quex* with the argument that kinship systems must change because they are outdated to modern life (1980). Sex difference is an idea, for Bateson, and a result of reciprocal behavior patterns pushing and pulling in different directions, that inevitably leading to a stability of patterns and types.

But, ideas are not the thing and our ideas are partly engrained in our habits of seeing and classifying. Not to notice this would for Bateson confuse logical types. Yet, it seems to me Bateson committed this very error in his reading of sex and gender and schismogenesis. It is exactly, Bateson's stochastic process that imagination is constrained by rigor which for me points to the value of his philosophy and thoughts. A value of understanding and placing thought within ecologies of ideas and histories of interactions. Yet, the twin demand for imagination and rigor makes the attempt and process to imagine, to become, and to change a difficult one. As well as highlights the difficulty and problem in his work or the yet unimagined possibilities. It is exactly his thought that what he observes must 'make sense' that Bateson might have inadvertently committed an error he himself was apt to criticize. In introducing the argument that tranvestism is a way to balance sex differentiation he uses an analogy from his country



and culture. He argues transvestism must be seen as a normal and fitting response. Bateson suggests that some forms of transvestism are normal in English culture and his example is the way women, when asked to perform in public equestrian events, often adopt the clothes of men. I imagine by extension this could be seen in the business suits of women who work in professional contexts historically the exclusive domain of men adopted the suits of men.

In the example of horsewomen, I find it troubling that Bateson explicitly excludes from consideration abnormal and deviant examples of transvestitism. Yet, it is not clear what *abnormal* means here. If *abnormal* consists of ideas and responses to a relational context that are not “standardized,” in other words, that are not typical for Iatmul culture, that would be one thing. Yet, that would make it unclear why Bateson should introduce the analogy in the first place. If Bateson means that *abnormal* challenges his habits and his prior learning, so that actions do not fit or seem natural, then it is simply Bateson being inflexible in his sense-making activity. Given Bateson’s own system, I find the analogy even difficult because it classifies something as a type without explaining how certain reciprocal patterns gave rise to it. Is this a moment of unexamined habit for Bateson and a confusion of logical types? Bateson argues that explaining the activity he was doing was tautological, in other words, to square data and experiences within some set of laws and habit. According to Bateson, whatever change the human organism is capable of developing is a function of the organism’s capacity of imagining that change and the limits of imagining are the limits of embodiment.

Let me further highlight Bateson's thought of sex difference by highlight some more imaginative limits. Bateson explains, "sex difference" as a process and understands the process as relational in which women and men are defined as binary pairs. He defines the binary pair in opposition, either symmetrical or complementary, to each other. To make matters worse for Bateson he never actually observes women, or takes them as informants, instead their ethos is deduced from his role as an observer. As an observer he then deduces the sex ethos of women as complementary to the male ethos. Furtherstill, Bateson argues the performances of Naven bonds and bridges clans and keeps the community from splintering. These bonds are still bonds between men and Bateson even has an elaborate discussion of a negotiation of a bride price between men. The trap of Bateson's imagining is what performance scholar, Peggy Phellan refers to with the words, "visibility is a trap" (1993, 6). The trap, not unlike the misplaced concreteness, assumes representational economies cannot capture Sexual Difference because representational economies reduces sexual difference to a hierarchically paired and oppositionally valued binary. In turn, the binary pair reduces difference to a logic of the same. Phelan argues "the one they become is gendered male. Sexual difference in this way remains hidden and cultural reproduction remains hommo-sexual" (1993, 5). In converting sexual difference to a binary pair "feminine difference" is replaced by a specular femmine, which mask as the devalued other. Braidotti argues attempt to explain sex difference starting from a logic of the same only recapitulate an economy of visibility in which the women (as different) is not represented. Braidotti suggest, as a response to this trap, risking an essentialism that creates cartographies of "the virtual femine which [she] cast in opposition to woman as other-than or different from, that is to

say, specularly connected to the same as its devalued other (2002, 27).” To map routes to become and to imagine alternative bodily configurations, Braidotti suggest a cartographical project that is radically self-reflexive which risks the charge of essentialism to create room for imagining alternative configurations of being and becoming Woman (2002).

Bateson, despite his better intentions to theorize bodily becoming and somatic change in evolution, creates the mistake of misplaced concreteness precisely at the moment where it seems to matter the most for becoming. Bateson, I believe correctly states “what is learned in contexts associated with sex will be carried over into contexts associate with quite different spheres of life – initiation, death, trade, etc – and that, vice versa, what is learned in these other contexts will be carried over into the specifically sexual life” (1991, 47). If this is true, that sex is the first location of learning and that it so fully comprises the subject then I am dumbfounded at the conclusion Bateson reaches from this premise, when he states: “sex is scarcely a useful concept for the analysis of human cultures” (1991, 48). In his epilogue to *Naven*, Bateson highlights the difficulty of the trap when he states, “the habit of thought which attributes concreteness to aspects of phenomena is one which dies hard. ... It has taken me over a year to drop the habit even partially, and I fear that many passages in the book may be still more or less infected with it, in spite of drastic revision” (1958, 263). Bateson’s pedagogical method and performance challenge these habits of thought, but here where it seems to matter so much, he falls into his own trap.

In a stochastic process imagination is constrained by rigor, change is constrained by habit, and learning is constrained by prior learning. Then it seems to me that the assumption of abnormal and normal transvestism as well as Bateson's desire not to push his argument on misplaced concreteness to include sexual difference is misguided. Troubling for me is that in the horsewomen example Bateson explicitly excludes from consideration abnormal and deviant examples of transvestism. Yet, it is not clear what abnormal means in this situation. If abnormal are ideas and responses to a relational context which are not "standardized" which is to say they are not typical for Iatmul culture would be one thing. Yet, that would make it unclear why Bateson should introduce the analogy in the first place. If Bateson means that abnormal meets up with challenges from his habit and his prior learning in which they don't fit or seem natural? Then it is simply Bateson being inflexible in his sense making activity. Given Bateson's own system, I find the move even difficult because it sets up to classify something as a type without explaining how and what reciprocal patterns gave rise to it. Is this a moment of unexamined habit for Bateson and a confusion of logical types?

Bateson argues explanation the activity he was then preceding to do was a tautological activity, which meant to square your data and experiences within some set of laws and habit. According to Bateson, whatever change the human organism is capable of evolving is a function of the organism's capacity of imagining it and the limits of imagining are the limits of embodiment. To move towards rejoining Bateson's theory as well as stressing the importance still of process over product, I now move to someone for whom the appearance of natural and the assumption which gives rise to it, is itself the problem and her discussion of transvestism; that is Judith Butler.

### ***Judith Butler's Theater of Deeds***

Judith Butler introduces performativity to criticize a vicious closed circle in the split among sex, gender, and now, *sexuality*. On the one hand, Judith Butler criticizes practices in feminist theory that assume sex is biological and gender is socially constructed. This separation was welcome news for feminists looking to challenge gender roles, for example when Esther Newton (quoted above) heard it from Margaret Mead. But Butler argues that this separation conceals how sex itself is always already a gendered and cultural construction. Additionally, Butler argues that feminist sexual-difference theories likewise create a feminist subject position or a female sexuality that is before or beyond representation and discourse. To address this vicious circle Butler relies on the two processes of performance and performativity to subvert the naturalized assumption of sex. In subverting identity, Butler touches on themes of reflexivity dear to Gregory Bateson and argues the subject is constituted in a form of twisting and turning back. She states:

In each case, power that at first appears an external pressed upon the subject, pressing the subject into subordination, assumes a psychic form that constitutes the subject's self-identity. The form this power takes is relentlessly marked by a figure of turning, a turning back upon oneself or even a turning one oneself. This figure operates as part of the explanation of how a subject is produced, and so there is no subject, strictly speaking, who makes this turn" (1997, 3).

Early in her career Butler referred to gender and sex, being a sex, and being a gender as involving an impossible "twist of language" or a twisting in language and performance (1999, 25).

Butler argues that any subject and identity are performative effects of repeated stylized acts or performances. These acts are performative utterances within the context

of a heterosexual matrix of intelligibility that produces a naturalized sex via repeated performance of gendered identities. In Butler's approach normative sexuality, understood as a heterosexual matrix, fortifies normative gender, which in turn naturalizes sex and bodies.

The sexed body is configured within a heterosexist matrix of intelligibility and its pleasures are always constrained and produced by social and historical relationships of power and discourse. This matrix constitutes the field of performing subjects marking both the inside and outside of sex and gender identity. Butler states: "We are asking how the criterion of intelligible sex operates to constitute a field of bodies and how precisely we might understand specific criteria to produce the bodies that they regulate" (1993, 55). In this regard, the matrix constitutes both what identities are "inhabitable" within a social relationship of power and at the same time constitutes what subjects and lives are uninhabitable, therefore producing a realm of a constitutive outside in identity formation. Butler assumes any gender policing is part of the constitution of the subject. Following Foucault's critique of the repressive hypothesis, Butler argues the sexed body is not something that language and the law perceives and represents. Instead, discourses produce bodies that the law only later claims to represent. Butler also argues that Foucault's assumption that the body interacts, supports, and may be a regulatory ideal for the discursive formation and practices is also false. For Butler, it is not the case that a free-flowing world of libidinal energy and drives exist before discourse; therefore, it is not the case that we have mediated access to nature or bodies, nor do we have bodies to support our discursive practices. Discursive practices do not mediate access to bodies;

instead they occasion and shape those bodies. The body is the “occasion,” but never the ground of gender or sexuality.

Butler’s project exposes the naturalized effect of matter, in which to matter or to mean is to be materialized. For Butler all theories of construction inevitably lead to a metaphysics of substance and the belief that language refers to a prior reality. For Bateson this is the insistence that the “map is not the territory.” Butler states:

It is, however, clearly unfortunate grammar to claim that there is a “we” or an “I” that does its body, as if a disembodied agency preceded and directed an embodied exterior. More appropriately, I suggest, would be a vocabulary that resists the “substance metaphysics of subject verb formations and relies instead on an ontology of present participles” (1988, 521).

In this way Butler argues something is excluded by naïve assumptions of nature, and she questions the efficacy of appeals to a feminism of or in excess. To this effect she states, “Feminists ought to be interested, not in taking materiality as an irreducible, but in conducting a critical genealogy of its formations” (1993, 32).

Butler then criticizes the assumption of a natural ground toward which claims of social construction inevitably point. In this way, any act of trying to point toward nature or the body is inevitably from a position that is essential in culture. An enduring circle emerges as someone points to nature and claims it to be outside of discourse and culture. One can envision two problems emerging from this attempt at pointing to a body in the discussion of sex and gender. In one scenario gender is a cultural attribution of a natural, “sexed” body, and in the other a natural essence is posited as a site or location one can return to or that is outside of language. In either case Butler argues that the construction

of sexual difference obscures the “nature” of the sexed body and the process by which the body becomes matter.

According to Butler, matter and the process of mattering needs to be the subject of investigation and not the ground. Feminist practice should investigate the ways matter comes to matter in repeated stylized performances; in other words, how gender is constrained and how it is opened through performance or deconstructive performances. Butler states, “What I would propose in place of these conceptions of construction is a return to the notion of matter, not as a site or surface, but *a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter*” (1993, 9). Not addressing this is for Butler a source of great injury to those at the intersections of intelligible sex.

For Butler, what secures any identity is both an avowal and a disavowal of identification. It maybe holding on to something and letting something else go. Yet, what we avow often appears natural and normal (and thus often moral). The identification works by disavowing others as an impossible arrangement. In this way, identifications are echo effects of being within a signifying chain that authors any utterance—“This is me” or “I am x” as meaningful and livable. The disavowal is melancholic and functions as an “ungrievable loss,” a love that has no name and, without a name, is not identified. Constituted identifications work by maintaining and concealing their own contingency.

Butler’s political project emerges as she argues that different boundary-producing taboos draw different lines between intelligible identities and non-intelligible identities.



In Judith Butler's rewriting of J.L. Austin's performative utterance, she argues performance is enabled and constrained by a citational history of performativity. Butler reads speech acts through Derrida's elaboration of speech acts to create a theory of performativity. In *Signature, Event and Context*, Derrida criticizes theories of speech acts by challenging the ability of any signature, event, or context to define the meaning or effect of the utterance (1988). Freeing any performative utterance from its happy context opens the phrase towards an infinite play of difference as the lynchpin between "performative utterances" and "constative utterances" breaks down when they are both rethought as citationality. Butler rewrites Derridean citationality as performativity—or "materially performative"—to argue that the sedimented history of prior performances constrains any and all current performances; therefore, performance and performativity are always kept apart with one constraining the other.

Judith Butler argues that pushing gender performances (particularly paradoxical performances) destabilizes the assumption of natural sex, which in turn can then undermine the constraining and enabling context of those performances understood and intelligible within a heterosexual matrix constituting its intelligibility. Butler's aim is to challenge the foundational assumption of any "ground" in feminist and lesbian theory. It follows from this that Butler is critical of the assumption that gender is expressive or that it is excessive. Gender is not expressive of anything but a ritual styled act secured and constrained by a citational history. And, any excess is always constituted by the boundary act of identity formation.

Any performance of gender is conditioned and constrained by a sedimented history of performativity—a history without which it would be difficult to say anything could count as a performance of gender. From my reading, is this not a stochastic process in which a performance of gender emerging in the life of a subject is constrained and conditioned by that very history of performance itself—a history that provides and enforces the requirement that it has coherence. And, not just the subject’s performances, but also all prior performance in a way produces and constrains each intelligible act.

Here, I review how for Bateson the body in relationships, the subject, is thrown into a set of relationships with complementary or symmetrical tendencies that results in patterns and habits that we call sex, gender, or ego. For Butler, any identity is an unstable affair compelled by literalizing fantasies and melancholic loss. Bateson seems not to have developed nor entertained any theory of how gender could be subversive or for that matter why it should be subverted. In this regard, he is as far way from queer theory and feminism as anyone. But, as I discussed earlier, Bateson constantly asserts that our patterns or relationships form and maintain a theory of the self, ego and subject; yet, naturalizing the body and the subject is a confuses of types that obscures this fact.

Butler argues that sex and matter have a history fully sedimented and only assumed to be natural. This assumption is a conjuring trick to conceal the contingencies of identity. And “feminists ought to be interested, not in taking materiality as an irreducible, but in conducting a critical genealogy of its formulations” (1993, 32).

Bateson would just as easily point out that no one has seen a random event or unformed

matter. Yet, Bateson seems, against his tendencies, to have confused logical types and posited just this ground.

In the end, Bateson's analysis points out the movements in which performances of gender, or sex ethos, are responses to relevant others. Yet, in excluding abnormal transvestitism with ease, he does not investigate the process by which bodies come to matter; in his way of speaking, Bateson does not investigate how bodies survive in an ecology of ideas and co-evolving process. Bateson was fond of saying in any difference that makes a difference one possibility is highlighted and others excluded; yet the exclusion is necessary since all newness is constrained by history and all learning involves both proto and deuterio-learning. Bateson's mistake was to confuse "normal" and "abnormal" transvestitism. If he had seen this type as a process, which is to say if he had the flexibility to imagine it, then he might have taken the route of a critical genealogy or an investigation into what and how the distinction is formed and maintained.

Butler's theory is important here because if there are transvestites who appear "normal," like the horsewomen in her pink and jodhpurs, and some who seem abnormal, then this is simply because of a different frame around (a term developed by Bateson) the one and not the other. Butler states in her landmark *Theatre Journal* article that

Gender performances in non-theatrical contexts are governed by more clearly punitive and regulatory social conventions. Indeed, the sight of a transvestite on stages can compel pleasure and applause while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence. The difference. I want to make two different kinds of claims, regarding the tentative distinction. In the theater, one can say, "this is just an act," and de-realize the act, making acting into something quite distinct from what is real (1988, 527).

In theater a frame limits the “naturalness” of the transvestite’s claim, but Butler would argue that the “transvestite’s gender is as fully real as anyone’s whose performance complies with social expectations” (1988, 527).

I again return to Bateson, for whom the body is always already in co-evolving and reciprocal relationships. These relationships push the subject to escalating tensions and push toward spiraling conflict of differentiation. Yet, as if going too far, a complementary position is adopted to pull back in another way. For Butler, the strategy of paradoxical performance reveals the illusion of a ground within feminist theory that there is no doer behind the deed. As Bateson would argue, evolving involves playing with ideas and flexibility in imagining other configurations. What survives is part of the process of imagining.

In concluding this chapter, I turn back to the beginning and the origins of that beginning, where God stands over the “darkness” and converts, from the null, formed matter. The darkness, which claims to be a natural ground or misplaced concreteness, covers and obscures, in a great conjuring trick. When the trick is revealed, the performative utterances turn out not to be God’s, but our own. Judith Butler in referencing the performative utterance states In *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*:

Thus, although the referent institutes reality rather than describing it, the referent always institutes reality within an already constituted field. It is not God’s performative, which brings into being what it names and thereby exercises the performative in a creation ex nihilo. The performative, understood as illocutionary, indicates reality, even transforms it, as a matter of course; it seeks to modify a situation, to have certain effects. It therefore has this situation as its necessary, if not constitutive referent” (Butler 2002, 122).

### Metologue Three: Are Monsters Scary?

Daughter: Are robots scary like monsters, Daddy?

Father: Yes, but in a different way.

Daughter: Do you mean one of them is kind of unsettling and other is terrifying?

Father: Well, yes, I think monsters are scarier than robots, but they are not always scary. Sometimes monsters are not scary at all, like in the movie we watched the other night—what was it? It had a monster named Boo, I think.

Daughter: Monsters Inc.! But, Boo was a kid pretending to be a monster.

Daddy, you are so bad at remembering movies.

Father: Yes, I am not very good at remembering movies, but those monsters are not scary, right?

Daughter: You are right. Those monsters are not very scary at all. And the robot in *Toy Story 2* was not scary. I even got to meet him at Mickey Mouse's house.

Father: So, what makes some monsters scary and the others not so scary?

Daughter: The monsters and the robot in those movies are kind of like kids, aren't they?

Father: Yes, those monsters and robots that are kind of like us are not quite so scary.

Daughter: Some robots are not like us and not scary—they are helpful and an extension of us. The way some robots can compute complicated math easily or do repetitive tasks without getting bored.

Father: That gets me thinking about the racecars on television. Racecars, for example, have computers in them providing feedback to the driver and the engineer. The computer and the racecar work in tandem in a circuit or grid.

Daughter: Who is in control of the race?

Father: As a matter of safety, the driver controls the race. The driver is behind the wheel and controls the speed and direction of the car. The driver, however, is often wrong about what is going on in the race, and the race is often designed around what the computer is reporting. Sometimes the driver is just thought of as a feedback component telling the engineer information about the race.

Daughter: Then the computer is better, and the engineer is in control?

Father: Yes, it is hard to tell sometimes. That is why it is kind of interesting to watch.

Daughter: I noticed on television that robots fight wars next to soldiers. Who is in control, the soldier or robot?

Father: We are in control; well, I am because I vote. But things are getting complicated. We were talking about monsters and robots and if they were scary, right?

Daughter: Yes, why are they scary?

Father: I think because they are like us in some way, but missing something.

Daughter: What are they missing?

Father: I don't know, maybe feelings or a soul.

Daughter: Are you saying they are scary because they are like us even though they are different?

Father: Yes, exactly. Monsters and robots have a relationship to humans, but humans are not robots or monsters.

Daughter: How do humans know the difference between robots and monsters? Can they be fooled into thinking a monster is really a human or a robot is really a human?

Father: Yes, I think so. Even though I have never met a robot or monster that fooled me into thinking it was a human in disguise.

Daughter: How can humans behave like robots?

Father: A human can act like a robot and treat another human as a piece of scrap metal. Sometimes governments are assumed to act like robots and treat people as interchangeable parts on an assembly line. I imagine teachers can do the same thing.

Daughter: Can people act like monsters the way they can act like robots?

Father: Yes, and we might not know it. But when humans act like monsters, they really are monsters.

Daughter: Is it this acting like a monster that makes them scarier?

Father: Yes, monsters are almost too close to us. The scariness of the monsters is how close they come to the boundary of the human community. When humans act like monsters, they really are monsters, and we don't want to think of them as part of the human community and us.

Daughter: So monsters are always scary unless they are like children?

