

Miran Možina and Graham Barnes¹

Second-order psychotherapy: How psychotherapists use theories and how psychotherapy theories use psychotherapists?²

*Psihoterapija drugega reda: Kako psihoterapevti
uporabljamo svoje teorije in kako psihoterapevske
teorije uporabljajo nas?*³

Abstract

For Graham Barnes, the starting point of his research was the observation that most psychotherapists are trained in a theory-centered style of practice, neglecting epistemological and hermeneutical aspects. The consequence is an absence of critical self-reflection about some basic assumptions of psychotherapy theories and clinical practices in the psychotherapy community. When using a particular theory, therapists forget that the theory is “using” them, as well, i.e., they are unaware of the effects the theory has on them and on their relationships with clients.

As an alternative to this ignorance, Barnes developed the concept, research project and clinical application of what he called “second-order psychotherapy”,

- 1 Mag. Miran Možina, MD, psychiatrist and psychotherapist, SFU Ljubljana (<http://www.sfu-ljubljana.si/en>), miranmozina.slo@gmail.com
Graham Barnes, PhD, psychotherapist (1936-2020).
- 2 This article is written to the memory of Graham Barnes (1936-2020). It includes revised version of metalogue that was published in Slovenian language in Bateson, G. (2019). *Ekologija idej [Steps to an Ecology of Mind]*. Ljubljana: Beletrina and SFU Ljubljana: 515-535. It also includes Možina's introduction to the metalogue that was published in the journal *Constructivist Foundations*: Barnes, G. in Možina, M. (2020). Metalogue: How to Understand Bateson? In *Memoriam Graham Barnes (1936-2020). Constructivist Foundations*, 16(1), 101-107.
- 3 Članek je napisan v spomin Grahamu Barnesu (1936-2020). Vanj je vključen nekoliko spremenjen metalog, ki je bil objavljen kot spremna študija h knjigi Gregoryja Batesona *Ekologija idej*: Možina, M. in Barnes, G. (2019). Kako razumeti Batesona? V Bateson, G. *Ekologija idej*. Ljubljana: Beletrina in SFU Ljubljana: 515-535. Vključen je tudi dopolnjen spremni tekst k metalogu, ki je bil objavljen v reviji *Constructivist Foundations*: Barnes, G. in Možina, M. (2020). Metalogue: How to Understand Bateson? In *Memoriam Graham Barnes (1936-2020). Constructivist Foundations*, 16(1), 101-107.

in which the central question is: How can we encourage therapists to engage in systematic self-reflection on the influence of theory on the content and structure of their therapeutic conversations? Following Bateson's epistemological guidelines, we give an example of how our conversation about understanding his ideas includes conversation about our understanding of the conversation about an understanding of his ideas.

Bateson created a new didactic form of dialogical presentation to facilitate the understanding of knowing, called a »metalogue«, in which the content and the structure of the conversation are intertwined in such a way that it becomes more transparent how the metalevel of relationships between the speakers influences the content and vice versa. Such second-order understanding opens the space for the inclusion of self-reflection on our relationship (and its evolution) and how our relationship has shaped our understanding.

Key words: Cybernetic epistemology, second-order psychotherapy, dialogotherapy, self-referential awareness, understanding, difference, schizophrenia, double bind, innocence

Povzetek

Izhodišče raziskovalnega projekta Grahama Barnesa je njegovo opažanje, da se večina psihoterapevtov usposablja iz na teorijo osredotočenih načinov psihoterapevtskih pristopov. Pri tem pa zanemarjajo epistemološke in hermenevtične vidike. Posledica je pomanjkanje kritične samorefleksije o nekaterih temeljnih predpostavkah psihoterapevtskih teorij in kliničnih praks. Ko uporabljamo določeno teorijo, psihoterapevti radi pozabljamo, da je odnos krožen, da tudi teorija »uporablja« nas. Ne zavedamo se dovolj, kako teorija učinkuje na nas in naše odnose s klienti.