Father: No, I don't think so. Some monsters make us think about what is human and what it means to be human.

Daughter: Do robots do this? I mean do they make us think about what is human?

Father: I think they do.



Daughter: Dolls are not quite human; do they make us think about what is human?

Father: Yes, you are right. Dolls are not human. But they are not human in a different way because they are like us, only not alive or living (also kind of made of plastic, cloth, and rags). What I mean to suggest is that we care for them as if they are alive by feeding them and giving them their bottles. We might even care for them in a special way like putting them in a stroller for a walk or putting them in a bassinet to sleep, but they are not really alive. We don't ask Nana to watch over the doll when we go visit our friends. If you happen to ask her to watch over your doll, then I imagine she might do so out of respect for our game. I don't think she would be particularly concerned that the doll might get sick or hungry if we were gone. Dolls teach us how to act toward human babies, but monsters and robots are a little closer in different ways, aren't they?

Daughter: So if a doll is not like us because it is not living, then are monsters and robots alive?

Father: I don't know if monsters and robots are alive. I am also not really sure it matters why we take them to be scary or if we find something wonderful about them.

Daughter: I thought they were scary. What is so wonderful about monsters and robots?

Father: I think they suggest ways to think about the boundary between humans and monsters or robots. That is why I like science fiction and why I watch all those alien movies.

Daughter: So science fiction teaches us something about being human?

Father: Yes, of course. So does science, and so does art.

Daughter: So what does it mean to be human, Daddy?

Father: That is the question isn't it?

Daughter: What question?

Father: The question robots and monsters suggest. I imagine dolls and dogs suggest the question in other ways. I think they all highlight different aspects of the human, and if we are inclined to wonder about the boundaries between humans, monsters, dolls, and dogs then the question is interesting.

Daughter: So what is the answer? I mean, what does it mean?

Father: That will have to wait for another day. Besides your mother has been waiting to read you a story.

Daughter: Will it have monsters in it?

Father: I think so. Let us see.

### **Chapter Three: A Cybernetics Trip: From The War Machine To Performance**

In outlining this study explaining Bateson's contribution to performance and reinterpretation of Genesis, I assumed I needed to mention Bateson's near-religious fascination with cybernetics. This is a fascination I share, only without the congregation. Times have changed, and academic interest in cybernetics has faded. The fascinating moments of interdisciplinary exchange, which once filled the Beekman Hotel no longer focus on cybernetics. I imagine I have a near-religious fascination with performance, but I have a congregation. I know times will change, and performance studies will share the fate of cybernetics and lose favor in academic opinion polls. Although moving in and out of favor is an evitable process in the life of ideas, in this chapter I hope to suggest, as if coming from different congregations, an interfaith dialogue between cybernetics and performance.

I suspected the need for such interfaith dialogue when I got the feeling (that feeling might be paranoia) that it sounds obscure to suggest that what a bunch of military contractors did influenced what a bunch of artists did. The paranoia around this hunch about a relationship between ideas made writing this chapter difficult. I had imagined a literature review of both cybernetics and performance set side-by-side, but I feared a tandem organization would neither capture the similarities nor suggest the possibilities of connection to those not already in position to see one. My paranoia became more acute when I realized I could no longer think of cybernetics and performance as separate. What emerged as my writing style in this chapter is then informed by my paranoia that what I

was thinking of as connections were still just vague references to possible connections. In end, I suggest seeing cybernetics and performance as emerging from a shared convergence in the American academy, and I feel making sense of Gregory Bateson's performances also means making sense of the strange American context, which developed, for me at least, performance studies and cybernetics.

This chapter then reads as a history of cybernetics, and my questions throughout the chapter are: What is the hope of cybernetics? How did this hope emerge? What does this hope share with the tradition of performance studies? In suggesting an answer, I will read Bateson as a central figure in Jon McKenzie's general theory of performance (2001). I will argue that even though early cybernetics was largely funded by the Second World War effort, Bateson and second-order cybernetics focused on performance and embodied communication, thereby challenging representational frameworks of science and the underlining assumptions of agency and praxis. Emerging from cybernetics, this chapter can be read as the study of the human and the machine after a cybernetic translation—a translation in which the human became the cyborg.

### *The Displacement of Change*

To set the scene for this translation, I turn to theater and performance scholar Sue Ellen Case. Case argues that in the West, the founding moments of theater and science—although traditional origin myths may assume otherwise—emerge to “displace science and rites dedicated to change” (2006, 7). Insisting that theater should not be read as transformation or as emerging in theories of transformation, Sue Ellen Case states,

The notion of an actor, or performer, in the European Tradition was not derived from the priest's ritual of transformation of the wine and bread. Had acting been

understood as ritualistic and transformative, it might have found consonance with different traditions in the world and different cosmologies. It might have remained embedded in ritual, music, and dance and dedicated to transformation. But the extraction of “theater” from the fusion of change, dance, and music actually displaced those performances of transmutation (2006, 8).

Case contends that even when theater emerged in monastic performances, it did so in ways quite different from the Eucharist in the celebration of the mass and other transformative rituals. Case argues that representational theater in the West is not primarily about participation in change and transformation but that “the shift in focus, from rites of transubstantiation to representation, ultimately differentiated theater from liturgy” (2006, 8). Even if theater appears to suggest change, as when men play women on stage, Case argues that these performances “actually stabilized the rite of representation as belonging to the exclusive all-male realm of men in vestments” (2006, 9).

Importantly for the scene I am trying to set, Case argues Enlightenment science took advantage of the metaphor of the theater to conceptualize the activities of knowledge production. Working from Ann Blair’s review of 17<sup>th</sup>-century natural theology, Case argues that natural philosophers were trying to conflate knowledge of the world into one perspective. Blair states, “The metaphor of theater converged the bringing of a vast topic under a single, all-encompassing gaze” (Case 2006, 157). The 17<sup>th</sup> century, Ann Blair argues, actively created theaters of knowledge and graphical representations of knowledge (such as the cabinet of wonder, the painting, and the book) to secure knowledge as an object. Following Blair, Case argues that all knowledge of the world was organized around the gaze of the vitalist man in his environment. The new science and new theater of the West displaced previous, different ways of knowing the

world, and lost in the displacement is an alternative cosmology of a dynamic world where humans share the agency of change and are participants in change. This is a move from an adverbial to an adjectival world. This is fitting when one also thinks of the metaphor theater mundi, theater of the world, as emerging in baroque art to insist on a natural and ordered world; a divinely directed world where everyone has a role and a place. In this displacement, a world of dynamic change and becoming is lost behind the iterative representational practices of theater and knowledge.

Case argues that the twin birth of theater and science creates a stable human subject who knows by a stable eye/I the world of objects. This representational practice separated humans from the environment and displaced the element of change onto the environment or the stage. As a result, two audiences were created, the audience of theater and the audience of science; both became spectators of change hidden from participation in the rites of change by either dimmed house lights or white coats. Both audiences rely on the same representational practices of theater.

Case argues that theater and science replaced dynamism with an iterated world, and as a result, performances and knowledge become bounded, repeatable, and iterative acts that could be sold, traded, and ultimately policed with the use of patent rights, trademarks, and intellectual property to package and sell repeatedly for consumption. Case argues, however, that displacement was never complete, and rituals of change continued in grassroots performances of science, alchemy, and systems theoretical approaches to science. Case argues both theater and science challenged, staged, and explored the representational practices that encompass them.

Gregory Bateson, whose work I am tracing in this study, also suggests a schism between a mechanistic science that divides humans from their environment and a cybernetic science that necessarily places humans as an element of a cybernetic circuit. In a conversation with Frank Lloyd Wright, Bateson stresses science as an aesthetic activity participating in a world of change and becoming. As we might expect of an artist, Wright proclaims, “A scientist cannot see the thing. That is what shuts the scientist from the creative artist”(MacAgy 1949). Wright is arguing that the scientist and science cannot inhabit the object because they are in principle separated from it. Wright continues his diatribe: “The scientist, in a sense that he is the fact, has wiped out religion; ... he is the enemy of the present time of all that the artist would represent and would do for his kind (MacAgy 1949). Bateson agrees in principle with Wright, and I imagine one does not have to be as much of a romantic as Wright to agree with the premise that materialistic science slices and severs the world. Bateson will continue, however, to argue that cybernetics, with its focus on circular causal feedback, is not detached materialistic science focusing on lineal causes and effects. Despite Wright’s characterization of the scientists, Bateson will argue that science and scientist are full participants in the world.

I take one of the central mores of Bateson’s work to be the realization that the scientist (as well as the artist, the writer, the businessperson, and the housecat) is a participant in his or her world. In his poem “The Allegory,” Bateson discusses and challenges the epic conflict between science and art (1978). In “The Allegory,” science takes the form of a railroad surveyor attempting to create representations of the world via a cartographical project of new science, which in turn creates a vision of nature and

knowledge, as Case explains. A beautiful woman represents art, and she sleeps in the unexplored and forgotten parts of the railroad. The surveyor avoids the beauty of the world he is creating, insisting that he is not interested in its beauty. The beautiful woman is a torch singer for a lost world of beauty and pattern either unknown or killed by the world of science and knowledge. The conflict in the poem emerges when the beautiful woman finds one of the surveyor's maps. She discovers in the map a world of beauty and returns it to the surveyor only to hear him say that he is uninterested in the beauty of the map. The next night the surveyor finds the woman asleep on the railroad track and traces her body to produce a map of it. The surveyor gives the woman the map he has created, and, like the surveyor, she is uninterested in this new map, proclaiming that it does not contain beauty. This poem is an allegory for the conflict of science and art, with both sides avoiding and denying the beauty of the other. For Bateson, science and art share not only practices of representation but also concern for patterns and, within those patterns, beauty. Bateson saw cybernetics as a sea change to mechanistic science, and he thought cybernetics shared with art a concern for beauty and pattern.

### ***The Cybernetic Imagination: Fear, Glory, and the Post-Human***

Having mentioned cybernetics as a sea change to mechanistic science, I should continue contextualizing and explaining what the term *cybernetics* means. Norbert Wiener coined the term *cybernetics* as the study of steersmanship or control within technical and biological systems. Ross Ashby thinks of cybernetics as an art, and Bateson saw it as the study of form and pattern. As a science of control or an art of interacting within patterns, cybernetics is a convergence between science and art. To contextualize how seemingly different interpretations emerge from cybernetics, it is



important to understand the post-World War II context, in which cybernetics emerged. Historian and philosopher Jean-Pierre Dupuy argues that cybernetics emerges from a political lobby:

Cybernetics was obliged from the beginning to ally itself with a movement—a political lobby, actually, operating under the auspices of the Macy Foundation—that sought to assure world peace and universal mental health by means of a bizarre cocktail concocted from psychoanalysis, cultural anthropology, advanced physics, and the new thinking associated with the cybernetics group (2000, 22).

The political lobby grew from an increasing interest in the study of the human mind and mental health after the world witnessed the horrifyingly grotesque scenes of human cruelty of Nazi Germany's Final Solution. During the war a hope emerged that the study of humanity would help ensure world peace (Marks 1991). Dupuy's political lobby was the U.S. military, allied forces, and intelligence community. The famous Macy Conferences, during which cybernetics first emerged as a topic of discussion, was an informal network of scholars and consultants who kept military and agency staff informed on developments in the social and behavior sciences. Marks explains:

Every TSS [Technical Service Staff] project officer had a skull session with dozens of recognized experts several times a year. "That was the only way a tiny staff like Sid Gottlieb's could possibly keep on top of the burgeoning behavioral sciences," says an ex-CIA official. "There would be no way you could do it by library research or the PhD dissertation approach." The TSS men always asked their contacts for the names of others they could talk to, and the contacts would pass them on to other interesting scientists" (1991, 64).

From this context the central contributions of cybernetics are negative and positive feedback loops and the servomechanisms that detect change and deviation in a cybernetic circuit. The archetypical example in cybernetics of negative feedback is a steam engine with fly-ball controls, where the speed of the steam engine is controlled by

the angles of the fly ball that can either constrict or open the supply of steam from the boiler to the engine. The fly-ball control works because as the vehicle accelerates, the ball governor constricts the air intake valve, thus decreasing the amount of steam moving into the engine. As the train decelerates, more steam flows into the engine, resulting in an increase in speed. The engineer can calibrate the governor by adjusting angles on the balls to maintain a desirable speed. The popular collegial phrases “balls out” or “balls to the wall” refers to a fly-ball governor that when maximally angled provides the most fuel, or steam, to the engine, thus pushing it to full speed. This is similar in idea, but not necessarily in mechanics, to the principle of cruise control in a car. Cruise control operates by maintaining a desired range of speed—say, between 41 and 42 miles per hour—from which the vehicle cannot deviate without activating a correcting mechanism in a set of servo valves, or electronic controllers, that maintain the car’s speed by maintaining the energy input (fuel and air) into the car’s engine. These controls are also in principle capable of defining upper limits to engine speed, such as in stock car racing where restrictor plates or governors restrict the car’s speed to an upper limit. Rev[olution] limiters that prevent an engine from revving up too quickly or limiting the rate of increase in speed also operate on a similar idea.

My daughter finds a fascinating example in the float valve of our toilet. A floating ball is a servomechanism that maintains the water supply in the tank via self-correcting feedback. Amelia has learned that only slightly depressing the lever results in adding just a little bit of water, because (and I am positive she does not know this) the float valve maintains a desired level of water in the tank.

Positive feedback similarly detects changes in time with a servo valve or mechanism, but the change detected results in amplification of the error and deviance in the system. Although few engineers design systems in which the governor works to amplify a state of deviance from the desired state, positive feedback is important and often results in knowing where a small change in one variable can send the system into major changes. An example of a small change in a system amplified via positive feedback is thermal runaway, in which a small increase in temperature results in more increases in temperature. Positive feedback is also evident in the annoying sound one hears when a loudspeaker is too close to a microphone. In this case, the microphone picks up the sound of a nearby loudspeaker and sends the sound back through the system to the loudspeaker that in turn amplifies the sound, only for the microphone to pick it up again. The sound becomes only louder until someone adjust the system.

Cybernetics, as an art and a science, is the study of such interactions between parts of a feedback loop within the system that maintains the system. Cybernetics studies the process of feedback, particularly self-reinforcing or negative feedback, on the operation of biological, mechanical, and social systems. Cybernetics understands behavior as an interaction of coupled parts in which information about previous interactions operate as feedback that maintains purpose.

As the study of the interactions of parts in the dynamic interplay of a cybernetic circuit or system, emerging from a political lobby, I ask as an intellectual historian, what the hope of this convergence was and how it played out. I ask, “Does the impulse to study cybernetics come from the hope of efficiency and optimization in organization that

good design achieves by building in feedback and communication relays? If this is the hope, then cybernetics earns the acronym C<sup>3</sup>I for “command, control, communication, and intelligence,” with the sensing organ in a position of greater control of the process through measuring efficiency and optimization. If this is the hope for cybernetics and its convergence, then it is not divorced from the sense of what it is that needs to be controlled or protected from change. I will argue that the hope that gives rise to the convergence is not divorced from the various movements for stability or change and from the various understandings of the process.

To highlight the question I am asking, I point to a paradox Dupuy finds in cybernetics. Dupuy argues that cybernetics did not model humans on the machine but mechanized the human. Readers may think of this as a separation between adding humans onto or into the machines and denying anything special about the human mind in the first place. In the former, the cyborg is understood as Humanism extending its instrumental rationality and control. The latter, that is, denying anything special about the human mind, can be seen as bringing the human down into a simple mechanical computation of physical effective causes. The latter mechanizes mind and embodies mind in the physical causal process of a body; thus, an embodied mind. For Dupuy cybernetic ideas denied anything unique about the human.

Dupuy contends that cybernetics focuses on mechanizing mind and creating a physics of meaning via logical mathematical modeling of physical causal processes. In the Macy Conferences, cybernetics eliminates any talk of subjectivity or anything that remained of the particularly “human” in causal processes. Cybernetics did this by

precluding any talk of “final causes” and focusing only on efficient causes, the ones allowed by science; but cybernetics would continue to argue that systems could emulate final causes, teleos, intention, and purpose. For example, the phrase “teleological mechanism” points to mechanisms or algorithms with finality, but the phrase describe physical causes that, via circular feedback, emulate final causes such as purpose, intention, consciousness, and will.

Dupuy contends that the result of elevating the model of the mind was to decenter and make the human less central to the model or the exclusive location of mind. The further result, for Dupuy, is the deconstruction of metaphysical humanism. Dupuy continues to argue that the deconstruction process created an “ally of the first order” for the French deconstructionists across the Atlantic who would come to develop an engineering style of thought and celebrate a subjectless cognition (2002).

The paradox for Dupuy is how deconstructing the mind and positing it as a mechanical model operates simultaneously to foreground the model and to bring into focus the question: what is essentially human, if anything? Only with the mechanical model of the mind could science then hope to claim mastery over something previously unheard of for science, that is, consciousness. This seesaw effect gives rise to what I will refer to as a cybernetic imagination. On the one hand, cybernetics led both to the fear that the human would be eclipsed or to the glory that the human could be aided by the machine and its allied orders of information, communication, and control; on the other hand, cybernetics led to practices of glorifying the mechanization of humans.

As a seesaw elevating the human for control or deconstructing the human, the hope of cybernetics can be illustrated by the hopes of the military funders of the original meetings. Paul Edwards argues that the bulk of cybernetics research emerges from a focus on military technology and military uses. Edwards argues one of the largest problems the Allies faced in World War II were problems of ballistics (1997). The Allies needed to know how to shoot down the fast Axis powers aircraft with land-mounted anti-aircraft guns. The gunner needs to know how to hit a moving target and the interactions of a set of variables including the course of the plane, the plane's speed, and the speed of the rocket. The development and manufacturing of faster airplanes during World War II made this increasingly difficult to compute. The United States invested billions of dollars to design analog and digital computers to compute ballistics tables for these applied contexts. (The ballistics table that accompanied my Remington 12-gauge shotgun is similar in type but not scope to this same problem cybernetics attempted to solve.) This huge U.S. investment developed machines that could, in principle, perform the computations more quickly and accurately; yet, this context also gave rise to ways of thinking and designing the human as a part of the machine (Edwards 1997).

Paul Edwards suggests that cybernetic discourses were picked up in military strategic planning. Planners imagined a closed world in which human and machine operated together in a cybernetic circuit in ensuing dramas of enclosure, containment, and penetration. This closed-world drama of containment is evident in American foreign policy, in which the need to contain the Soviets enclosed the United States behind advanced weapon systems, leading to a boom in the Robert McNamara style of strategic planning, that is, hoping better and faster feedback could lead to more efficient control of

the process. As a result, Edward argues that the command tradition, in which the military brass issues a strategic order and then leaves the tactical discussion to troops and commanders on the ground, was replaced with a command and control model, in which strategic and tactical decisions were made together in a central location, in this case the Pentagon.

As the study and design of self-regulating machines, cybernetics led to the question of control, and in particular, who controls whom. Paul Edwards demonstrates how the question is posed and answered in many films with cybernetic themes: a fear of machines eclipsing humans leads us to an unwanted war in the movie *The Doomsday Machine*; a world in which once machines reach a level of consciousness, they turn on and declare war on humans as in the movie *The Terminator*; it could be that a machine with instrumental rationality is the biggest enemy of the humans as in the first *Star Trek* series; how the cyborg creature and the machine's physical plant, the Death Star, makes war on nature in the movie *Star Wars (1997)*. A similar theme is played out in the series of movies that began with *The Matrix*. The machines, having reached a level of Artificial Intelligence, effectively declare war and imprison humans in a dream world of make-believe and a simulacrum named the matrix. The flux of fear and celebration of machines changes as the ubiquity and iniquity of computing changes.

But the fear of machines eclipsing humans is contrasted by the joy of imagining how technology and cybernetic accoutrements can aid the human's quest for control and perfection. Technological enthusiast Howard Rheingold, who argues that technology

becomes feedback circuits, amplifying the capacity for collaboration and coordination for mutual benefit, makes this assumption of possible control and perfection (2002).

I return again to tracing the hope of cybernetics to highlight that at stake is what it means to live in a human community and to be part of it and responsible for it. But what is human? —Let alone the human community?