Kot alternativo prevladujoči enostranskosti, je Barnes razvil koncept, raziskovalni projekt in klinično uporabo t. i. »psihoterapije drugega reda«, ki si zastavlja naslednje ključno vprašanje:

Kako spodbujati psihoterapevte, da bi se bolj posvečali sistematični samorefleksiji o vplivu teorije na vsebino in strukturo svojih terapevtskih pogovorov? V skladu z Batesonovimi epistemološkimi kažipoti s konkretnim primerom metaloga na krožen način prikaževa, kako najin pogovor o razumevanju njegovih idej vključuje pogovor o razumevanju pogovora o razumevanju njegovih idej.

Da bi olajšal učenje o razumevanju in spoznavanju, je Bateson razvil novo didaktično obliko dialoške predstavitve, ki jo je poimenoval »metalog«. V njem se vsebina in struktura pogovora prepletata na tak način, da postane razvidnejše, kako metaraven odnosov med govornici vpliva na vsebino in obratno. Takšno razumevanje drugega reda odpira prostor za vključevanje samorefleksije

o naših odnosih (in njihovi evoluciji) in o tem, kako naši odnosi oblikujejo naše razumevanje.

Ključne besede: kibernetska epistemologija, psihoterapija drugega reda, dialogoterapija, samoreferenčno zavedanje, razumevanje, razlika, shizofrenija, dvojna vez, nedolžnost

Uvod

Običajno se psihoterapevti ne sprašujemo dovolj pogosto, ali pa sploh ne, kaj so temeljne predpostavke našega mišljenja, čustvovanja in delovanja. Naša prevladujoča navada (pa tudi navada znanstvenikov na splošno) je, da poenostavljamo probleme, s katerimi se ukvarjamo, in ne upoštevamo dejstva, da večji konteksti vplivajo na manjše. Večinoma psihoterapevti mislimo, da uporabljamo teorije in spregledamo, da teorije uporabljajo nas, smo torej bolj ali manj slepi, kako teorije učinkujejo na nas (glej sliko 1). Tudi se ne poglobljamo dovolj v raziskovanje širšega konteksta, zgodovinskega in družbenopolitičnega ozadja, v katerem se je pojavila določena teorija, ki nas potem uporablja za reševanje (ali na žalost velikokrat tudi za povečevanje) določenih individualnih, družbenih in ekoloških problemov.

Slika 1

Prevladujoče razumevanje med psihoterapevti je, da psihoterapevti uporabljamo teorije, pozabljamo pa, da velja tudi obratno – da teorije »uporablja« nas.



Raziskovalni projekt Grahama Barnesa, ki ga je poimenoval »psihoterapija psihoterapije« ali »psihoterapija drugega reda« (Barnes, 1994), temelji na kibernetski epistemologiji Gregoryja Batesona (2019). V njem je povabil psihoterapevte, da naj v svoje strokovno delo vključimo proučevanje svojih epistemoloških predpostavk, kar pomeni raziskovanje drugega reda (npr. kako naj razumem svoje razumevanje, kako lahko spoznavam svoje spoznavanje itn.). Poglobljanje v Batesonovo epistemologijo še zdaleč ni zastarelo, temveč je v luči globalnih družbenih in ekoloških problemov, s katerimi se soočamo v antropocenu, pomembnejše kot kdajkoli. Njegova ekološka modrost nam je lahko v naših prizadevanjih za izboljšanje razmer v človeških skupnostih in na našem planetu še kako v pomoč (Možina, 2019).

Metalog kot didaktični pripomoček za reflektivno učenje

Da bi psihoterapevte spodbudili k zahtevnemu epistemološkemu premiku, ki ga je predlagal Bateson, potrebujemo tudi nove didaktične možnosti. V ta namen je Bateson razvil novo obliko dialoga, ki ga je poimenoval metalog. V njem se vsebina in struktura pogovora prepletata na tak način, da s pomočjo samorefleksije govorcev postane bolj razvidna metaraven odnosov med njimi.