The importance of these questions to humanism can be seen in how cybernetics influenced central questions of post-humanist studies. The other side of the coin to assuming attitudes of fear or accoutrement toward machines is to assume that there is nothing special about humans in the first place. In other words, there is nothing to the fear that humans could be replaced or eclipsed; instead, the cybernetic flows of machines are all there are to the human. In my reading of the 1985 essay “The Cyborg Manifesto,” feminist and historian of science Donna Haraway suggests that the organic body is fully cybernetic (2003). Haraway posits that the cyborg is interlaced and intersected with crosscutting lines without an organic past or future. Haraway’s cyborg is a way to situate the histories and knowledges as they emerge in techno-science from particular locations without essentializing or romanticizing technology or matter. Haraway replaces “matter,” and thus humans, as a stable and unchanging base with a role as actants; in Haraway’s account, nature becomes an actor and a player in a co-evolving science. Haraway’s cybernetic organism, like monsters and companion species in her work, become sites through which to investigate the emergence of raced, classed, and gendered bodies.



Just as cybernetics is a convergence of disciplines after the World War II, so it was also a divergence, in other words, it caused an explosion in academic fields. In the convergence and divergence after World War II, performance studies scholar Jon McKenzie argues there was an explosion of theories of performance, or theories emphasizing performance, which by the turn of the twenty-first century resulted in performance being both paradigm and episteme (2001). McKenzie contends that the emphasis on performance emerges in the academic contexts of organizational management, cultural performance, and technical performance. McKenzie argues that performance emerges within a set of challenges—for efficacy of cultural performance, efficiency of organizational performance, and effectiveness of technological performances. In all the disciplines, McKenzie argues that the focus is on making and doing, or poesis, and results in a set of challenges that are either revolutionary or normalizing behavior. That is to say, following Dupuy, performance highlights humanism or decenters it. In a context of cybernetics, a reader can think of McKenzie's intellectual history as arguing that performance is both liberating and constraining. I will summarize McKenzie's point by referencing two of his divergences, cultural and organizational management, to suggest how both emerge from cybernetics and focus on performance.

One location for an emphasis on performance is organizational management. McKenzie argues that performance management emerges from cybernetic management after World War II. This cybernetic and performance management challenged and changed the notion of the manager as a scientific decision maker. A hallmark of scientific management is a split between managers and workers in a way that makes them

both metaphysically separate and different. That is to say, workers and managers are fundamentally different breeds of people. This distinction is codified in the Fair Labor Standards Act, which famously provides 40-hour workweek protections to workers yet explicitly exempts managers and professionals from these protections. The logic of the split is simply that managers and professionals think and plan in workplaces; but workers do not make decisions, nor are they necessarily creative. Thus managers and workers are each subject to a different set of rules and codes. If you make creative decisions or routinely use professional judgment, then you are exempt from the FLSA and the 40-hour-a-week overtime protections. Scientific management develops and stresses the science of work design, with the scientific manager as the scientist-king creating efficiency. With such a context, it is not difficult to imagine how workplace democracy, co-determinism, or action research failed in America. McKenzie argues that performance management then “attempts to displace the rational control of the workers by empowering them to improve efficiency using their own intuition, creativity, and diversity” (2001, 63). As a result, the manager becomes more a dramaturge and less an engineer in leading workers into a creative process of learning and thinking. I would argue that organizational interventions emerging from performance-management or systems thinking attempt to overcome the split. I would also assume that these interventions not only recognize the creativity and innovation of workers but also recognize how a focus on planning, control, and strategic thinking is often not very strategic at all and is often caught in a reinforcing feedback loop. In this performance-centered context, the manager may often be evaluated on his or her capacity to stir innovation and creativity (McKense 2001).

McKenzie also argues that the study of culture changed from a focus on abstract social structure to a dramaturgical focus on the creative process of social change. Cultural performance stresses the efficacy of social rites, performances, and rituals to make and participate in social order. McKenzie argues, performance theory often emphasized the revolutionary aspects of social performance, stressing the role of performance as social resistance; yet performance theory ignored the way performance also constrains and normalizes behavior. McKenzie's theory and reading of cultural performance highlights the limin, used in performance studies, following Turner, to highlight that the threshold between structure and anti-structure in social organization can go in two different ways—normalizing and revolutionizing. McKenzie then follows the creativity of thought in Deleuze and Guattari to argue that performance creates a territory of itself and at the same time erodes that very territory by challenging and breaking apart sedimentary forces, trends, and habits.

As I read Deleuze and Guattari, they capture an ambience in cybernetics and the machine as they discuss a process between molar/majoritary/sedimented formations of subjectivity and a molecular revolution of becoming. In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari mount a critique of theories of the unconscious as lack and particularly refer to Bateson's work as an organizing principle of their book (1983). This results in a series of plateaus in dynamic changes to theorize how social production and desiring production relate in a machine process. In his book *The Three Ecologies*, Guattari further develops cybernetics through his own explication of Gregory Bateson (2001). Guattari argues ecology, in the face of global capitalism, can no longer limit itself to a discussion of the physical environment. It must, following Bateson, address the three ecological registers

of the physical environment, the social environment, and the mental environment.

Similarly to Bateson, Guattari argues that no split between nature and culture, or any of the three ecological registers, can be made, as they are all evolving and adapting to one another. Instead, he suggests the need to create new ecological identities in an open process of becoming.

As I mentioned, McKenzie suggests rethinking the limin of performance studies involving both change and revolution. In doing so, McKenzie particularly refers to system theory and cybernetics when he states, “Systems theorist Niklas Luhmann posits that any system is defined less by the border that separates it from its environment than by an internalized, self-referential description of this very border” (2001, 199).

McKenzie here is explicitly linking his form of performance theory to branches that developed out of cybernetics, particularly, Maturana and Varela’s work in autopoietic theory.

Maturana and Varela issue a challenge to computational theories of mind and cognitivism to argue that mind does not perceive an independent world in the sense of representationalism (Maturana and Varela 1980). Neither does the mind operate as a Turing machine does on an input/output matrix. Instead, a world and domain of action is called forth or enacted out of the sensor motor action of organizational closure and structural determinism of the organism. Instead of inputs and outputs, micro-world and micro-identities are created in the habitual embodied actions of the organism (Maturana and Varela 1980).

In making a boundary, the organism distinguishes between itself and its environment; however, both of these domains, the self and the environment, are the result of the organism's act of distinction. Formally, this is a strange loop in which both domains are constituted in an act of bending back. Having made the distinction separating the autopoietic organism from its environment, the organism becomes information tight and performs operations on a closed set of operands. Maturana and Varela's work in suggesting operational closure implies that an organism's central nervous system does not respond or react to an outside world, but to perturbations of its own structural coupling with the environment. What this means is that the world the autopoietic organism responds to is not separate from its own structural coupling within its environment.

As a result, Varela argues that mind and traditional conscious identity are an emergent property of a distributive system of neural activity (1999). The mind enacts a domain of action that entails a readiness to respond. For Varela, habits, particularly habits of thought, form the subject and his or her world of action. A world is constituted and an environment called forth in an oscillating process of neural activity coupled with action. Out of these actions emerge an ensemble, what Varela calls a "virtual self" that may appear to have a self or center of activity. Yet, this "I" is only an effect of a physical process. And, for Varela, this virtual self is far from an ego controlling an unconscious (1999). The "virtual self," although real, arises out of self-descriptions and narrations. In other words, interpretative narratives call forth a world and an identity characterized by Varela as a "self less process."

In a particularly insightful essay, Karen Barad continues the interdisciplinary dialogue I am hoping for between cybernetics and performance. She provides a post-humanist account of performativity that connects with the cybernetic traditions of Varela as well as with Donna Haraway's ideas (2003). Barad argues that performativity is a challenge to a linguistic turn to "environments" or "nature" that provides language with too much force. Barad asserts, "performativity is actually a contestation of the unexamined habits of mind that grants language and other forms of representation more power in determining our ontologies than they deserve" (2003, 802). Barad figures performativity as a critique of social constructionism in the same way that Judith Butler does; she figures theories of representationalism in general in the same way Varela does.

Representationalism is the assumption that a thing "out there in the world" is represented "in here in our minds." And it is the belief that what is represented or known exists more or less independently of the knower. Barad argues critiques of science share a fundamental epistemological belief in representationalism. These representational beliefs take the form of arguing that language may mediate, filter, and color our perspective on nature but that language still assumes things and words. In a move similar to Varela's enactionism, Barad argues that performativity shifts attention from representation and correspondence toward actions and responsibilities.

Barad, following Bohr, argues measurement (such as vision) is a performative accomplishment that secures the boundary between the knower and the object in a moment of "differentiating becoming" via an "agential cut." In other words, in a dynamic process an observation or distinction separates "cause" from "effect"; therefore,

phenomena instead of things are basic entities. As Barad argues, the phenomenon is not a limit mediating access to the ability to secure a separation between observer and observed in epistemological terms. Instead, phenomena are ontological basic entities. Barad declares, “Phenomena do not merely mark the epistemological inseparability of ‘observers’ and ‘observed’; rather phenomena are the ontological inseparability of agential intra-acting ‘components’” (2003, 803). At this point Barad’s thinking is similar to that of Varela and Maturana in privileging the act of description as the primary unit of intra-action.

Barad challenges the epistemological interpretation of philosophy of science with ontological significance. Yet, for Barad, the apparatus of measurement is not passive but is always reworking boundaries and distinctions. Similarly to Butler, Barad is not content with theories of discursive practices resting on material bodies. Instead she wishes to rework discursive practices that secure the boundary between human and nonhuman. Barad argues that matter and nature are not static entities but dynamically produced in iterative (or recursive) interactions. In other words, material and discursive practices do not stand in relationships of “inside” or “outside,” but instead both emerge in the dynamic interactivity of phenomena and the “agential cut” that secures their boundary. In this way matter and bodies are not a “kind of citationality” as they are for Butler, but are produced in agential interactions.

Agential realism addresses the material and discursive constraints on knowledge production by suggesting an onto-epistemology. This perspective looks at how epistemology, ontology, and ethics are always already bound up with each other by

emphasizing the boundary-drawing practices of science. Barad is saying we only know by way of bodies and the material effects of the apparatus of knowledge. Knowledge becomes an effect of an interaction between apparatus and bodies of knowledge. To stress how objects and agencies of observation are inseparable, Barad suggests intra-action. Apparatus are not simple instruments but are themselves “complex material-discursive phenomenon, involved in, formed out of, and formative of particular practices” (2003). In short, apparatus of knowledge are themselves performances and performative. The knowledge “produced” is always a performed effect of the apparatus itself. Agential reality is not a fixed ontology but an ontology linked to and through material and discursive intra-actions. In the end, Barad pushes for a post-humanist account of performativity. She states that holding the category of “human” as fixed excludes an entire range of possibilities in advance, eliding important dimensions of the working of power” (2003, 826).

Barad is working from Andrew Pickering’s work in the sociology of science. Pickering addresses the theme that I am outlining in this chapter. He argues in an essay titled “Ontological Theatre” that cybernetics developed and put in practice a “non-modern ontology [in which] the world—human and nonhuman—is a lively place of performatively interacting, endlessly emergent systems (of which humans are just one sort)” (2007, 44). Pickering argues that second-order cybernetics in stressing the process of self-generating feedback did performativity and created a non-modern ontology of performance. Pickering continues:

How do we get to this ontological ground of a sort of productive and performative squirming into focus? One way is to talk about it, as I have in my earlier work,



discussing examples of what I called a *dance of agency* between human scientist and the material world in the history of physics. But this is just words; far better—and more appropriate—to act out this nonmodern ontology of performance, to perform it. And—*mirabile dictu*—this is just what cybernetics, on my reading, has done. (2007, 44)

### ***The Cybernetic Imagination in Performance***

To bring the discussion full circle or recursively back to itself: Andrew Pickering argues that the designs of places are architectures of knowledge with different theatrical places emphasizing different conceptions of knowledge (2007). In a theater with a fourth wall and a proscenium arch that dims the house lights, the scientist and the knower are extracted from the world. I hope I have demonstrated how this conception of science and knowledge was challenged by cybernetics. Knowledge became an activity of coupling with a world and participating in it. As is no surprise, the theorist of cultural performance stressed the creative aspects of thought, often thinking of the academic enterprise as a creative and artistic one. Additionally, organizational managers changed from detached rational kings of workplace efficiency to encouragers of innovation and creativity.

The give and play between science and art also led to what in performance studies became the New Theater of the 1960s. The New Theater stressed rituals of participation in the world and changing notions of the machine. As a historical note, after cybernetics became interested in recursion and mechanization, performance and theater would also play and experiment with recursion. Sue Ellen Case gives a nice example of the ways recursion, dear to the cybernetics of the time, played out in Beckett and Cage's performances, when she states, "Beyond the ubiquitous performances of science, avant-garde performance practice took up the machinic as a mode of composition. The

recursive loop of iteration central to recording devices became a site of emulation and intervention” (2006, 116).

That is to say, the art of recursion became central to many avant-garde practices as evidenced in the way Pauline Oliveros fed magnetic reel-to-reel tapes back on themselves in a recursive fashion to produce and intervene in music. A similar recursive practice can be seen in Burroughs’s cut-up method, which consisted of cutting a piece of writing in random pieces and then rearranging them to produce a non-linear narrative. Case, elaborating on Beckett’s use of recursion in Krapp’s last tape, says, “Man and machine are synchronous in their functioning, inhabiting a shared subjective space of recursion that actually defines their functions. Without the recursion, the play or the playing is over” (2006, 126). In this quotation, a reader can notice how performance is defined in relationship to the recursive system. Interestingly, Case finds examples of a recursive and dynamic approach in a variety of avant-garde performers.

The interaction between science and art is interesting, especially as I try to imagine Bateson’s understanding of cybernetics and performance. It is interesting that in 1966, a young John Brockman, who had recently graduated with a degree in business, would come to manage the New York Film festival. Brockman became influential in combining the use of new media and film with performance art—in a practice he called intermedia. *The New York Times* would proclaim in a review of Brockman’s work that “happenings are dead”; now it’s intermedia. John Brockman, who mingled and invited numerous performers to New York to explore the intersections of film and performance,

became a close friend of Gregory Bateson and his literary agent. In 1966 in *The New York Times*, Eleanor Lester reports that

John Brockman, the New York Film Festival's 25-year-old coordinator of a special events program on independent cinema in the United States, plugging into the switched-on "expanded cinema" world in which a film is not just a movie, but an Event, An Environment. This is a humming electronic world in which multiple films, tapes, amplifiers, kinetic sculpture, lights and live dancers or actors are combined to Involve Audience in a Total Theater Experience. (September 4, 1966)

Of course, this would sound similar to the discussion of Happenings a year earlier in the *Tulane Drama Review*. Michael Kirby, in his essay "The New Theatre," describes Allan Kaprow as one might describe a cybernetic relationship:

*Eat* by Allan Kaprow went one step further by employing human beings as the "mechanized" elements. The people involved functioned within narrow and well-defined limits of behavior. Their tasks, which had no development or progression, were repeated without variation. They responded only to particular actions on the part of the spectators—only when their "switch was turned on" (1964, 24).

Later Kirby refers to New Theatre as being non-matrixed and without logical (or illogical) information structure, and I can only understand this claim in relationship to cybernetics and information theory. In his "American Speech" essay on the origin of Happenings, Dick Higgins states, "All the avant-garde arts tended increasingly to fuse, as artists explored new media ... Kaprow made extensive collages, using machines, mirrors that reflected the spectators, and ultimately, live performers" (1976, 268). Bateson's friend Paul Ryan pioneered the use of video art and cybernetics by investigating video communication technology, particularly the Sony Portapack™ as a unique media. Paul Ryan's Raindance Collective used Sony The Portapacks™ in video installations investigating the effects of simultaneous feedback in cybernetic circuits.

If my suggestion of a connection between performance and cybernetics is still vague, what about the fact that the Polish theatre director Jerzy Grotowski came to America to lecture at Lindesfarne, where he did some of the famous performances well documented and discussed at length in the film *My Dinner with André?* Gregory Bateson, of course, gave some of his most famous lectures, including “Men Are Grass,” at Lindesfarne. Grotowski influenced the theatre practices, then well underway, of Richard Schechner. As McKenzie points out in his intellectual history of performance, both Richard Schechner and Victor Turner were readers of Gregory Bateson and influenced by his notions of feedback (2001). At the Lindesfarne conference presentation by Grotowski, Pete Rose meet Jacques Chwat, who at the time was Grotowski’s translator, and Rose and Chwat, together with Tim Miller, founded Performance Space 122 (Rose, 2004).

In closing, whether we stress the revolutionary or the deteriorating, or positive or negative feedback, cybernetics is the study of stability and change as twin sides of a coin. On one side of the coin, cybernetics is enmeshed in a military war machine, seems at times to glorify the mechanistic extension of the human, and promises to solve problems with increasing feedback, communication, and control. The other side of the coin implies that nothing is quite so special about the human and that instead of control we need more randomness, more noise, and more becoming. On one hand Bateson points to the war machine and states, “the state department of several nations are using games theory, backed up by computers as a way of deciding internal policy” (2000, 476).

Bateson may have been a larger part of the war machine than just a consultant. While working for the OSS, Bateson wrote to Wild Bill Donovan that a new agency was needed to collect and analyze information on different cultures so as to better protect American interests and to be better colonial managers. America needed to adopt this new form of political and colonial management after the nuclear bomb compelled people to develop guerilla style, networked warfare. The recent rise of terrorist networks and the Taliban may illustrate how correct Bateson may have been. Bateson argued that in this insecure world, an agency was needed to collect information and that agency became the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (Darling 1993). In another OSS document, Bateson developed this “policy recommendation” and his analysis was clearly focused on performance and specifically on performance that could become sites and methods of political resistance. Bateson suggests that the OSS renew efforts to collect information about different cultures. Cultural managers previously collected information by taking local mistresses and gaining firsthand knowledge through intimate affairs. The colonial system changed, and colonial governors then (at the time of Bateson’s writing) relied on surveys. Bateson suggested reestablishing networks of communication and feedback loops in a culture. Bateson also suggested that instead of outlawing cultural performances, colonial managers should become better spectators of them. He feared that if the colonial managers outlawed cultural practices and performances, those practices and performances could become sites of resistance; but in becoming spectators, managers could generate ways to shape the performances and avoid the possibility of the performances becoming occasions of escalating conflict. This strategy is an application

of schismogeneses, as discussed in Chapter Two, because it recognizes how performances are caught within relationships.

In general, most arguments assume Bateson left the OSS black propaganda campaign feeling disappointed in his applied work. Bateson's biographer David Lipsit argues that Bateson was disgusted not only with his OSS work but also with applied anthropology because it did not work. On the other hand, anthropologist and historian David Price argues that Bateson's work was largely adopted writ large as the effective method of CIA involvement in foreign countries and toward indigenous resistance (1998). Price assumes Bateson left the OSS because he did not feel comfortable with how he was led to do things during war that he would not have done otherwise. Stated differently, he was unable to change the institution. Bateson may have harbored a distrust of applied work for the rest of his life, but it did not prevent him from working in contexts that were clearly not divorced from military applications. In *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Bateson refers to the questionable contexts of his animal communication research with John Lilly, conducted at the naval research outpost. Bateson's research on schizophrenia was conducted at a Veteran Affairs Hospital where the CIA was also conducting experiments on the applied use and effects of LSD.

As a humanist, Bateson seems to suggest that cybernetics is a method of humane and balanced interaction in the world when he states, "Latent in cybernetics is 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" (1972, 484). To see our own follies in a wider perspective, Bateson might have joined a

generation in America hoping for expanded consciousness. In *Search for the Manchurian Candidate*, chronicling the CIA's hope for a mind controlling substance, John Marks states: "In 1959 Bateson helped arrange for a beat poet friend of his named Allen Ginsberg to take the drug [lsd-25] at a research program located off the Stanford campus" (1991, 120). Marks continues in a long paragraph to explain how the CIA desire for mind control led to counter-cultural experiments in social organization and psychedelics:

Anthropologist and philosopher Gregory Bateson then worked at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Palo Alto. From 1959 on, Dr. Leo Hollister was testing LSD at that same hospital. Hollister says he entered the hallucinogenic field reluctantly because of the "unscientific" work of the early LSD researchers. He refers specifically to most of the people who attended Macy Conferences. Thus, hoping to improve on CIA and military-funded work, Hollister tried drugs out on student volunteers, including a certain Ken Kesey. ... Kesey later wrote adding, "six months later I had a job at that hospital as a psychiatric aide." (1991, 120-121).

Kesey and the Merry Pranksters eventually took a bus from the West to the East Coast, in a trip chronicled in Tom Wolfe's famous book the *Electric Acid Kool-Aid Test*. Stewart Brand, one of the Merry Pranksters, later published the *Whole Earth Catalog* that regularly featured Gregory Bateson's work and largely promoted him as a public intellectual. In this context, Bateson would refer to his LSD trips as moments when he thought past himself, when the cybernetic circuits of man and music blend and separate. On his acid trips, which may have also been his hope for cybernetics, Bateson questioned the boundaries of the self; thus, he encouraged deconstructing the proud view of man as the center of the cybernetic circuit.

## Chapter Four: The Fall from Grace: Cybernetic Romanticism

I have always wondered what the trust circle activity, in which students cross their arms across their chests, close their eyes, and fall back into the hands of others, so often used in interpersonal communication classrooms, is really supposed to teach. Does it teach the person to trust in someone else and the importance of this act of trust? If the person catches me here in this example, then do I know what it is like to have trust in a person and have that trust affirmed? If the person drops me, do I know what it is like to have my trust in another person shaken? Is the trust in a person or in the group? In the trust circle exercise, do my closed eyes protect me from the giggling and laughter of the group or from the reservations inherent in the promise to catch me? The giggling and laughing might complicate my leap, or fall, into your embrace. If I turn around and open my eyes, am I in a better position to calculate our trust? With our eyes open facing each other, is our trust on better ground? Do I assume that vows, calculations of trust, and attempts at knowing if someone will be there with arms open in my time of need are immune from doubt? I may hope, pray, bet on, and even assume with tragic arrogance that someone will be there for me, but is this something I can ever say I know? Know with certainty? And how is this knowledge conceived? If the person does not catch me, is it my knowledge that is shaken? Could my trust be shaken and my knowledge not shaken at all?

This trust-circle falling can never actually convey the trust we have in others and how that trust can be broken, mended, and fostered in relationships. Although the



activity fails in the classroom, it is at least a fair demonstration of the need for interpersonal community, for community and for each other. And the fall, with our eyes closed, in a position of limited knowing is also a fair starting point for understanding Bateson's contribution to communication studies.

### ***Bateson's Fall from Grace***

On so many occasions, Bateson refers to our language as our fall from grace. As Bateson states in *Versailles to Cybernetics*, "I think that cybernetics is the biggest bite out of the fruit of the tree of knowledge that mankind has taken in the last 2000 years. But most of such bites out of the apple have proved to be rather indigestible—usually for cybernetic reasons" (1972, 476). But why is this apple so indigestible? Because we cannot swallow it? Because it leaves us wanting more? Because it, like tainted pork, leaves us questioning our cherished boundaries of the self?

The bite of the apple, for Bateson, is his reinterpretation of the fall from grace as the human condition of language, or the condition after the fall is a natural predicament of human language. Bateson elaborates in the essay "A Theory of Play and Fantasy": "Organisms having eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge discover that their signals are signals" (1972, 179). At the Macy Conference on group process Bateson again in his presentation *The Message "This is Play"* says, "It seems to me that when the human species ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, it discovered that automatic signs could be turned into signals and emitted with conscious or unconscious purpose, with that discovery, of course, also came the possibility of deceit, and all sorts of other possibilities" (1958, 157-158). The fall from grace is another way to put the starting

hypothesis of Gregory Bateson's work in communication—"that human verbal communication can operate and always does operate at many contrasting levels of abstractions" (1972, 177).

By "levels of abstractions," Bateson means some messages act to contextualize both the utterance and the relationships in it. Bateson has a few ways of expressing this thought in his writing. Often it comes out as a difference between a metaphoric and a literal meaning. The metaphoric puts words within a context, often imaginative; the literal, on the other hand, takes words out of a context. Another way Bateson puts this is to compare digital and analogic forms of communication. Purely digital coding is often unambiguous; changes in the way or manner something is said is often unimportant. In analogic communication, changes in the way something is said does influence what it means. Bateson, at times, expresses this as a difference between denotation and connotation. A denotation is an abstraction of a word, given an isolated context, such as the definitions found in dictionaries. Connotations, on the other hand, are the words within contexts that imply relationships. Connotations cannot generally be contained in definitions and as such generally extend beyond dictionaries. Bateson also points to literal and figurative as methods of describing the difference. The literal and figurative are staples of children's books, at least from my history of reading them. For example in my daughter's book, *Amelia Bedelia*, Amelia Bedelia confuses the literal and figurative meaning of words. This results in her interpreting the words "dress the chicken" to mean that she should dress the chicken like a little man in a suit (Parish 1992). In referencing my daughter's book here instead of any of my own, I hope to emphasize that any formal definition of these various distinctions is not required to understand the spirit of

Bateson's words. Instead, I think a formal definition would only lead to more confusion. The point Bateson is making is that people are apt to read one level of communication against another level of communication. In this way, I imagine you can ask if children's books are written to teach children about confusing messages, and if the books reassure the parent that this confusion is child's play. The lesson to the child is instructive but the reassurance to the parents is inappropriate.

Bateson argues that meaning exists, that meaning is embedded within the context of human interaction, and that human communication exists on different levels of abstractions. In Bateson's familiar cybernetic language, the meaning of a word or an action comes from guessing what whole a part is a part of. A part of an action or utterance allows the observer the capacity to guess, with better than random odds, at the larger whole; but the guesses are made only in adductive logic, and as guesses, they are prone to error. The raised fist, the downward glance, the email to which you never replied, and the smile from across the room all gain meaning the same way—by someone guessing the relationship of which these actions (or failure to act) are a part. Bateson states, "As I see it, if the receiver can guess at missing parts of the message, then those parts which are received must, in fact, carry a meaning which refers to the missing parts and is information about those parts" (1972, 414). And when you smile from across the room, the context is our relationship. Bateson continues to say that information has meaning because information is a difference that makes a difference, and this difference is a difference in a pattern. And not everyone smiles in that slightly bashful way. Information, in turn, becomes redundant because it carries information about the pattern

within which it is nested. This is no doubt circular, and information does not have to match the outside world; for Bateson it never has to reach the outside world.

Continuing his assumption that “meaning” comes from or is embedded within contexts, Bateson argues in *Communication: The social matrix of psychology* that a matrix, or an ecology of ideas, as he would later say, shapes and defines what information is perceived and perceivable (Ruesh and Bateson 1951). In the landmark essay “Information/Codification,” Bateson argues that codification/evaluation operates on the aesthetic operation of valuing and making a context for something. What we see, codify, and classify depends on a capacity of seeing something as an aspect or a difference; as Bateson would say, “a difference that makes a difference” (1972, 457). In other words, to see something requires setting a context in which something could count as information and thus as a difference. The setting of a context is the only way to understand a message, and every message sets both a context and a domain of meaning. Bateson states, “The value system, as organized in terms of preference, constitutes a networking in which certain items are selected and others passed over or rejected and this network embraces everything in life” (1951, 176). This is not to say that we see only what we want to see, because I just saw your shoulders drop in disappointment at me and with us. What I see, I must have been in a position to see. What I see must exist in pattern and gains its meaning from the pattern. These patterns securing meaning are forever changing. Bateson explains:

The message ceases to be [a] message when nobody can read them. ... To be meaningful even to be recognized as pattern—every regularity must meet with complementary regularities, perhaps skill, and these skills are as evanescent as the

patterns themselves. They, too, are written on sand or the surface of waters (1979, 43).

Assuming meaning comes from context, Bateson writes codification/evaluation as one word to suggest they are the same operation: to classify is to value something as a difference. “In codification of information,” Bateson states, “human beings discard the ground and observe the figure” (1951, 176). Meaning, for Bateson then, is a process of taking something as a figure or an aspect. Thus all messages do two things: on the one hand, they have a context level that denotes what something is; on the other, they have a relational level that indicates what to pay attention to in the larger environment. The patterns an organism responds to are largely dependent on and constrained by its history. An organism’s history of learning and experiences sets the context for what the organism takes as information and meaning. This is not too difficult to imagine because if we did not have a certain relationship before, then I might never have noticed you slipping out of the party without saying hello.

Bateson argues that communication exists within different levels, and those of us prone to responding to language will read one level of communication against and by way of another level of communication. As if what you said led me to wonder why you said it here, said it now, said it to me, and, of course, said it the way that you did. Let me give an example illustrating the point I am trying to make. Say I stopped by our local campus pub after teaching my class and saw four of my students at a cocktail table with a few appetizers and a few empty beer glasses. Obviously, they were not in my class just a moment ago. I ask, “How did you all get here?” and they respond, “We drove in Mike’s car.” I will venture to say in this scenario stage directions are important to know the

appropriateness of the students' responses and the appropriateness of my question in the first place. I could have asked the question in a way that implies that I am okay with them missing class. Maybe they skipped a review session and, being the best students in my class, they simply do not need to attend the review. Maybe their response assures me that they are safe and have a driver who is not drinking—at which time I notice Mike is drinking an iced tea. I may be glad the students learned to know and befriend each other in my class. I may even think this is an example of my good teaching: seeing it as proof that embodied, student-centered pedagogy works. I could have asked the question in a way that expressed my disapproval that they skipped my class. I might have asked the question rhetorically, implying that they should have been in my class. But in this scenario, it is not clear whether Mike's car has anything to do with my question. Maybe, of course, they were all driving in Mike's car when it over-heated, and as a result they could not get to class on time. They might have at that point decided to have a few beers until the car cooled down. I imagine I might be relieved by Mike's gesturing to the car in the parking lot with its hood up. Yet, I could also be further enraged, thinking that they should have walked or run to campus to make it to my class on time. I might, however, knowing a thing or two about cars myself, just as easily offered to help the students with Mike's car.

What is important is that the communicator whether student or teacher, have some kind of directions or a context to understand the words coming from the other. If we respond and how we respond is the relationship we have; of course, not responding is a way of responding. In my example, what the teacher is asking is not made clear by the words alone. These words, as are all words, are ambiguous. And, our guesses at contexts

are only guesses. If the students feel “on the spot,” as if in trouble for skipping class, they may respond literally. If they guessed or knew I was joking, then they may respond differently. Bateson refers to contexts or directions as meta-communication.

Now to explain how Bateson’s theory of communication operates as a comment on the Biblical account of the fall and to situate Bateson’s evolutionary account of language, I turn briefly to the Biblical story. Biblically, the fall is the founding separation from God and an exile from the garden where humans enjoyed a harmonious connection with God and a direct participation God’s loving grace. The fall from grace is the human situation; only humans fell and were exiled from the garden. As such the fall is also an account of how humans came to be in a particular location and situation. This is also true of Bateson’s evolutionary theory of language in which only humans exist as fallen.

As I am writing this very sentence my cat, Boo, is biting at my hand while playing with my pen and paper. I am not particularly worried, however, that Boo will jump up and attack my face, possibly scaring me or at least causing me great harm. I assume Boo thinks the same of me. How do I know that Boo knows my aggression is play, and I likewise know that his kitten bites are play? And, is this an issue of knowing or acknowledging?

Bateson’s concern with animal communication emerged while he watched river otters, trained dolphins for the U.S. Navy, and kept an octopus in his living room. Of course, I do not actually know where Bateson kept the octopus. The octopus may have been in his bedroom, but that supposition would connotatively affect the story too much. The octopus could be in the kitchen, which might connotatively affect the story in other

ways. In either case, context is important to any meaning. So let us keep the octopus in a tank in the living room, so that the context is less suggestive.

In Bateson's studies of animal communication, he asked if it were possible for an animal to know that signs can be used symbolically. Bateson further asked if an animal knowing that messages could be used symbolically would behave differently in response to the messages. How do animals know which way a sign is being used?

In his trips to the San Francisco Zoo, Bateson saw animals playing, an everyday occurrence that Miranda, Amelia, and I have also observed every time we have gone to Lowry Park Zoo in Tampa. We have seen animals playing by biting each other; this we could see was obviously not fighting. Bateson reads the ordinary scene of animals playing as paradoxical because it is an example in which an animal's bite does not mean what it would mean if it were a bite to protect itself or to kill prey. This bite is kind of a non-bite bite. Bateson argues such bites are paradoxical messages because they exist on different levels of abstraction and as different logical types. The animals must have some way to interpret the bites as play. The messages seem to contradict each other, with one message implying that the bite does not mean what it might normally mean.

The importance given to logical types by Bateson at least requires comment. The theory of logical types emerges from Russell's work in set theory. Set theory attempts to solve a paradox of overlapping group membership or a self-referential paradox, in which an element is a member of a class and a class cannot be a member of itself. All is fine with logical typing if no one ever confuses an element for a class or makes a class a member of itself, which action would result in a self-referential paradox. In the example



of a bite, a bite can be an element of two different classes of behavior, either play or aggression. The paradox is simply that you cannot resolve the paradox by referring to a class element distinction, and in logic you must exclude the paradoxical statement.

Bateson famously discusses logical types in his essay *A Theory of Play and Fantasy*. The essay does not attempt to provide an answer to the question, “what is play,” but instead the essay addresses the characteristics of play and how play is an important element of relationships and human communication (Bateson, 1972). To elaborate on the distinction between logical types and frames, Bateson gives two famous examples. The first message, given in words or comportment, generally indicates the activity underway, such as, “This is play.” The other message that Bateson contrasts with the first takes the form of a question “Is this play?” I contend that Bateson’s principle interest as a romantic communication theorist is within these two, the statement and the question. But there are other questions and other differences we can use to highlight distinction in levels of communication. Is there a difference between a smirk and smile? And, if you know of a difference, where is it and how do you know it? Is there a difference between lovers slapping one another during love making and beating a spouse? Is there a difference between harassment or bullying and teasing or joshing? How about a shrug and a punch? The distinction “is it or is it not” is ubiquitous in our human lives among others. “Is this play?” the victim of a bully may ask. The bully may respond, “It is play.” Do the bully and the victim really ask this question and take it seriously? Is that a real smile, I imagine Jane Austen’s Elizabeth Bennett to ask of Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*. Is there a difference, and if so, where is it? How do we know the difference? As a

further elaboration, I contend that Bateson is interested in how organisms explore these differences in the activities that constitute them?

What is important for Bateson is the way levels classify and interpret each other. If there are rules that classify how to interpret messages, as play or not play for example, then rules must emerge in interactional sequences and not in logic. Bateson's metalogue, *Are These Conversations Serious* is a conversation about how rules and the understanding of activities emerge in the doing of those activities (1972). Take a game as an example. Can the messages about the game be included in our playing of the game? For example, Snowy Mountain is a game my daughter Amelia has made up all on her own or "all by myself," as she likes to say, that generally involves sitting on the floor in a particular way, with your legs stretched out in front of you. In the game you scoot down the hallway on an imaginary train until reaching Snowy Mountain, where we sit cross-legged. There are lots of rules for playing this game, yet most of them have to emerge during our playing of it. You must sit with your back towards Snowy Mountain in order to ride the train; apparently my daughter has not seen trains that have seats in both directions. It is also okay to bring food up to Snowy Mountain as long as you do not eat it on the way (a rule I made to limit our mess). Defining during the game is how most of the games I play with Amelia unfold. We have not gotten around to playing games in which the rules are set before we play, despite my attempts at introducing her to Candyland. If rules were all pre-existent and could not emerge in interaction, life would be quite boring. Bateson states, "The game and the creation of the game must be seen as a single phenomenon, and indeed, it is subjectively plausible to say that the sequence is really playable only so long as it retains some element of the creative and unexpected

(1979, 128). Amelia gladly provides Miranda and I the creative and unexpected emergence in play.

In discussing rules and logical types, Bateson does not assume that introducing the rigors of logical types to human communication will solve any problem. As I argue, Bateson indicts the hope of constructing such a theory of language. Instead, Bateson argues that such confusion and levels of messages characterize human life. His discussion of logical types and paradoxes in play is simply the suggestion that some messages act to “frame” other messages. And, of course, these messages are not always separate from each other, nor should they be separate.

Bateson insists that something happens between bored otters playing at the zoo and between human children playing in the playground. For one, I do not know nor assume an otter can bully, and I assume that otters do not go around questioning whether something is or is not love, hate, or play. Of course, something has happened in the evolution of language, as I suggested above, in connection with our kitten Boo: a difference that made the pen both an instrument to play with Boo and to write to my audience. I am not sure whether Boo can think of this abstraction, of a community and a relationship not present. But I have that ability and its converse: I can deny a relationship, say, between writing and expressing or between expressing and emotion. Both are my options, and I will, of course, say more about this shortly.

Concerning this difference between humans and animals, Bateson argues that animals manifest “mood signs” that “stand for” or are “a part” of a larger whole that allows the organism to guess about its environment with better than random odds.

Additionally, animals communicate “face to face,” allowing them to propose actions, such as play, which another animal can discourage, say, with a “don’t,” such as when an older dog growls at a puppy’s “proposal.” But the iconic communication of animals is always extensively about the relationship, and the universe always includes that relationship.

Animals have the capacity for language with different logical types, such as bites that do not mean a fight, yet humans are the only animals that have a “not” or a negative indicative statement. The negative indicative statement has the capacity to deny the existence of a relational aspect. We are the only animals capable of saying “It is not the case that this is a message of love, play or hate” or “It is not the case that yours is a message of love, play or hate.”

The human condition of language after the fall is that the part can be severed from the whole and taken without any relationship to the larger whole. This, for Bateson, results in digital coding, in which changes in magnitude do not result in immediate changes in the referent or the whole. In a heated argument, for example, I do not necessarily learn how angry you are by how loudly you are yelling at me. Conversely, when you say nothing, you may be even clearer than when you are yelling. The negative indicative statement, in turn, can be used to deny a relationship between a part and a whole in a way that allows humans the capacity to isolate context. Whether this is advantageous in evolution is hard to know, but humans are unique in the history of evolution. I imagine if you see the capacity for negative indicative statements as

advantageous to evolution influences whether you see it as a fall or an elevation. bringing up.

The astonishing human capacity to deny the presence of a relationship and the others in them is at the center of Bateson's double binding sequence. The double bind theory emerges from Bateson's work at the Veterans Administration Hospital in Palo Alto, where Bateson explored whether confusions in logical types and the inability to discriminate abstractions in communication contributed to schizophrenia. After a few years exploring the abstractions of communication and a lot of trouble maintaining funding, Bateson reluctantly set forth a theory of the Double Bind.

Formally, there are three conditions for the double bind sequence. First, there exists a relationship that is important for one party to maintain, such as a relationship of dependence. Second, there needs to exist a series of paradoxical statements so that one statement disagrees with another statement at a different level of abstraction. Third, for the double bind to exist, there needs to be an injunction against meta-communicating so that the paradox cannot be resolved. Bateson reminded his readers in 1967 that the double bind is not something one can count but instead should be understood as a pattern within relationships. With respect to a pattern, it is important to understand the tragic scene Bateson created for the double bind. In the scene, a mother and child are reunited in the office of a psychiatrist after the son's brief stay in a hospital and his recovery from an acute psychotic breakdown. In the scene, the child is already sitting on a couch when the mother enters the office and sits next to her son on the couch. The son places his arm around her in an apparently loving embrace. The mother then stiffens her body in

apparent discomfort. After the son withdraws his arm, the mother turns to him with an overly theatrical display of love and asks “Don’t you love me anymore?” The child proceeds towards another episode of psychosis.

In this scene, the mother makes her expression ambiguous and faults the child for withdrawing his arm. The child interprets the mother’s stiff body as a rejection of his embrace. The mother produces an overly theatrical response that the son takes as blocked, guarded, or otherwise fake. In the end, the mother blames the child for his withdrawing behavior while also denying, with the overly theatrical response, her part in creating confusing messages and confusing the context to interpret messages.