Bateson je metalog definiral takole: "Metalog je pogovor o neki nejasni temi. Ta pogovor bi moral potekati tako, da sodelujoči razpravljajo o problemu, obenem pa je tudi struktura pogovora takšna, da ustreza prav temu problemu [...]. Omeniti velja, da je zgodovina evolucijske teorije neizbežno metalog med človekom in naravo, v katerem morata porajanje in interakcija idej nujno ponazarjati evolucijski proces." (Bateson, 2019: 35)

V skladu z najinim razumevanjem Batesonove ideje metaloga naj bi struktura dialoga odražala vsebino in obratno. Če vzamemo kot primer metalog *Zakaj imajo stvari obrise* (Bateson, 2019: 61–66), se v njem Bateson med drugim s svojo hčerko pogovarja, kako se je William Blake rad jezil in ni bil tolerant. Nena doma pa postane Bateson jezen, ker se mu zazdi, da je hčerka v tu in zdaj njunega pogovora preveč tolerantna, na kar se ona začne jokati. Ta primer nam kaže, kako v določenem trenutku njunega pogovora vsebina, ki se dotakne tematike jeze in tolerantnosti, postane del njunega odnosnega vzorca. Torej se problemi, o katerih diskutirata, odražajo v strukturi njunega dialoga.

Na to prepletanje strukture in vsebine naj bi bili psihoterapevti ves čas pozorni. V naših pogovorih s klienti naj bi poskušali ohranjati dvojen fokus: enega na vsebini (ali "digitalni" ravni komunikacije, kot jo je imenoval Bateson (2019: 308)), drugega pa na odnosu ("analogna ali ikonična" raven (prav tam)). To je bilo eno ključnih Batesonovih razlikovanj. Raziskovalci psihoterapije, kot sta na primer Jeremy Safran and Irvin Yalom (npr. Safran, 1993; Safran in Muran, 2000a, 2000b; Safran in dr., 2002; Yalom, 2002; Yalom in Leszcz, 2005; Levy, Ablon in Kächele, 2012), so potrdili učinkovitost takega dvojnega fokusa v terapevtskem procesu.

Metalog, ki sledi, je nastal na podlagi več pogovorov, ki sva jih imela preko spleta v maju 2019. Najin namen je namreč bil, da bi skupaj napisala spremno študijo k slovenskemu prevodu Batesonove knjige *Ekologija idej* (Bateson, 2019). Najprej sva na podlagi vsebine najin pogovorov mislila napisati članek, potem pa sva pri transkribiranju pogovorov postopno prišla do ideje, da bi jih predstavila v obliki metaloga. Pri tem sva izhajala iz predpostavke, da metaloga v vsakdanjih pogovorih ni mogoče točno napovedati in ga že vnaprej natanko

predvideti. Do njega lahko pride spontano, ko dialog diskontinuirano preskoči na metaraven, ko se torej vsebina in struktura pogovora nepričakovano prepleteta.

Pri pisanju metaloga pa sva zavestno poskušala prikazati prepletanje vsebine pogovora z odnosno ravni. Tako npr. na vsebinski ravni pogovora poudariva, da je razumevanje neločljivo povezano z dialogom in govoriva o različnih ravneh rekurzije v človeški komunikaciji. Navedeva Batesonovo razlikovanje med verbalno (digitalno) in neverbalno (analogno ali ikonično) ravni rekurzije v medosebni komunikaciji (Bateson, 2019: 308). Neverbalno uokvirja verbalno in je pomembnejše v prenašanju sporočil, ki so povezana z odnosom, nezavednim in implicitnim.