The child, who is in need of this relationship, is a position of not knowing whether he is loved or not by the mother. The child is also in a no-win situation because he can either affirm the contradicting messages of love as love, and possibly wonder if they reflect her true feelings, or he can indict her for the mismatch and threaten the relationship. The child wavers between wondering if the feelings are real or if by commenting on the interaction, he might trigger the end of the needed relationship. The result of the sequence is predictable because both the child and mother attempt to avoid commenting on the relationship and confuse their expressions. If the sequence continues, then the child may become paranoid and assume “Behind every statement there is a concealed meaning which is detrimental to his welfare” (1972, 211). Such a situation is paranoia-inducing because the other person’s expression does not match intention or feelings. Bateson continues “[the schizophrenic] would find it necessary to see and hear

less of what went on around him, and do his utmost to avoid provoking a response in his environment” (1972, 211).

I tend to read the double bind sequence as a moment in which the ability to understand what a message is about is disabled, often deliberately, by confusing the messages, contexts, and frames that secure them. This may be why, for Bateson, the sequence presents itself at moments when we do not know who we are or whether we are in the world with others. This might explain why the schizophrenic presents symptoms of a profound lack of personal pronouns. As I have argued: if you guess at my meaning, you must imagine a context in which what I said is said for a reason. And to guess is for you *to place* the message in a context, and, conversely, you and I are *in* that context.

For Bateson, the schizophrenic “does not share with normal people these signals which accompany messages to indicate what a person means” (1972, 210). I would add here that normal people, whoever this would be for Bateson, may also be left to wonder what people mean in saying and doing the things they do; yet, these normal people may have better coping skills. Bateson assumes such double binds are normal occurrences, and he states, “We have suggested that this is the sort of situation which occurs between the pre-schizophrenic and his mother, but it also occurs in normal relationships (1972, 209). As a normal, or at least more normal situation, take the example of being angry around your own house. Your deportment tells it all: you are silent when you are generally talkative; you are stiff in your movements across your living room floor when you are generally lighter on your feet. Doors are shut a little louder, a little more heavily. Yet when asked by those who share your life (your son, your daughter, lover, parents,

roommates, and neighbors) whether you are angry or what might be troubling you, you respond, “Nothing is the matter! Why do you ask?” What has just happened? Can observers no longer read your body as giving expression? What message should they trust—the deportment or your words? What a choice to make! Your friends and family may ask for clarification and say, “But you are slamming the doors, and I know you are mad; your body tells it all.” The proverbs “actions speak louder than words” and “the eyes are the windows to the soul” both speak to the confusion I am trying to suggest. I imagine this scenario as ordinary. Maybe you follow up and deny anyone the right to comment on this situation; maybe you say, “You aren’t reading my body correctly. I am just shutting the door and walking around.” You may even follow with “I told you I am happy.” Upon hearing this statement, your friends and family have a choice; maybe they simply do not need to maintain a relationship with you. And we all have relationships like this one, maybe with a standoffish neighbor. But if the relationship must be maintained, or to end it is to end something of yourself, is it so easy? Can the child end the relationship, whatever that means, and walk away, whatever that means? If this were a pattern of behavior (slamming doors and walking around abruptly), then what message would your observers learn to trust? Doesn’t knowing a message mean knowing a context, trusting the context and your ability to read that context? Is your trust always well placed?

I understand the double bind as the confusing of types and the injunction against commenting on conflicting messages as often leading to tragedy. But surely we have all been subject to conflicting messages and not really sure which messages we should trust. For example, I have often wondered after a friend or lover has given me a half-hearted



laugh if they really thought I was funny. I am left wondering if the laugh expresses a soul. Does this bespeak of a paradox? How about the nods of agreement from your students or bosses, do they give expression to a shared agreement or understanding? How do we ever have reason enough to trust in a message? My sense is that we feel these things and others all the time—as if in a marriage, a partner asks, usually in a silent soliloquy, “Does she (or he) really love me?” Or, “Are her (or his) expressions real expressions of love?”

### ***Temptation to Know and Melodramatic Doubt***

If we imagine words must be placed within contexts for them to mean and if our human expression can so easily lead to confusion, then we can either avoid or acknowledge these confusions. In evolving “the not” and the twin capacity for deceit and wonder, humans enabled themselves to talk about things instead of relationships and things outside of relationships. Bateson’s theory of language then emerges as explanation of how humans got specific about things instead of relationships. At the London Dialectics of Liberation Conference, Bateson tells a story:

There was once a Garden. It contained many hundreds of species probably in the subtropics living in great fertility and balance, with plenty of humus and so on. In that Garden, there were two anthropoid who were more intelligent than the other animals. On one of these trees there was a fruit, very high up, which the two apes were unable to reach. So they began to think. This was the mistake they began to think purposively. By and by, the he ape whose name was Adam, went and got an empty box and put it under the tree and stepped on it, but he found he still couldn’t reach the fruit. So he got another box and put it on top of the first, then he climbed up on the two boxes and finally he got that apple (1972, 435).

Having bitten the apple, an organism knows a “sign” could be a signal and used symbolically. “The Fall” for Bateson is the unique place or condition humans find

themselves in relationship to language. It is the place in which “signs” and symbols do not have to match. I tend to see it as the moment in which humans have to rely on shared understanding and know that they are capable of lies and deceit, as well as truth. To state this differently, the human condition as fallen is where trust and relationships may be more important to what we know of each other than anything we can posit with philosophical certainty. In this way the fall is the human situation, and we continue as fallen when we create simple purpose, isolated contexts, and parts.

I again ask why we choke on this condition of language, and now turn to theater scholar and student of J. L. Austin, Stanley Cavell to explain how choking is our human condition of language. Cavell, in reference to the half-bitten apple Bateson mentioned above, stated,

One text from which to decipher the significance of our suffocating from the half-swallowed apple of knowledge is Kleist’s “Marionette Theater.” Is being human exactly to be incapable either of swallowing it or spitting it out? Is the gasping of the human voice, say sobbing or laughing, the best proof of the human? Or best picture, i.e., mask? To swallow once for all would be to live always within ordinary language-games, within the everyday; to spit once for all would be to exist apart from just that life, to live without. In particular, to live without the human voice (e.g., without appeal, without protest). Is the temptation to knowledge a product of the prohibition of knowledge, or the other way around, the prohibition a projection or explanation of the temptation? (The decisive moment in the conjuring trick) (1979, 477).

Cavell argues that the choking apple is part of what it means to inhabit a human voice instead of a metaphysical voice that speaks outside human embodiment. In a fashion similar to Bateson, Cavell contends that language is neither learning words in a dictionary nor an algorithm for deducing logical meaning; instead, to learn a word is to be able to share the world and concept of life with people that accompany words. To know

the meaning of a word is to share a form of life and a world with others. Learners of a new language often find words do not translate well, not because there are no dictionaries, but because some cultures simply do not share the same forms of life that accompany those words. Cavell states: “to have a concept is to be able, so to speak, to keep up with the word” (1979, 78).

In his landmark collection of essays on ordinary language philosophy, which became through Judith Butler a major influence on performativity, Cavell outlines a split between a positivist theory of language, which hopes to place language on par with logical statements so that deciphering a meaning is nothing more than deducing logical proofs, and post-positivist movements within the academy that study speech and human uses of speech in contexts in which the words are used and mean (1976). In Speech Communication textbooks the distinction is at times between a transmission model of communication, which divorces meaning from context in an engineering approach to optimizing human language usage, and a ritualistic or social constructionist approach to communication that situates the contexts of shared meaning making as the location of study. In the textbook I use in my introductory course to interpersonal communication, the split Cavell outlines is followed by a study of “world of meanings,” and I would contend that the methodological study of language in use is a hallmark of speech communication departments (2006).

Cavell contrasts human-communication-as-attunement with philosophy’s picture of language, which is a world of private generic objects. In this world, the context of claiming and talking with others is out of the picture or irrelevant. Cavell states:

It is as though we [philosophers] try to get the world to provide answers in a way which is independent of our responsibility for claiming something to be so ... and we fix the world so that it can do this. We construct “part” of objects which have no parts; “senses” which have no guiding functions; become obsessed with how we can know “the pain itself” in a context in which the questions “why do you think this expression of pain gives a false picture of it?” has no answer. ... Convince ourselves that what we call something does not tell us what it is in a context in which the question “what would you call it?” or “what else might it be?” have no answers (and we take what we have fixed or constructed to be discoveries about the world, and take this fixation to reveal the human condition rather than our escape or denial of this condition through the rejection of the human condition of knowledge and action and the substitution of fantasy. (1979, 21).

Cavell’s description of language is similar to Bateson’s criticism in his essay “conscious purpose vs. nature”; human purpose cuts the arc of the cybernetic circuit in which it is embedded. Bateson argues cutting the arc of the cybernetics circuit is characteristic of the fall from grace where a quest for knowledge takes the form of limited purpose divorcing knowledge of the world from our participation within ecologies of ideas. Cavell argues the quest for knowledge hopes for “getting the sign and the sensation stamped upon one another so that so to speak their faces can be seen to match quite independently of any decision of mine” (1979, 348). It is a hope that my knowledge of you and your knowledge of me rest on expression that is read as a natural fact and without my participation as a knower.

As illustrative of the hope for knowledge, my readers can refer to the previously psychotic son’s desire in double binding sequence to know where he is in the vital relationship with his rather theatrical mother. I have argued above that this desire to know is apt to fail us and cause us to wonder where we are and who we are. How do we then register our disappointment with the fact of language? To know me is to know beyond my expression, or likewise, for me to know you, I must know you past your

expressions. I read it as a hope to know another person without the capacity for that person to intervene in that knowledge. I take a scene from *When Harry Met Sally* as illustrative of this hope (1989). The scene: Harry explains how he ends a very brief relationship with a woman with whom he just had an intimate affair by saying he has an early meeting, or a haircut, or a squash game. Sally states, “You don’t play squash.” Harry responds, “They don’t know that; they just met me.” Further on Harry says, “I don’t feel great about this, but I don’t hear anyone complaining.” Sally responds, “You are at the door too fast.” Harry defends himself, “I think they have an okay time.” Sally responds with the skeptical question, “How do you know, know that they are really?” Harry interrupts Sally, “Are you saying that they faked orgasm?” Sally responds: “It’s possible most women one time or another have faked it.” Harry confidently responds, “They haven’t faked it with me.” “How do you know?” Sally continues the skeptical premise. Harry asserts, “Because I do”! In a wonderful moment of film, Sally, while she and Harry have a meal in the deli, proceeds to fake an orgasm to suggest that he does not know with any certainty. I assume Harry’s impulse to read “another” (a woman) in this scene is to read the body without the possibility of “an other” intervening (and, without having to read her). In a relationship we can only hope the orgasm flows freely from the body. Bateson discusses this hope in terms of how perfumes can mask pheromones, and in turn humans, plagued, cursed or blessed with their state as fallen, may hope for the simple mood signs of animals in which signs, behaviors, and referents match in a natural one-to-one relationship (1972). Sally can fake her feelings, and Harry can continue to wonder about them. To capture the spirit of my words, I can use covers of magazines proclaiming the keys to reading body language to find out his or her true feelings or that

suggest ways to discover if his or her heart, if not his or her body, lies elsewhere. To illustrate this difficulty in relationships, consider the typical cover of a magazine proclaiming that its articles contain the key to reading body language to find out her (or his) true feelings or to discovering if her (or his) heart, if not her (or his) body, lies elsewhere.

Cavell argues that hope and temptation are natural to human language but are also prone to end in disappointment. The hope leads to disappointment because “our working knowledge of one another’s (inner) lives can reach no further than our (outward) expressions, and we have cause to be disappointed in these expressions” (1979, 341). Likewise in the double bind sequence, the son experiences difficulty both in knowing expressions and in discussing the abstraction of communication. This difficulty in turn leads him to wonder if the emotions are real or fake.

As the double bind suggests, if our deportment and expressions do not match and if we can read deportment and expression only in a shared language, then we are apt to be disappointed in such expressions and the ability to read them. Can I keep you from reading them? Can you stop from wondering if you are reading them correctly? Can you wonder if you are in your expressions and if I am in mine?

Emerging from the double bind is the tragedy of doubting one’s worth. In an essay presented at a conference celebrating Bateson’s work, Cissna and Sieburg argue that a melodramatic response emerges when people in interactional sequences are repeatedly disconfirmed. The essay reads, “The person whose topic is repeatedly ignored may soon come to *doubt his or her very existence*, and at best will feel that he or she is

not heard, attended to, or regarded as significant” (1981, 263). Conversely, ignoring others may lead to the idea that I am not known to others and thus whether I exist. Exist for them at all. Additionally, John Steward et al. claim that disconfirmation and stereotypes are defensive strategies to adopt toward others as if to avoid acknowledging and confirming them and our relationship with them (2006). I reiterate that our criteria and definitions are liable to breaking down and may lead us to doubt whether we are known to another through our expressions or whether we can read others through their expressions.

Stanley Cavell argues that the vulnerability and doubt Cissna and Sieburg discuss become methodological doubt, and from a melodramatic stance, may lead to wondering if others can know us or if anyone can know anything at all. “It is a melodramatic response to a melodramatic situation” for Cavell, that is, a moment of fear, and he states “we begin to feel, or ought to, terrified that maybe language (and understanding, and knowledge) rest upon very shaky foundations—a thin net over an abyss (1979, 179). Bateson similarly argues that the situation of human knowing leads to terror: “I suggest that it is the attempt to deal with life in logical terms and the compulsive nature of that attempt which produces in us the propensity for terror when it is even hinted that such a logical approach might breakdown” (1979, 117). As a melodramatic response born in fear and paranoia toward the human finitude of knowledge, Cavell assumes that skepticism, modern philosophy, and the birth of reason emerge from taking a melodramatic stance toward the finitude of human language and radicalizes the doubt into world-consuming fear that we may not know for certain the existence of other minds or material things.

Cavell argues that our condition of language can then lead both to and from an extreme performance anxiety: we are not only unknown but also unable to make ourselves known in our performances and expressions. Cavell argues, “The fantasy of a private language turns out, so far to be a fantasy or fear either of inexpressiveness, one in which I am not merely unknown, but in which I am powerless to make myself known; or one in which what I express is beyond my control” (1979, 351). In such fear, I am hidden from the words I use, I am not found in the words, or I do not know who I am in the words. This is a fear of language in which everything is too public or everything too private, a fear that language reveals us too much, or a fear that I cannot express myself in the words we share. The performance anxiety or the desire not to risk commenting on the relationship emerges in the double bind as the act of avoiding one other and results in the loss of the ability to use personal pronouns.

Cavell ends by arguing that skepticism and philosophy shrink from the success of knowledge and from the realization that as our claims of knowledge are not immune from doubt. Philosophy produces a prohibition that makes knowledge a riddle. The moment at the heart of the double bind, in which I may be prompted to question who and what I am and whether I exist for you, is not produced by a *lack* of knowledge, but by its *success*. The fall from grace is then a way of explaining the temptation of hoping to put knowledge on a surer footing, yet not on a human foot(ing). The fall from grace is the realization that I do not know how the world is with you, how you feel about me—even with you expressing it. I can feel disappointed in your expression, but surely this should not mean that I cannot try to share a world with you or that something is beyond my



capacity to understand and yours to express. Are we forever unable to know how the world is with one another?

To continue the cover story of human finitude of knowledge, philosophy creates theories of a private language to turn language from a wedge to a hedge. Cavell uses Wittgenstein's private language argument to question, in the mode of philosophical therapy, the desire to posit a theory of a private language argument, which reads, in philosophy, as secret and fundamentally unknowable. Wittgenstein's use of the private language argument, according to Cavell, is not to deny (whatever it might mean to deny) that we may have secrets or private things. If you were to deny that we may have secrets or private things, then I might be prone to kicking this table to prove that you cannot know the pain in my toe. Actually, there are private things, like my bank account password, that I wish to keep you from ever knowing. But *private* means I am the one keeping the password from you and this (negative) act constitutes my stance towards you. Yet, in a philosophical context of certainty, the assumption is that I cannot know what is secret or hidden. Cavell explains how philosophy hopes, by developing a skeptical dilemma that one cannot know, as human knower, what is private or secret. According to Cavell, the impulse of the private language is to create a riddle of my knowledge of another by turning the wedge between expression and reference; my knowledge of another reaches only as far as the hedge of his or her outward expression, keeping us apart from each other. As a result, the predictable skeptical claim that "I can never know their pain, their experiences, and their world" emerges. The appropriateness of the phrases "I can never know their pain" or "you can never know my pain" depends on the context in which it is uttered and the spirit in which it is meant. Cavell argues that we

hope to leave behind the human voice by substituting a fantasy of a private and secret language and a theory of knowledge that excludes our human participation in that knowledge. For us “to know” seems to mean “to know without our participation and responsibility for that knowledge.”

For Cavell, philosophy turns away from this fact of human knowledge and reads privacy as a guarantee of our difference, making us separate in our private depths of isolation and fundamentally unknowable to each other. The insistence of a private language, Cavell contends, is what prompts us making role of ourselves to hide from expressing and exposing ourselves. If I tell you, for example, how your words hurt me the other night and how I need your reassurance in our relationship, and you do not acknowledge those words as expressive, then you are particularly failing to acknowledge me. The risk that comes with my disclosure is that I am not so sure of myself or that sure of how others see me. This might be reason enough to avoid disclosure, but if I imagine that you cannot know, as a human knower, then I am producing a cover story to avoid this fact. I am inclined to argue that in the double bind, the confusion of real and fake emotions leads to a context of avoiding and theatrizing each other; we dare not say how the world is with us and avoid commenting on the relationship. To acknowledge is to expose ourselves to our ideas and concepts of each other and ourselves. Between acknowledgement and avoidance lies the human voice, which to be heard, must be expressed and read. And if the human voice is heard as blocked and guarded, then it is an interpersonal stance we take toward each other.

Our not knowing with certainty does not have to result in world-consuming doubt in which language and knowledge are always already failed endeavors. It is in living with this doubt as the condition of human knowing that Bateson stresses performance as a striving towards grace. Cavell understood it as acknowledgement over knowledge. I will return to this theme in Chapter Five when I discuss Bateson's practice of performance as grace.

## Chapter Five: The Esalen Tapes and Striving for Grace

In this chapter, I turn toward an interpretation of Bateson's public lectures. I imagine I am in the position of the student, whom Bateson jokes about in his introduction to *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* when he relates:

At the end of the session, one resident came up. He glanced over his shoulder to be sure that the others were all leaving, and then said rather hesitantly, "I want to ask a question." "Yes" [replied Bateson]. "It's—do you want us to learn what you are telling us?" "I hesitated a moment, but he rushed on with "or is it all a sort of example, an illustration of something else?" Yes, indeed. (1972, xxv).

A paragraph later Bateson recounts a rumor: "There's something behind what Bateson says, but he never says what it is" (1972, xxv). Bateson's audiences are generally led to wonder what it is that his teaching is a teaching of in the first place. My position is a little more confusing because I do not have Bateson in front of me so I can ask what he means and what he is attempting to do in his performances. I imagine it could also be less confusing because I do not have his body there in front of me saying something in his deportment different than what I take the words to mean by themselves. And should I ever assume words or bodies can be separate?

In Chapter Four, I argue the fact that language exists on different levels of logical types represents the fall from grace or conditions our human condition as the fall. I argue that the hope for meaning, language, and knowledge to rest in certainty or outside of our participation can lead to a melodramatic realization where skeptical doubt undermines all claims of knowledge. The doubt leads to a fear that we are not in the world, that we

cannot be known in the language we share, and that we are powerless to make ourselves known. In this final chapter, I now argue that Bateson believes the same predicament of human language that produces the tragic outcomes of the double bind also situates performance, art, and communication as a striving for grace. Bateson states in *Style, Grace, and Information in Primitive Art*, “that art is part of man’s quest for grace; sometimes his ecstasy in partial success, sometimes his rage and agony of failure” (1972, 129) I stress that Bateson, as Lipset argues, is a sixth-generation atheist and that his appeal to grace points neither to God’s efficacious Grace nor to Actual Grace. Rather, Bateson’s appeal to grace is a striving for communion and participation within an ecology of ideas. Outlining his approach to communication as grace in this chapter, I will discuss Bateson’s performance at Esalen alongside his contributions to performance and art from the Western Round Table and Creative Art Conference lecture. In discussing Bateson’s theory and practice of performance, I will also contextualize Bateson’s contribution within contemporary oral interpretation and performance studies.

### ***The Search for Stability and the Search for a Text***

After placing Bateson’s theory of communication as a fall from grace and then positioning it as a search for grace, I assume I cannot avoid the religious connotations. I imagine, quite appropriately for a religious interpretation, it is fair to start with my searching for something to know. Which is to say, I assume it is quite fitting for a theory of performance as a fall and a need for grace that I spent so much of my time in graduate school searching for a text. A bounded something to study, to know well, and ultimately to write about.

I started the journey to a dissertation with a plan to study the performances of docents at a local science center. I figured it would provide a good text or field site for the theoretical marriage between cybernetics and performance. I assumed, and still do, that cybernetics suggests a way of performing science entailing different representational practices. Shortly after the study's approval, I realized the science center was in the process of reducing its number of docents and performers. As a result, my trips to the museum left me without a single encounter with a performer. I imagine the loss could have been more profound if had I not at the same time discovered an equal dislike for ethnography. Nonetheless, my failure at ethnography left me without a text for my ideas, which were sprawling out of control.

Fearing the loss of a ground, I soon embarked on a project of archival research, searching for traces of Gregory Bateson's public performances. In the process, I called on Nora Bateson, Gregory Bateson's daughter, to ask for a set of tapes from Bateson's public lectures. She in turn introduced me to Mark Watts, the son of Allan Watts, who mailed me a compact disc of Gregory Bateson's Esalen recordings. My new text allowed me to do my research within the changing context of my life, which at that point placed any free time to do research well after Amelia went to sleep.

I received the recordings in a padded brown mailer envelope with no liner notes, no publication history, and no recording dates. As a result, the origins of these tapes and texts are difficult to clarify. They are titled *The Informal Lectures* on the compact disc Mark Watts sent. An unconfirmed Internet rumor suggests these informal lectures were once published as the *Turtle Tapes*, with an ensuing copyright dispute removing them

from circulation. Using other sources, I have tried to estimate the dates of Bateson's performance—with no luck.

Severed from an original context, the tapes are actually compressed digital files in the lossy data compression of the mp3 format. The recordings are lossy because as the name implies something is lost in the process of conversion from the original recording to the digital recording. The mp3 compression removes redundancy and produces a copy that is unlike the original audio recording. The lossy format of the audio recording invites questions concerning, first, what is lost in the translation between the performance and the text and, second, what is lost in retranslating the text to another text; and, now third, retranslated into my own text. The answers to these questions shape contemporary discussion of performativity and performance studies. Although I may fall short in answering these questions, I will suggest how Bateson intervenes into these questions of performance, text, and interpretation and how his public performances operate as extensions of the debate.

As the name suggests, Bateson's performances are lectures, but more particularly they are pedagogical performances that are ordinary and casual. The form of Bateson's lectures as the celebration of ordinary context of learning also fits the content of those lectures that increasingly celebrated embodied performances and art as a way to criticize poor epistemology. To understand the importance of these lectures as pedagogical, it is important to understand the overall pedagogical context of Bateson's work. The first sections of *Steps to An Ecology of Mind* are metalogues, pedagogical moments of teaching and exploring with his daughter. Bateson's *Mind and Nature* is largely a

textbook for thinking, which starts with a set of axioms each student should know and comes complete with a glossary of italicized terms. Bateson carried his interest in education and pedagogy into the administration of Governor Gerald “Jerry” Brown, where he was appointed to the Board of Regents for the California Board of Education. As a member of the Board of Regents, Bateson was an outspoken critic of education and pedagogy. As a critic and teacher (and a critic of teaching), Bateson argues repeatedly that thinking and learning exist as two parts of an overlapping process. In Chapter Two, I discussed this overlapping process as levels of learning and deuterio-learning. In *Steps Towards An Ecology Of Mind*, the idea comes across as the two pincer movements in thinking. Across these different phrasings, Bateson argues that learning involves both the exploration of new data, experiences, and situations as well as the investigation of the experiences, habits, and patterns of thinking. In each phrasing, learning and thinking exist as levels of learning, side by side, or as pincer movements in which one pincer captures raw materials or data while the other pincer constrains the first pincer’s grasp by habits, prior experiences, and former learning. The ideas expressed here are similar to the stochastic process I discuss in Chapter Two, where imagination and newness are constrained by rigor and sense making.

Bateson’s criticism of teaching argues that education, scientific research, and humanistic inquiry proceeds with limited purpose and forgets the twin movements or processes of learning. Bateson dramatizes this with an example I think appropriate for the context of this study:

Moliere, long ago, depicted an oral doctoral examination in which the learned doctors ask the candidate to state the “cause and reason” why



opium puts people to sleep. The candidate triumphantly answers in dog Latin, “because there is in it a dormative principle” (1972, xx).

Bateson argues that the candidate’s answer and the research hypothesis testing and refining this “dormative principle” puts to sleep the critical faculty because it relies on simple cause and effect; but it does not attempt further to generalize across patterns or places these causes and effects within cybernetic circuits. Including the causes and effects within cybernetic circuits requires locating the scientist’s acts of description and evaluation and their hope for knowledge as existing outside of their participation. In Bateson’s short tape “Men are Grass,” recorded a few months before his death, Bateson suggests a logic of ecosystems that makes patterns across classes and types (1991). The argument is that a logic of subject and predicates, a logic preferred and taught by schools, assumes subjects and predicates exist before logic. As an alternative Bateson suggests a logic of connections thinking across subjects and predicates. Bateson assumes the path of ecological becoming takes pattern and process not subject and object as a starting point. I will return to this logic to suggest that it is a logic Bateson found in performance and in sacrament.

For lectures marked by informality and ordinary contexts, Esalen is a very fitting location for Bateson’s pedagogical performance. The Esalen Institute is considered a rather exotic location at which New Age philosophy, human potential, yoga, psychedelics, and naked bodies came together at the naturally formed hot springs on the coastal bluffs of Big Sur, California. Esalen is a classroom and intellectual institution where poets, artists, and philosophers have come for residencies and lectures for the last forty years. Founders Michael Murphy and Richard Price “envisioned Esalen as a kind

of intellectual ashram” (2005, 6). Esalen is a space for intellectual pilgrimage where “western and eastern thinkers and practitioners could meet in order to fuse the best of both cultural visions and create a new way of being (or indeed becoming) human” (2005, 6). Esalen focused on non-traditional and non-dogmatic approaches to religious life and learning. Kripal and Shuck argue that three rules shape this intellectual environment: 1) “that no single individual, however, charismatic, would be allowed to dominate the culture”; 2) “religious dogma would be treated as metaphorical” (2005, 6). The third rule, in the form of a mantra, largely contradicted the second rule and it was 3) “fuck dogma” (2005, 6).

As a counter culture location, Esalen reimagines the connection between body and mind by stressing embodied forms of knowledge. Kippal and Shuck contend that at Esalen, an intellectual historian may find “a deep appreciation for the human body as the privileged site of the sacred. ... At the same time, we discover the acceptance of intellectual and corporeal practices side-by-side” (2005, 9). Some of these embodied practices at Esalen included yoga, Zen meditation, sensory awareness, and tantric massage. As a founding location to reinvestigate the body’s role in knowing, Don Johnson argues Esalen provides an intellectual home to investigating and brings back forms of bodily knowledge lost in a rise of positivism and military and technological research (2005). Johnson states:

From the mid-1800s until the beginning of World War II, there was a widespread and vibrant counterculture of the experimentation body throughout Europe and the United States. ... These people shared a new vision of embodiment that was at odds with the models found in classical ballet, physical education, religion, and bio medicine. Instead of training dancers and athletes to shape their bodies to fit a classical form that was

considered normative for all, they encouraged individual expressiveness and a return to a more “natural body” (2005, 252).

Claiming that knowledge is bodily knowledge and that the performing body is a privileged site of knowledge production comes as second nature to this performance studies scholar emerging from speech communication. Oral interpretation and oral English is the lineage of performance studies that I claim as my own. The assumption, I feel, of oral interpretation is that if literature is a representation of the emotional life of a culture, then the public reader in performance brings that piece of literature to life. This is a life felt in dramatic and emotional contexts, a life performed. I feel it fair to say that oral interpretation assumes a student of performance learns the emotional texture of a piece of literature through good reading. In the process of reading and performing, the student is introduced to the basic questions of critical theory by making his or her commitments public and by embodying the dramatic tensions of the performed text. The performer is also a teacher and a vehicle to give a text an interpretation. The performance gives the text a voice and a body. To know a text is to embody it.

Oral interpretation begins with the reading of a text that is always present; in traditional interpretations the text is kept inside a black binder to remind the audience that it is the text that is being interpreted. Elizabeth Bell argues that the historical displacement Don Johnson refers to results in de-emphasizing the body in the context of American oral interpretation or speech communication (1993). The de-emphasis of the body elevated the text and the proper mastery of the text, thus resulting in privileging the male textual critic over and above the female teacher of speech (1993). As a result, some of the positive women’s work in private academies of elocution, which taught a more

expansive notion of the performing body, is displaced; in turn, the body becomes both 1) subordinate to the text and literature and 2) a site for mastery and control (Bell 1993). Delsarte's method of elocution or gymnastics, according to Johnson, is part of the repressed history of somatics and bodily knowledge that Esalen was hoping to revive.

As a result of the displacement and ensuing recuperation of the body, the literary center of oral interpretation shifted to a paradigm of performance studies charted by Pelias and Van Oosting (1997). The recuperation, following the work of Richard Schechner, also shifted traditional theater's textual center (the script central to performance) toward an expanding web of performance genres (2003). And I neither wish to elaborate on whether the shift is advantageous to performance nor to document the reach of McKenzie's or Pelias and Van Ostings's performance paradigm.

This historical displacement of the body is also central to the very origin myths of the discipline of speech communication. The birth of our discipline and the history of communication studies are often mythologized as emerging from the constricting contexts of the speech and composition classroom and only at the turn of the twenty-first century becoming a theoretical practice and science. Theorizing communication studies then places its practitioners, mostly male theorists, as leaving the speech classroom and female teachers (Bell 1993). In her history of performance, Shannon Jackson argues that performance and rhetoric reemerged in the academy as theory, and this metamorphosis only furthered the displacement of the body (2004). The rise of theory then places the speech practitioners as leaving the speech classroom, and this bespeaks a curricular problem: we do not know whether communication is a practical art that teaches practical

skills of communication or a theoretical discipline exploring ideas and models of communication.

Situating a displacement of the body from the classroom is important for my purposes because I believe that it may be assumed, quite erroneously, that Bateson encouraged this displacement and the movement towards theory. Quite to the contrary, Bateson developed a dislike for and a lack of trust in applied work throughout his life. Lipset (1982) and Price (1998) argue that after working in the OSS, Bateson becomes hostile to applied research. The spirit of Bateson's work, from my reading, is to resituate the classroom as the embodied site for learning and thinking. I also situate the displacement of body as a practice in order to explain my anxiety in studying a scholar of communication who also practiced what he theorized.

To further my contextual understanding of Bateson's performance at Esalen, I suggest that the subordination of bodily knowledge to textual knowledge invites the practice of recuperating the knowledge lost in the rise of text. Such subordination also invites criticism and explorations of the assumptions of bodily knowledge. Both questions are explored in performance studies and are addressed by Bateson.

In a vein similar to Bell's criticism of the privileging of the textual critic over the female teacher of speech, Dwight Conquergood in his essay "Beyond the Text: Towards a Performative Cultural Politics" argues that performance is a site of politically repressed knowledge that is silenced in a textual bias (1998, 26). Conquergood argues, "We need to recuperate from performance some oppositional force, some resistance to textual fundamentalism of the academy" (1998, 26). Conquergood is critical of how knowledge

as text silences alternative forms of knowledge production, particularly knowledge produced by subjects excluded from the production of text. Conquergood's criticism of textual bias argues that the text as a stable object positions the knower in the detached position of the observer. Conquergood's argument mirrors Case's position that enlightenment science, borrowing a theatrical metaphor and theatrical theories of representation from New Theater practices, creates a stable and all-encompassing subject position by which to view a stable and iterative world (2006). In a text-based form of knowledge production, knowledge becomes a bounded act; both Case and Conquergood argue that this displacement encourages colonial practices of knowledge production, which Conquergood characterizes as "the white man's drive to objectivize, control and grasp as a way of knowing" (1998, 30).

As an alternative form of knowledge production, Conquergood introduces kinesis, where meaning in performance rests "in terms of active verbs, instead of nouns, unfinalizable processes instead of enduring propositions" (1998, 31). Conquergood continues "new analytics emphasize a process over product" (1998, 31). He then proceeds to argue that the history of performance reads from mimesis (imitation), poesis (construction), to kinesis (dynamism)(1998). Performance as kinesis is an active intervention into the creating and recreating of social life. Case likewise provides an alternative conception of performance as improvisation.

The problem of the text in performance can be considered a situation in which knowledge is produced in a textually centered world where the texts are privileged objects of knowledge. In the process of privileging textual knowledge, production

becomes a private activity done in the privacy of one's study. This knowledge is then private property that can be packaged and sold. The privileging of the text leads to theories of performance with the text at the center; the performance of Shakespeare's plays and the performance of written literature took, pun intended, center stage.

Knowledge is then something produced ultimately in private without a congregation or community. This, for Case and Conquergood, is contrasted with performance that is immediate, participatory, and communal.

Case continues to argue that even theories of performance aiming to rethink the role of performance in knowledge production still privilege a particular form of scholarly performance (1997). Case takes aim at theories of performativity, which she feels unduly scapegoat lesbian performances as locations of naïve presence and essential identity positions. Case argues performativity is a recursive activity, "a self-iterative function that precedes" (1997, 16). As a recursive activity, performativity is a strange loop operation, in which the act of bending or twisting constitutes both domains of the performance/performer and that which precedes and constrains the performance as performativity/citatoriality. Case contends, however, that theories of performativity largely privilege the writer as the performer and that this privileging only furthers the textual bias. Case suggests that behind theories of performance and performativity is an academic text/print industry that reduces performativity to its mode of production, writing. Furthering Case's argument, and important to my upcoming discussion of Gregory Bateson, the way academics read papers reproduces the very binary the academic theories aims to trouble. Case states: "Reading the paper foregrounds the conditions of having written the paper elsewhere, and at an earlier time. As an import

rather than an improvisation, the paper foregrounds the stability of print and thus of knowing” (1997, 24).

This means that reading a paper secures the representational framework of a static iterative world of the eye/I of the spectator. Referring to the work of Maya Deren (Bateson’s one time lover), Case argues that improvisational performances are alternative conceptions of performance in which the static is recast as a dynamic becoming (1997).

In comparing traditional reading with improvisation Case states,

Improvisation is perceived as a kind of “fallen” unprepared performance that borders on “opinion” rather than “research.” The performance of reading, in this way, often undercuts the aim of a paper to encourage the sense of postmodern slippage, or deconstructive strategies (1997, 24).

Case is concerned with interpretations of performativity that side step embodied theater practices, which are for Case actual attempts to embody and participate in a world of change and becoming. Likewise, Conquergood asks: “What are the costs of dematerializing text as textuality, and disembodying performance as performativity, and then making those abstractions interchangeable concepts? What gets lost in the exchange, in the ‘reworking of performativity as citationality’” (1998, 25). And Conquergood’s answer is the oppositional force of performance. Jill Dolan makes a similar characterization, referring to her privileging of embodied performance over “performativity’s more social excursions” (2001, 142).

Della Pollock criticizes Case’s easy reduction of performativity to print and celebration of performance; yet she continues to question the assumption of self-evident forms of knowledge production (2005). She values embodied performances as sources



and sites of knowledge production. Pollock's argument rests on the double play of text and performance and the hope for stability and control on both parts. In her response to Conquergood, Pollock states:

It [performance] deflects domination by the textual critic ... by giving the critic what s/he wants: a piece, a marker, a metonymy that, as text, as Ricoeur's "sedimentation" of cultural practice in time, in fact leads away from the realm of subaltern practice, away from what James Scott calls the "hidden transcript." This is the ultimate practical joke (1998, 37).

Pollock characterizes Conquergood's "oppositional force of performance" as a slight of hand that produces a text as a bounded object for the grasp of the knower. The colonial knower is ultimately tricked into producing a thing, and the knower is prevented from seeing the hidden transcript. Pollock adds that the trick is "on the desiring subject: the textual critic" (1998, 38). Pollock argues that the text qua text is a production of the intersection of the material history of its production and circulation and that its assumed stability is an after-effect production of the knowing subject who produces and hopes to maintain it as an object. Pollock continues, "the text in the trick, the trick-text, is a boundary phenomenon" (1998, 38). As a boundary phenomenon, the text is double play producing and questioning its own genesis as an object.

For Pollock, however, the text as trickster object, maintains problematic subject-object distinctions because it is often assumed, as it is assumed by Conquergood, that as Pollock argues, "texts are put in place by users," and the text as a material source of conflict, exchange, and uses are "mobilized by pre-discursive 'users' or subjects (1998, 39). Relying on Judith Butler, Pollock then argues that performance and subjects are constituted in language and come to matter through a materializing performativity. As I

have already argued, this is a metaphysics of substance in which subject and object exist prior to discourse. Following performativity, Pollock argues that performance is a boundary act materialized through performativity as a ritualized citation; therefore, an easy privileging of performance contra textuality is difficult to maintain without privileging performance and conversely the subject/object of performance as prior to signification. Pollock then turns Conquergood's joke about the textual critic back on himself. The joke is now, both on the textual critic's hope for a bounded object to which to lay claim and on the performance scholar's hope to read performance against test-based knowledge by casting performance as outside of performativity. There is no outside performer doing the deed and no singular, easy text.

With text and performance fully within a citational history, Della Pollock suggests rethinking scholarly performance. Pollock's "Performative Writing" essay posits the text, some text as, inviting in and within this space of identity and meaning making pushing at, often in nervous citation and metonymic double play, its own knowledge production (2005). Writing is not, for Pollock at least, contra performance. Writing is also neither in competition with performance nor unable to represent it. Pollock also, following Diamond, argues performance becomes an action that materializes performativity. Pollock recuperates performance and places performance as that which materializes performativity. Stated more succinctly, knowledge production, whether in the form of performative writing or academic performance, is always within discourse; therefore, performing writing and disidentifying performance challenge from within the hope for stability and closure.

Pollock and Diamond's recuperation of performance from act to action is another joke. It is a joke on the recursion of performativity—or again as Case aptly writes, a self-iterative function that precedes” (1997, 16) or as Judith Butler puts it, “a figure of turning, a turning back upon oneself or even a turning on oneself” (1997, 3). The difference is between a performance as recursive procedure, an activity that produces itself through itself, and the operation of that recursive procedure, in which the activity being done is being done in performance. Taken as a description of recursion, performance is an act, yet within recursive operations, it is an action. Of course, this body here typing is performed within a recursive operation, and it is twisting, contorting, and laughing all from within.

With two conjuring tricks revealing how text and performance operate inside textuality and performativity, the stability of our knowing and doing is called radically into question. With the two tricks comes a third trick, or a trick that may end by keeping the first two circulating. Cavell's contention is that the conjuring trick places our failure in knowing another as an intellectual lack and our knowing the other an impossible riddle—a riddle because it conceptualizes knowing as certainty independent of the knower and immune from doubt.

Reviewing and extending my argument of communication as the fall, I argue in Chapter Four that skepticism and the moment at the heart of the double bind leads *to* and *from* a melodramatic realization of language that knowledge, because it rests on human language, is apt to disappoint us and disappoint us in what it can promise. The fall from grace is a temptation hoping, like Pollock and Conquergood's conjuring tricks, to

theorize knowledge as something not human and immune from doubt. The fall from grace tempts us to hope that, like Pollock and Conquergood's conjuring tricks, that knowledge may be theorized as separate from human participation.

### ***Bateson's Theory of Performance as Grace***

Within the three conjuring tricks, Bateson dramatizes the desire of his audience to know beyond the world, beyond words, and beyond encompassing cybernetic circuits. As a response to and from the epistemology these conjuring tricks engender, Bateson proposes studying ecologies of ideas, that is, studying ideas in circulation and interaction with the bodies and nature that the ideas condition and occasion. All steps within an ecology of mind are recursive steps, in which "the (steps) towards" are always conditioned and preceded by the very ecology they are within. This "towards" is forever within its own habits of mind, and although Bateson is prompting us towards a horizon or a larger *gestalt*, he neither suggests nor assumes that we would ever be in a position to know or judge truth from this mythical, all-encompassing pattern, frame, or ecology. Concerning an outer limit, Bateson states, "I am inside it and therefore cannot know its outer limits" (1979, 194). Again, to guard against an interpretation that assumes an all-encompassing frame, Bateson's phrase "Towards an ecology of mind" is written with the indefinite article implying a multiplicity of ecologies of mind. Within these ecologies of ideas Bateson both purposes a reworking of aesthetic theory and practices the performances as a form of lecturing.