Vpliv odnosne ravni na vsebinsko postane v metalogu še posebej jasn, ko na določeni točki pogovora Barnes postane utrujen in si vzame nekaj časa za kratek oddih, tako da obmolkne (glej G24,25,26,27). Na vsebinski ravni se to takoj odrazi v tem, da postane tema pogovora, kakšno komunikacijsko sporočilo se lahko skriva v molku (M25,26,27), nato pa se najin dialog usmeri neposredno v pogovor o najinem odnosu. To se sicer v najin pogovorih maja lani ni zgodilo, se pa je v obdobju najinega petintridesetletnega sodelovanja kar nekajkrat. Ko je včasih Barnes v pogovoru na podoben način "ugasnil", sem postal negotov, koliko mu je najin odnos (in koliko sem mu jaz sam) res pomemben. To izkušnjo iz preteklosti sva izkoristila, da sva najin dialog nadgradila v metalog, tako da sva prekinitve običajnega toka dialoga na vsebinski ravni (*kaj se pogovarjava*) izkoristila kot odskočno desko za refleksijo najinega odnosa (*kako se pogovarjava*).

V nadaljevanju metaloga se potem znova vrneva k razvijanju vsebine, povezane z Batesonovim razumevanjem komunikacije. Da bi čim bolj nazorno prikazala njegovo izjemno estetsko občutljivost, razumevanje in angažiranost v povezovanju manjših oziroma ožjih (verbalnih, zavestnih, eksplisicnih) z večjimi oziroma širšimi (neverbalnimi, nezavednimi, implicitnimi) konteksti, sva v najin dialog vključila tudi vinjeto iz njegovega raziskovanja shizofrenije.

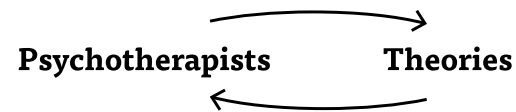
Introduction

Psychotherapists do not ask themselves often enough what the assumptions are that underlie their thinking, feeling and acting. The predominant habit of psychotherapists (and scientists in general) is to simplify problems by ignoring the possibility that the larger context may influence the smaller. Most psychotherapists think that they are using theories, but they are ignorant of the effects these theories have on them. They also do not sufficiently explore the larger context, the historical and socio-political background that has brought

about the theory that is using them to solve (or, unfortunately, also aggravate) particular social and ecological problems.

Picture 1

Usually psychotherapists think that they are using theories and they forget that theories are using them as well.



The research project of Graham Barnes, which he called the “psychotherapy of psychotherapy” or “second-order psychotherapy” (Barnes, 1994), was based on Gregory Bateson’s cybernetic epistemology (Bateson, 1987), in which he invited psychotherapists to incorporate in their professional work the second-order investigation of their epistemological premises. Being a scholar of Bateson is not outdated but rather, in the light of our enormous social and ecological problems of anthropocene, more relevant than ever. His ecological wisdom can help us in our endeavors to construct a better world (Možina, 2019).

1.

Metalogue as a didactic tool for reflexive learning

To encourage psychotherapists to make the demanding epistemological shift that Bateson has proposed, a new kind of didactics is needed. To this end, Bateson created a new form of dialogical presentation, called a metalogue, in which the content and the structure of the conversation are intertwined in such a way that the metalevel of relationships between the speakers becomes more apparent and transparent through the self-reflection of speakers.

According to Bateson «a metalogue is a conversation 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 [...] Notably, the history of evolutionary theory is inevitably a metalogue between man and nature, in which the creation and interaction of ideas must necessarily exemplify evolutionary process.» (Bateson, 1987: 1)

In Barnes’s and my understanding of Bateson’s idea of a metalogue the structure of the metalogue should reflect the content and vice versa. For example, in the metalogue “Why Do Things Have Outlines” (Bateson, 1987: 27–32) Bateson is talking with his daughter about William Blake, how he was an angry man and

how he was not tolerant. Suddenly, Bateson becomes angry because it seems to him that his daughter in the here and now of their dialogue is too tolerant, which makes her cry. This example illustrates that in the here and now of their dialogue, the topics of their dialogue (here: anger, tolerance) become part of their relationship pattern. So, the problems they are discussing are reflected in the structure of their conversation.