Within an ecology of ideas, Bateson suggests a reworking of aesthetic theory, criticizing the hope to get beyond text or performance to meaning or the hope for a

singular meaning to performance and text. The craving and hope for meaning and certainty, for Bateson, emerges from assumptions of the separation of form from nature or body from mind. Bateson's reworking of aesthetic theory, like contemporary theories of performance, takes seriously ideas of recursion and performativity.

In his famous essay "Form and Difference," Bateson argues that art and performance are combinations of saying and doing:

Isadora Duncan, when she said, "If I could say it, I would not have to dance it," was talking nonsense, because her dance was about combinations of saying and moving. Indeed, if what I have been saying is at all correct, the whole base of aesthetics will need to be re-examined. (1972, 470).

The base for the re-examination of aesthetics is Bateson's argument that all communication is fully composed of habits and that what art does is expose our habits of knowing the world, and you and I in it. Dance is a way of communicating, but it is not divorced from saying. For Bateson, the assumption of doing and saying as separate devalues the very meaning of the dance, poetry, writing, thinking, and even walking in nature, because it assumes the body and the mind are two different things. Bateson also refers to the phrase "The tear is an intellectual thing" and "The heart has reason that reason cannot know" to express the idea that the body, heart, or emotions know something that the rational mind cannot know. My audience will not have to attend many talk-backs after performances, particularly ones informed with romantic sensibilities, to get a sense of a body knowing something that is inexpressible in talk. Bateson's reworking of aesthetic theory assumes the body in the forms of movement and non-verbal expression does indeed contain bodily knowledge and that this knowledge is not readily

available to the conscious mind; yet Bateson does not think this bodily knowledge is separate from mental operations but is fully composed of habits. To dance, in Isadora Duncan's words, is to learn something about habits of thinking and perceiving, but the one is not divorced from the other.

To state this concept differently, Bateson does not assume a that a conscious mind speaking in words (as it is for Duncan) and thinking in logical patterns is divorced from an unconscious mind speaking or expressing itself in bodily forms such as dance. It is true that Bateson constructs a hierarchy of mind with a conscious mind and an unconscious mind operating on different levels. The unconscious mind is, for Bateson, a world of primary process in which connections and patterns are suggested or felt. These patterns, or metaphors, are suggestions of connections, but they do not make any explicit connections between things or relata. Explicit connections are the world of conscious thought, clear connections, and patterns between things. It is also true that, for Bateson, the conscious mind only knows a part of the process of perceiving because in making images, an organism necessarily sinks a large part of perceiving into habit. This is to say the conscious mind perceives things and relationships between things as a necessary component of perceiving. To illustrate this, Bateson often uses the example of a television screen that projects an image but does not project the process of generating the image. Bateson's experience with Albert Ames, Jr.'s optical illusions exploiting our habits of vision demonstrates both the habits and the difficulty in changing our habits even when made aware of them. Our habits of perceiving sink into an unconscious level of mind because of an economy of learning and thinking in which it is simply impossible to keep all of the stuff of perception available for consciousness. Bateson also argues that

the conscious mind limits connections in a conservative function, and the unconscious mind is largely random and suggests patterns but does not make them explicit.

Bateson's assumption of the unconscious mind as unacknowledged habits implies that he does not believe it is fundamentally a site of repression. Bateson does not think it is important, or possible, to bring the unconscious to light for the conscious mind.

Hence, Bateson has no hope for a decoder ring that can translate primary processes of the unconscious mind into a conscious language of rational thought.

For Bateson it is exactly the hope for a decoder ring, that is, uncovering meaning behind things that he believes needs to be reworked. Bateson argues our hope to interpret art in particular is part of an assumption that art can exist outside ideas of it. Bateson also argues that the extreme realism of *trompe l'oeil* is a uniquely a western preoccupation with certainty and a symptom of a philosophical position in which mind and nature can be separated in the first place:

We have the idea that form and substance are separable which no other culture is the world probably have. Now, we are the only culture in the world that I know of that can conceivably get into religious, doctrinal discussions of the transubstantiation sort. I mean, that is, the fact that we can get into arguments on the subject of transubstantiation, of the relationship between the symbol and the object symbolized, an object strongly to the notion that the symbol is a symbol ... but that uniqueness and our preoccupation with representation of things would seem perhaps part of the same syndrome (Howe 1949, 26).

The craving for the thing in itself driven by the assumption of form and substance as separate then produces a preoccupation with true representation. Bateson, however, is critical of the assumption of things outside of representations. Bateson continues, "The painting is not about the tree or the clouds, or the satin dress. The depiction of these is

only the vehicle for something else.” This statement begs the question of what the something is; yet the craving, for Bateson, or the question begging is a symptom of a hope to leave the condition in which you actively create images, and what you see and the meaning you find in the creating images and meaning includes you in it. The “something else” is our patterns of perception and thinking.

In this vein of criticizing simple meanings behind text and works of art, Bateson assumes that works of art have many meanings. The problem or vulgarity, as Bateson terms it, is attempting to reduce these patterns to a simple interpretation. In the “Creative Act” lecture in reference to the meaning of art Bateson comments that “a mass of messages that are meaningful as long as we do not try to translate them into an inappropriate language. Vulgarity is to give an inappropriate answer to the question ‘What is this painting, or this poem, about?’” (American Federation of Art 1957).

Bateson also says that “a proverb has about a half dozen meanings telescoped into it,” and this might be why they seem to have different meanings at different moments in your life (Informal Lectures). The multiplicity of meanings might also be the continued value of proverbs and the continual need to interpret them. Furthermore, in the “Creative Act” lecture and the Esalen lecture “Religious Poetry,” Bateson suggests a positive analogy between the schizophrenic and the artist largely because they do not wish to be interpreted as a single thing (Informal Lectures). Bateson’s work in aesthetics then points at how a poem or work of art is deeply composed by habits, either in the rigidity of poetic form or in terms of composition. Bateson argues poetry, because it is deeply patterned and composed, is a way to talk about how being human means to be connected to patterns



and rhythms. Bateson states, “I have given more of my attention in this world to the regularities of anatomy than I have to the regularities of poetry, but I don’t think the one is a different sort of problem than the other” (Informal Lectures). This is to say, for Bateson, that human life is constituted in patterns and deeply composed of them. Yet patterns are first processes only secondarily assumed to be types or forms. As Bateson proposes: “the right way to begin to think about the pattern which connects is to think of it as *primarily (whatever that means)* a dance of interacting parts and only secondarily pegged down by various sorts of physical limits and by those limits which organisms characteristically impose” (1979, 12).

As processes of participation, performances, art, and rituals for Bateson are actual participations with the “patterns which connect” and should not be reduced to mere metaphors, similes, or things. To reduce performances to metaphors and similes and to give performances a concrete meaning stops the very circulation of the ecological movement of ideas, bodies, mind, and nature. This is to trump form over process. If form is trumped over process and taken as the *thing in itself* (which I argued is a misplaced concreteness), then the patterns (first a process) that connect us to and with the evolutionary follows of becoming are cut. Dance and art become separate things divorced from our process of perception, creating boundaries, and making sense of the world. With such an assumption, why should we dance? Why read a poem?

Bateson’s attitude about form trumping process turns on his concern that privileging one deemphasizes or cuts our relationship with the world and with others. If performances become entertainment and things but no longer ways of participating in

patterns of change, then we are on the path to a wasteland in which nothing matters. Bateson's illustration of Wilson's vinegar is an example of devaluing our cultural participation in patterns by using them to sell vinegar. In the story, an advertisement man jokes that the way to sell vinegar is to find a sacred image and to develop the ad campaign around it. He asks, "Where in the Bible is vinegar mentioned?" After thinking a while, he proclaims he has the advertisement campaign and describes the image of Jesus on the cross saying: "Take it away! It's not Wilson's." For Bateson, the Wilson's vinegar ad campaign is a way to devalue our rituals of participation and turn a sacrament into a clever way to sell vinegar. In the lecture "It Used to Matter" Bateson argues that art, performances, and rituals used to matter but don't seem to anymore (Informal Lectures).

Bateson is critical of the hope and desire (for him, a pathological desire) for certainty and meaning to exist as clear things for the rational mind. This pathology cuts the world into parts and things divorced from our participation in them. As a result, dance or art risk becoming mere entertainment or things separate from our ways of knowing. As I have argued before, in perceiving objects and things, like the man in axe-tree-man system, organisms subtract something from cybernetic flows of difference on which to focus as an object. This is, according to Bateson, a necessary act of perception, but organisms are confused if they think this is the thing in itself. It is the taking of a thing—as a thing in itself—which Bateson argues is a confusion of logical types.

So what happens in the process of taking a thing and subtracting it from a process of perceiving and valuing it, is that in the process of codification/evaluation, we cut it

from the world and patterns that connect. The patterns are the ongoing acts of perception, valuing, and responding to the world in a process of evolution, change and becoming. Stressing our participation in processes and flows of life, Bateson insists on understanding performance as sacrament, and he in turn understands sacraments as performative.

The sacraments are our interactions with patterns, and Bateson argues the desire for things outside of our ways of knowing, or outside the human condition of knowing, severs the pattern and process. For Bateson, this results in asking if there is a difference between something that *is like* a sacrament and something that *is* a sacrament. Bateson suggests the connection in his discussion of the ballet *Swan Lake* in his metalogue “Is It a Swan?”:

Daughter: Is the swan ballet a sacrament?  
Father: Yes—I think so.”

The father, Bateson, continues to say:

At least for some people. In Protestant language we might say that the swanlike costume and movement of the dancer are “outward and visible signs of some inward and spiritual grace” of woman. But in Catholic language that would turn the ballet into a mere metaphor and not a sacrament. (1972)

To understand what Bateson is suggesting, it is important to realize that for Bateson the rise of Protestantism is the result of “a passionate desire that everything should make logical sense” (1991, 301). The desire for sense making privileges conscious purpose (or secondary processes and prose thinking) over unconscious mind (or primary process, poetry, and ecological connections). Yet this desire, for Bateson,

cuts the very mystery of the world and cuts our participation in patterns that connect. In a world of poetry, relationships, and ecological connections “It is and it stands for are the same thing; or else they are meaningless to it” (1991, 300). Sacraments are connections to the world, and they are not just representations of it.

Bateson elaborates the distinction and asks about the different roles the sacrament of the Eucharist takes in either the Protestant or Catholic traditions. In a Catholic tradition, the Eucharist is the body and blood of the divine and became so via the ritual act of Transmutation and the effective celebration of the Mass. Partaking of the Eucharist *is* a sacrament and *is* the actual receiving of Sanctifying Grace. Likewise, the confession of sins and the sacrament of penance actually absolve our sins. In a Protestant tradition, only faith is needed to receive Effective Grace, and it is solely the benevolence of the God that any one of us is received into the kingdom of God (we are, as it were, always on the short end of debt); faith is assumed to cover our sins, and God is assumed not to hold them against us in the end.

To contextualize my comments on sacrament to the discussion above, printed text encouraged the Rise to Protestantism by affording people the opportunity to read the Bible and learn the word of God outside the Catholic Church. In the Rise of Protestantism, the Bible is read without tradition, particularly without the tradition of the Catholic Catechism. As the private reading continued in Protestantism, the text soon began speaking its meaning. An evangelical street preacher outside of our university library stopped me the other day and proclaimed, “The Bible says ...” pointing to his worn study Bible. Here the assumption is clear that the text speaks without a body

interpreting it or a body reading it. As time passes, the Rise of Protestantism replaces the sacramental wine with grape juice as the individual alone secures a relationship with God. The visible church with its sacraments, communion of saints, and traditions is replaced with an invisible church of believers professing faith. Moving away from tradition, the Catholic Church started translating the masses into native languages. Two different times at Esalen, Bateson asked why the Church was translating the mass into English just when American youths were learning Sanskrit. In the translation, it seemed to Bateson, the sacrament became a private and individual performance and no longer a collective mysterious activity of connection. Bateson asked what happened to participating in the world and the ritual forms of that participating.

I feel it helps my interpretation of Bateson's thoughts on sacrament and performance to elaborate on Swan Lake. In Swan Lake, the leading lady Odette, a human woman who suffers the bewitchment of being a swan. She can escape her condition only if someone pronounces his love for her, with the words being true of heart, that is, the words must express an actual love (an Austinian performative utterance?). The leading man, Prince Siegfried must find love or be forced into an arranged marriage by noon the next day. Odette and Siegfried meet on the eve of Siegfried's marriage, and the prince learns of Odette's bewitchment. But the opportunity to express his love for her and release her from bewitchment is spoiled by intruders. The next day Siegfried pledges his love to the wrong woman who is disguised as Odette. Siegfried quickly learns of his mistake and runs to find the real Odette. The climax comes when the prince is faced with a choice of either being held to his pledge, given under false pretenses, to marry a woman he does not love or leaving the human world and jumping with Odette into Swan Lake.

Together the pair jump to their deaths, and in doing so, they transcend the human bewitchment of the confusion of logical types. It is interesting enough that the ballet famously figures the struggles with one's words in a form that uses no words. For Bateson the performance is a sacrament, possibly because it highlights our human bewitchment by dramatizing an attempt to search for words and meanings to exist outside of the condition of human knowing. That it is tragic and ends in Odette and Siegfried's deaths may remind us that this is only one possible route to take as a response to our human bewitchment.

Whether in dance or words (performance or text), communication is composed of habits, and exposing our perceptive habits is the reason for dance, for poetry, and for developing scientific manuscripts—even this dissertation. Bateson's suggestion of a reworking also argues that the conscious mind and the unconscious mind work in tandem, one influencing the other. This tandem motion means performance does not become an expressive source for knowledge divorced from mind or ideas. On the contrary, Bateson argues that performance is fully comprised of habits of thought, but the difference is that in performance, the frames around habits of thought are questioned, challenged, and explored. In the essay "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," Bateson argues that play is a form of playing with frames of meaning making and playing with the boundary between and among frames; particularly, play is a boundary between conscious and unconscious mind (1972). I have already argued in Chapter Four that frames classify things and relationships within them so as to constitute their meaning. Play, for Bateson then, is a frame that questions the activity of frame making. Performance as play, however, is not expressive of either level of the mind but a combination of the two in the activity.

The play of frames then invites the participants and performers to investigate how meaning, things, and pattern emerge in and from frames. For Bateson, the body and the words are spoken from a context and a communicative matrix; these perceptive habits condition, constrain, and constitute the subject whose life is lived within it. All language is meta-communicative; this fact, for Bateson, invites a realization that all meaning emerges in the interaction and dynamic exchange between and among language users in the worlds of meaning and ways of life that secure meaning. This not only means there are contexts and frames in which behavior and communication are interpreted but also, and more importantly for Bateson, it means that we do not always know (because human knowledge of the conscious mind does not afford such knowledge) what those contexts and frames are. Not knowing can be dangerous! The instability of gender frames, as Butler points out in reference to transgender performances on a bus, invite danger. Writing in excess and in violation of scholarly representation has consequences. I do not know how I will come off in this performance—my performance on this page.

Bateson's grace, then, is the realization that humans actively create frames, which means we create things and images, even images of the performing body and of what it is assumed to express and the assumptions that what it expresses are beyond ideas. Bateson states, "I create an image—the process is totally unconscious, automatic, and involuntary. The created image is conscious, but the act of creating it is beyond my ken" (The Creative Act Conference, 3). Play (and performance as play) becomes a way of investigating the habits of frame making.

The vital habit of creating images becomes the issue the creative artist addresses. Bateson often uses the words of poet and artist William Blake, “Wise men see outlines, and therefore they draw them” to express what artists do in addressing our habits of thought (Creative Act Lecture, 3). It is the outlines and not the things Bateson is concerned with addressing.

I want to stress again that Bateson does not think dance, as in Isabelle Duncan’s phrase, is divorced from habits. Instead, dance and performance are human activities fully composed of habits. To dance is to expose those habits and to learn something about them. I also want to argue in reference to the theory of play that it also is set within Bateson’s theory of language as the fall; this means humans do not always know the frames that secure meaning making, because communication always operates on levels. As an aesthetic alternative, grace becomes not the search for escape, but a realization that we create images and contexts in communication. As the in-between conscious and unconscious mind, or between being and becoming, art, play, and fantasy are participations in the patterns that connect. Bateson once referred to the aesthetic and sacred as “a flash that appears in consciousness as a disturbance of consciousness” (1991, 300). The aesthetic and sacred are what disturb your way of thinking, perceiving, and making images. For every image formed, there are other ways of forming them and every image is formed by us. What these patterns of perception are becomes the issue that art, communication, and Bateson’s performances address.

Considering language and performance as sacraments, Bateson stresses how language exists on different levels and how one level should not overcome another. The



hope that language is understood as expression divorced from habits of mind and the ability to know, or the ability for me to express how it is with me, will always come across as fallen. I cannot know with certainty even in intimate moments of communication, such as the moments when I-thou meet for Martin Buber, how it actually is with you. It seems to me this is the place of our separation from each other, our state as fallen. The extent that I participate in your life and you in mine is never something I can know immune from doubt. I can even make it difficult for you to know how it is with me and impossible for you to participate in my life (with consequences, of course). I can hope to overcome the public aspect of language with a fantasy of it being private and not shared (this too has its consequences: my knowledge of myself is secured, but my knowledge of you is sealed off). I can in turn make a prohibition on any knowing—either in God’s voice or through philosophy—that makes knowing the other not just limited, because human knowledge has limits, but impossible and forever closed.

Of course, human knowledge is limited by its very nature as human. It is not divine and cannot capture the things outside our names for them, and it cannot know past expression; thus, there can be no direct, unmediated participation or communication with God or another. Bateson states, “We live in a life in which our percepts are perhaps always the perception of parts, and our guesses about wholes are continually being verified or contradicted by the later presentation of other parts. It is perhaps so, that wholes can never be presented; for that would involve direct communication” (1979, 106). Is the temptation and hope to know how I am with you or what a text or performance means a natural result of this limit-in-knowing that a prohibition on knowledge only covers and obscures?

Performance as aesthetic then stresses another element of communication in which grace may be more important than certainty and in which the skeptical dilemma is lived as an element of performance. Communication as knowledge, that is, knowledge of the world as it really is or how you really feel about me, is always fallen. For Bateson, it is always misplaced concreteness and a confusion of logical types to assume direct communication. But communion and communication is possible, even if always on the shaky human grounds of human community, human language, and human knowledge. Stressing one level of communication, perhaps rational certainty, over another would deny communication as grace. If communication were only certainty, then it might frame breaking bread together or reading Anne Frank's diary as *Impossibilities* or *failures* to know another. It would be tragic and melodramatic. This turns the limits of knowledge into a cover and hedge. And for instance, this might play out as a critic's saying, of a performance of mine, that "I can never know what it is like to be gay, poor, or expatriate" after reading an interpretation of James Baldwin's "Giovanni's Room." I cannot know because I am neither gay, poor, nor as yet living in France as an expatriate. And, I do not have the same experiences and can never have them. But, as Cavell aptly suggests, this means we are only metaphysically separate and different. But are we incapable of coming to acknowledge each other? Are the patterns that connect forever cut and severed? Are we unable to think of connections we may share? For Bateson, although communication is fallen (meaning it is always human and always limited), one achieves grace through the struggle and striving for communion.

As responses to the human limitation of knowledge, I now turn to two essays on performance that offer different takes than a melodramatic response to human limitation

and return performance to the classroom. I take Conquergood's essay "Performance as a Moral Act" on dialogic performances as a cue (1985). In this essay, Conquergood famously created a grid and Cartesian coordinates about what is known and knowable in performance. Conquergood's grid is an attempt to justify performing ethnographic materials from a culture different than one's own. The grid concerns neither the epistemological failures of certainty nor knowing what it is like to be other than oneself. Instead, the grid locates the risk in performance. Surrounding dialogic performance in the four corners of the grid are the custodian's rip-off, the enthusiast's infatuation, the skeptic's cop out, and the curator's exhibition. In the center, Conquergood locates an ethical imperative in dialogic performances that are open and sincere attempts at understanding and learning with other cultures and inviting other cultures into that exchange. Dialogic performance opens room for thoughtful and honest exchange; in Cavell's language, it would be attempts to acknowledge the others and our internal relationships with them. And these performances can fail and disappoint us just the same way any other moments of performance do; that might be why a broken heart might lead to a melodramatic response quicker than any other breakdown in criteria or in sharing a world.

The skeptic's cop out is to shrink from a realization of limited knowledge and cynically stop trying while the other quadrants in the grid are selfish, sensational, or superficial attempts at knowing the other. I am less concerned here with the success or failure of knowledge understood as certainty; instead, I hope to "live my skepticism" and not cop out over the realization of limited knowledge. I may never know how it is with you, but this is not a failure of my intellectual capacities and all methods I may bring to

the table. Cavell's contention is that skepticism is the conjuring trick that places our failure in knowing another as an intellectual lack and makes knowing the other an impossible riddle. Yet, skepticism also keeps knowing yourself and any self-knowledge a firm rock in an ocean of uncertainty and doubt. Skepticism is a cop out but also conveniently does not question the certainty you have in knowing yourself. In this way, it is not skeptical enough, and for Bateson it is a poor epistemology.

The risk is that my performance may not come off the way I want it to. I may look crude; I may be seen as a rip-off artist; I may be seen as profiting from another culture's work. That is a risk of performance. The grid surrounds me at all corners. In making myself available to my audience, I may find out that the world and myself in it are not how I imagined them to be. Yet, this risk is not unique to performance. When I say, "I love you," I might not get the response I want. I might find out in your moment of pause that you have second thoughts. Likewise, when I say, "I love you," you might take those words as guarded and blocked. You may not think of me the way I think of myself. But again, that might be the reason why and the risk in saying "I love you." And, for Bateson, the limits of imagining are an organism's limits in becoming, adapting, and changing. Pushing the limits of imagining might be the point that the performance of the poem teaches.

The abatement of the melodramatic response is celebrated in Elizabeth Bell's feminist aesthetic of performance. Instead of Cartesian coordinates of doubt, Bell argues that performance is an exchange of desire and an economy of sexual pleasure (Bell 1995). And Braidotti reminds us that sexuality in the tradition of sexual difference is not

limited to the bedroom or to deviance but that it fully comprises constitutes the subject (2002). Bell proceeds to argue that performance is an avenue for “gaining the power to signify” and participate in a world of desire and subjectivity (1998). This description of performance could be exemplified in learning to makes oneself available to be read and learning to trust one’s expression as giving expression. The self-expressed is acknowledged and emerges in the material context of performance, which is a recursive process of expressing oneself in performance. Learning to speak with the human voice, its stumbling moments and beautiful moments, happens in performance and performance classrooms. It is in the stumbling and beautiful words of performance and the striving for grace that Bateson, at Esalen, performs within an ecology of ideas.

***Bateson’s Performances:***

Assuming art focuses on outlines, or combinations of saying and doing, in the vital habit of making images and boundaries in relationships, Bateson’s performances then highlight how his audiences create images of him and respond to those images. He is not there and the audience does not see him, Bateson jokes when he states in his lecture “Pathologies of Epistemology” that:

First, I would like you to join me in little experiment. Let me ask you for a show of hands. How many of you will agree that you see me? I see a number of hands, so I guess insanity loves company. Of course, you don’t “really” see me. What you “see” is a bunch of pieces of information about me, which you synthesize into a picture image of me. You make that image. It’s that simple (1972, 478).

In the American Federation of Art this concept came across again in the statement:

First of all, I think it's necessary to remove the unconscious from the very mystical value that's been given to it. You see, the creative, as distinct from specifically art—we are all quite astonishingly and fantastically creative, whether we are artists or not. When I look at whatever it may be—a tree, the audience in front of me here, the paper on the table—I create an image of those objects. I don't just see those objects [as] what we call seeing something, at least in me—and I believe in every individual in this audience consist in the creation of an image (American Federation of Art, 29).

Bateson's discussion of the creativity of the audience at The Creative Act Conference is interesting to note. In reviewing the documents surrounding the planning and organizing of the American Federation of Art Conference, I notice how the planners of the conference hoped to stage a creative act on stage only to feel decide that it would be too difficult to do so (American Federation of Art 1957). Bateson, however, does the very thing the planners had hoped to achieve but does so without the assumption of a separation between the doing and the thing done—or discussion of creativity and creativity.

In addition to suggesting the creativity of the audience, Bateson's performance seems more of a rehearsal with an appearance of his ideas being unfinished. Even to me, a fan of much of Bateson's work, it appears fallen, not completely thought out, and rough around the edges. I am sure, though, that these criticisms may equally apply to my work and my work here on this page. Is this the characteristic of communication that Bateson wants his audience to realize? Is this the joke he keeps trying to play on the audience interpreting him in the classroom or hearing him in the lecture hall? That he is presenting and lecturing from within an ecology of mind gives his thoughts and the steps he has taken as approaches to more encounters with the world. Does his lecturing within ecologies of ideas mean the ecologies are always being cared for and attended to like

one's garden? But also as an act within ecologies of ideas, are they always being worked on, worked with, and never separated from circulation?

I reiterate Case's argument, presented in Chapters Three and Five, that representational frameworks assuming knowledge is made elsewhere displaces change and our participation in change. Case argues that reading the academic paper borrows this framework by situating knowledge production as something that is done prior, before its expression in the reading of the paper; it is an import from elsewhere (1997).

In what appears to be constant rehearsal, Bateson seems to resist the ultimate act of leaving the ecologies of ideas and to leave the condition of human knowing, which would be to stand behind representational frameworks assuming knowledge is created elsewhere and then imported to the audience. Bateson violates the wall between theory and practice, or the doing and the thing done, and moves knowledge production and creativity from behind the podium and towards ecologies of ideas. Bateson, in keeping both pincer movements transparent, changes the representational framework of academic knowledge production and places the knowing and known in dynamic circulation with each other.

Further still, Bateson resists constructing knowledge as a bounded object in his performance and explicitly questions the wall between the reading of a text and creation of its meaning. Bateson's lecture "Religious Poetry," discussing the *Four Quartets* by T.S. Eliot, starts with Bateson's claim that artists and schizophrenics share a frustration with being interpreted as a simple and singular thing. Interestingly, Bateson then gives

an interpretation of T.S. Eliot's poetry that combines both his reading of the poem and discussion of the patterned nature of poetry. As a conclusion Bateson states,

Well, I don't know, I sort of rushed you through. What I wanted to get across I think more than anything else is the idea that the pattern of such things as that, the patterns of such things as the poetry I have been reading, the pattern of the universe, or cosmos, or human soul, about which the poetry is written—that these are all overlapping patterns in some sense. And that is about what I wanted to get said—it is up to you or yours.  
(Informal Lectures)

All these patterns are connected and overlapping; this suggests that the reading of the poem and the meaning of the poem are not separate but point always to the patterns that connect—patterns that include our perceptive habits and ways to come to read the poem. As if reading the poem does not highlight the meaning of the text outside of our patterns of reading it and coming to think about it in particular ways. The poem is a sacrament because it connects us with patterns and includes us in those patterns.

As in Case's suggestion, Bateson's works are improvisations not composed prior to the performance. At the "Creative Act" lecture, for example, Bateson does not read the paper he had submitted earlier but improvises a new one. The improvised version shares little with Bateson's submitted paper. To capture the importance of Bateson's move to performance studies, Bateson's lecture can be contrasted with that of Duchamp who, although he stressed the improvisational and fleeting moments of the creative act, painstakingly creates a text from which to read during the academic presentation (Nelson 1994).

By diagnosing the hope that knowledge, meaning, and interpretation are different than they are, a reader can understand Bateson's discussions of epistemology.



Epistemology does not emerge in Bateson's work as a way to generate justified true beliefs or to generate logical claims securing meaning making through logical statements. On the contrary, Bateson's endless discussion of epistemology suggests a recursive or cybernetic view of learning that replaces a bad epistemology in which knowledge exists outside of and independent of our interventions. The latter epistemology cuts the patterns that connect us to a world and keeps us from participating in them.

It is important then that Bateson's lectures took the form of his taking stock in his ideas and placing them, as Bateson states, "on the larder" for latter use or "to use them as weapons" to tackle questions. As a taking stock of his ideas, Bateson often recounts stories of how he came to thinking in a particular way. For example, in the essay "Experiment in Thinking of Eithographical Material," Bateson suggests, "Let me try to build up a picture of how I have acquired my kit of conceptual tools and intellectual habits" (1972, 73). His ideas are placed as inquiries into the very process of making order. As inquiries into order, the ideas Bateson develops do not lead to logical arguments with clear contentions in support of an apparent or self-evident conclusion; instead, the ideas are listed like axioms from which one begins thinking.

Bateson also dramatizes in his writing the placement of knowledge production in interaction with others. Foreshadowing ideas of performative writing that I outline above, Bateson's metalogues are "conversation(s) about some problematic subject. This conversation should be such that not only do the participants discuss the problem but the structure of the conversation as a whole is also relevant to the same subject" (1972, 1). For Bateson, this is to say that a process and content meet in the metalogues. In an

ecology of ideas, process and content always meet, but in the metalogues the meeting is acknowledged and celebrated. In turn, Bateson's metalogues invite the context of learning into his expression and exploration of that learning. His child is invited into his study and into the world of meaning making he himself is actively doing. That is to say, Bateson's metalogues as performative writing answer whether thought can exist within the context of human life and within ecologies of ideas. By inviting the child into the study, Bateson answers the question posed by Cavell of whether a philosopher can be married and whether philosophy can speak from and celebrate the ordinary. The metalogues then operate as a criticism of the hope of philosophy to construct knowledge outside of ecologies of ideas or outside of a life lived.

Additionally, the metalogues do not leave the condition of human knowing by setting up an example and agreement in conversation and then proceeding to generalize this the content into an abstract criterion of knowledge or truth. To set up agreement and generalize from it would sever knowing and knowledge from the contexts in which those questions the conversation's content is meaningful and important. Instead, the metalogues operate to sustain each other in a mutual inquiry into a conversation about some important topic. It is exactly the idea that metalogues sustain each other in mutual conversation that the feminist theorist Donna Haraway called Bateson the first Queer Theorist (2007). Again, the metalogues proceed by a pincer movement in which the father is afforded the opportunity to speak from experience and the daughter represents a newness of imagination. If the father has the last word, one might imagine that tradition and experience are valued in the dialogue; if the daughter has the last word, then one

might imagine a romantic privileging of the newness and randomness in the thinking of a child. Instead, father and daughter's voices are balanced in mutual exploration.

In this chapter, I argue that the hope for meaning to exist outside of our participation is exactly what Bateson diagnosed and criticized. It is a hope that mind and nature are separate from each other. As a response to this hope, Bateson suggested thinking of performance, art, and communication as sacraments of participation in the evolutionary world of becoming. Bateson's thought on performance as sacraments encouraged him to lecture in the embodied classroom of Esalen from within an ecology of ideas and within patterns that connect. In an endless rehearsal of thought, Bateson attempts to get his audience to see the patterns that connect as including their habits of thought.

## Chapter Six: Conclusions

This has been a study of Bateson's reinterpretation of Genesis, which suggested new ways to think about form, pattern, and knowledge. Bateson's reinterpretation suggests that our desire to know the world and our place within it leads to conjuring tricks masking our endless participation in processes of connections behind a pathological hope for certainty.

In Chapter Two, I argue that Bateson and Judith Butler share fundamental suspicions of the conjuring trick that assumes nature exists outside of and before our situated encounters with it; thus, from two different approaches, nature is inseparable from each other. In Chapter Three, I propose a connection between cybernetics and performance studies. Reading cybernetics and performance studies next to each other, I hope to suggest that Bateson and second-order cybernetics have interest in performance and also hoped to think beyond the human in a path of becoming. The two approaches saw the performer, the organism, the scientist, and the human as participating in a world of change. In Chapter Four, I return to the themes expressed in my introduction to argue that because language always exists within types and levels, it cannot promise certainty of knowledge; this may produce fear that knowledge is impossible and that we cannot be known. In Chapter Five, I situate Bateson's work within questions of performance studies to argue that he is critical of the search for meaning to exist outside of ecologies of ideas, either in his performances or in works of art. His performances then took the

form of his taking stock of ideas and presenting ideas as approaches towards thinking in an endless form of rehearsal.

In the end, Bateson's point or lesson seems simple: if you have a world and you and others are in it, then you have an ecology of ideas. You have ideas holding the world together that presents the world as things you can know, things you can interact with, things you can love, and things you can fear. It is within this ecology of ideas that the organism encounters a world and others in it. The organism's sense making in these encounters is constrained by its ecologies of ideas. Organisms, in the ongoing process of making sense of themselves and their environment, develop patterns of thought. These patterns of thought and habits in turn constrain and condition the organism's encounters with the world. Bateson insists all thought is necessarily stochastic, with newness constrained by habits; as a result, the ordinary and creative moments of perception that in presenting a world of knowledge also operate to keep part of that world away from our knowledge.

Bateson's principle interest becomes ordinary moments of thinking and learning in the world. In Bateson's way of thinking, learning and thinking are not the disembodied activities some may assume them to be in the first place but fully constitute the subject, and what it learns in the process of dancing between levels is its boundaries. As an embodied activity, Bateson once recalled that his greatest intellectual achievement was learning to tie a bow tie, and he always stressed the process of that learning over the product of learning, even saying, "Learning to walk is more fun than walking."

The conjuring trick, for Bateson, the one at the first step of Genesis is to confuse the product of creativity with the process of it, which is to say to separate the thing and object from the process. Because humans may be apt to confuse the process with the product, Bateson points us back to our ordinary achievement in thinking, learning, and ordinary creative moments that are muddles.

Bateson's picture of knowing and communication is not a Garden of Eden where sign and referent match. It is not a place where what I know is known without doubt or separated from my encounters and habits. Bateson's picture of knowing is a world where knowledge and learning exist in a muddle. The muddle, like the fall from grace, is the human situation. It is where meaning, truth, and the ability to tell it as "it really is" will always be constrained and conditioned by our bodies and our ecologies of ideas. We may hope to cover this muddle with a theory of knowledge divorcing us from the objects of knowledge and our participation with them, but this is tragic because it keeps us from participating in the lives of others and in a flow of becoming.

In pointing positively towards a muddle, Bateson diagnoses the hope to leave our situation by substituting a fantasy of divine communion with things as they really are. Through muddle, Bateson suggests a different origin myth of thought, learning, thinking, and thus of philosophy. By turning towards muddles and by inviting his child into the study in an endless rehearsal, Bateson makes the academic life, not the life of prophet who after spending time way from the world, in a desert for forty days or alone in a study, emerges to speak truth and reason. What emerges from the academic life for Bateson is not a spark of the romantic genius or some mystical revelation of the world as

*it really is*; instead, ideas are habits, and everyone has them. Our habits may last too long and outlive their usefulness. Habits may become addictive and disruptive. And you may not even realize you have habits of ideas at all. But as habits, ideas are not divorced from your life with them.

As habits of thought emerging from a personal process of learning and thinking, this dissertation on Bateson's public performances and the claims I make about those performances is not divorced from my way of approaching the study in the first place. If I claim that I am absent from the study, or if I claim to have a mysterious process of divination for decoding the meaning, then I am cutting the patterns that connect my thinking and caring about the topic in the first place. I imagine this amounts to saying that what the ecologies of ideas prompt us to do is to ask why we are drawn to something and why we create the meaning we do as a result. Bateson writes, "All epistemology is personal," and this is the same as saying that ideas are habits. Emerging from Bateson is an image of the intellectual life as one full of passionate encounters with our habits of thought and ideas. I can now say that my process of learning about these performances coincided with my learning to be husband and a father. In the process, I learned to value grace in all of them. Grace is the recognition of difference, separation, and our limits in knowing and communication. But different and separate as we are, there are still patterns that connect you to me and us to the world. Our not knowing with certainty how each pattern moves need not invite the paranoia of the doubly bound child but instead invite the willingness to move together in composing a life (Bateson, 2001). Moving together to compose a life may make our marriages sacraments—even if secular—because they affirm our participation in each other's lives. Moving together to help compose a new

human life makes parenting filled with reminders of difference, as well as sacraments, because at every step children imagine the world in new ways and in the process return us to our muddle and our habits. I feel these are lessons Bateson teaches.

In my introduction, I approach to this study as overrun by the paranoia and fear of being received poorly and misunderstood. I hoped I captured my fear that I could not make myself known to you with my acts of expression. I feared I would not count for you and matter for you at all. Worse still, I feared I was powerless to make myself known.

My admiration for Bateson emerged when I came to think of the double binded child as similarly plagued and crippled by fear. The fear of the child in the double bind and my own fear rest on wondering where we stand in a relationship. This, of course, is equally the fear of where we stand in a community.

I began to ask, of myself and of others, what could overcome the fear and doubt? I came to think that no amount of knowledge conceived as certainty could ever assuage the fear and doubt. Cavell's thoughts on performance encouraged this line of inquiry in my work. I started to assume the basic fact of human communication that bodies speak words could be denied. Denying this ordinary fact of knowledge seemed to rest on the hope that words mean outside of bodies, outside of ecologies of ideas, and outside of interpreting them. I started to wonder if this was the promise of heaven and the garden where words and things match in a one-to-one correspondance. I started to think that in the garden there was no space between words and bodies and no room for doubt.



If all communicative messages have the latent risk of confusion then it seemed the double bind was always possible. But, again what overcomes the fear and doubt? Does the assumption that *I know how it really is* in the world or with you a way to overcome the doubt? Bateson's seems to suggest the assumption, that I know it *as it really is*, is the trap of misplaced concreteness. The trap assumes the map is the territory and the name is the thing named. As it stands, the assumption is the promise of the garden, the promise of heaven, and the promise of direct communication with the world and others in it. It seemed to me the promise hinged on cutting our relationships with the world and our participation in the world.

In the end, I felt the only way out my paranoia was to striving for grace. I assume this is why Bateson in his discussions of aesthetics focuses on sacraments and grace as an alternative to the double bind. It is an alternative that does not promise direct communication or certainty. As a muddle ideas and communication exist in the struggle, the striving, and the hope that one finds community and a congregation. It seemed that the first step in realizing grace was to acknowledge that direct communication was impossible. It was only then that I started to think of performance as a risk one took with the possibility of doubt. Yet, now the possibility needed to be lived, like Cavell's skepticism. It need not be crippling, but only acknowledged as a possibility of communication.

I started to think that only after acknowledging this possibility could I find my way out of my crippling paranoia. I stopped worrying about mapping knowledge and I began to question the impulse to separate knowledge from the history of the knower. In

turn I focused on the joy of finding community and those who might think as I did. I no longer hoped for the garden and to capture the world *as it really is*, but I did focus on what I wanted the world to be. I focused stopped focusing on the questions I could answer, but the questions I could ask. More importantly, I started wondering what these questions did. In the end, this was the focus of the performative and the performative turn.

In the end, I return to wondering if the trust circle activity, in which one falls backward, eyes closed, was a good starting point for Bateson's theory of language, in which our knowing whether we matter to someone at all and whether we can trust another is cast forever in doubt. Now as a striving for grace, I remember the trust circle is also a training exercise in dance to teach dancers how to move their bodies together. By falling into one another, the dancers learn how to dance and participate in patterns. Each fall and every catch affirms the dancers' participation in the dance and trust in each other. The falling teaches us to move in spite of doubt and risk. Bateson called this grace and a sacrament. As a sacrament, I fall into your arms believing you will catch me as we dance off the page.

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### **About the Author**

Daniel Blaeuer was born in Fairfax, Virginia the first of a pair of twins on April Fools' Day in 1978 to the surprise of his parents. He attended James Madison University where he earned a B.A in philosophy and communication studies, was a member of the debate team, and hosted a weekly radio show. He attended the University of South Florida for graduate school where he earned an M.A. and Ph.D, where he met his wife Miranda, and had a beautiful daughter Amelia.