This is what we, as psychotherapists, should be aware of at all times. In our dialogues with our clients, we are trying to maintain a double focus: one is on the content (or “digital” level in communication, according to Bateson, 1987: 417–431) while the other one is on the relationship (“analogue or iconic” level, *ibid*). With Barnes, we understood this as one of Bateson’s basic ideas or distinctions. Psychotherapy researchers such as Jeremy Safran and Irvin Yalom (e.g., Safran, 1993; Safran & Muran, 2000a, 2000b; Safran et al., 2002; Yalom, 2002; Yalom & Leszcz, 2005; Levy, Ablon & Kächele, 2012) have confirmed the efficacy of this double focus in the therapeutic process.

The “metalogue” that follows originated in several discussions between us. They took place online in May 2019. According to our understanding of a metalogue, one cannot predict having a metalogue in advance. They arise spontaneously out of dialogue. Originally, we wanted to write a standard article, but while transcribing our dialogues, slowly the idea arose to present them as a metalogue.

In our metalogue, we point out that understanding is inseparable from the dialogue and we talk about different levels of recursion in human communication. We differentiate between verbal (digital) and nonverbal (analogue or iconic) levels of recursion in human communication. What we maintain is that the nonverbal frames the verbal. Therefore, it is the nonverbal that is more important in conveying the messages that are connected to the relationship and, many times, to the unconscious, albeit implicitly. To present this more vividly, we also embedded a clinical vignette from Bateson’s schizophrenia research as an example of his aesthetic sensibility, understanding and engagement aimed at integrating the smaller (verbal, conscious) with the larger (nonverbal, unconscious) contexts.

At some point, Barnes becomes tired and takes some time to remain silent (see G24,25,26,27). This did not happen in our online conversations but on several occasions during our 35 years of collaboration. To these moments of silence, I reacted with insecurity. The interruption on the content level thus became the starting point for reflecting on our relationship.

Metalogue: How to understand Bateson and how to understand our own understanding of Bateson?

Miran Možina (M1): Let's talk about Gregory Bateson and how it is possible to understand him. He mentioned several times that very few people have any idea what he is talking about.⁴ I have to admit that I am not one of those lucky few. So how can I then contribute something valuable to our dialogue about Bateson and his work? Whenever I think that I understand something and I experience one of those beautiful moments of clarity and refreshing insight, sooner or later I find myself once again confused and feeling incompetent about trying to interpret or explain his work for others.

Graham Barnes (G1): Well, I can understand exactly how you feel because it is the same for me. But let me put your mind at rest, because I would never like to collaborate with anybody who claims that they understand Bateson. My Gregory Bateson is inevitably different from your Gregory Bateson. Because we have our own background, our own experience and abilities, we can at best stand under the wings of his understanding but it is impossible to step into his understanding directly and claim that we can think as he would think. But having said that, it is very important that we do our best to understand as he would understand, because there is a great deal we can learn if we aim at such an ideal, though unreachable end.

M2: That sounds reassuring ... So you are saying I can still be helpful in our dialogue even though I experience moments of confusion while endeavouring to understand Bateson?

G2: Absolutely, because he himself all of his life insisted he was an explorer who couldn't know what he was exploring until it had been explored. He understood confusion as a necessity in terms of the learning process, especially with the higher orders of learning, which he named deuterolearning (learning II) and epistemological learning (learning III), during which the basic premises of our thinking and acting can be changed.

M3: Maybe vagueness and confusion on the conscious level are also inevitable because higher order learning includes unconscious processes or »primary process« as Freud would call it?

G3: Yes, Bateson was convinced that unconscious levels of the mind are crucial for guiding the scientist or the artist towards the questions and answers, which generate even more complex questions. Whole dialogues do not float in an empty space but evolve in relationships. We could even say that relation-

ships are the dialogue. If there is no dialogue, there is no relationship, at least in Buber's »I-Thou« sense.

M4: In our everyday conversations we usually pay more attention to the content than to the relationship, more to the verbal, explicit than to the non-verbal, implicit.

G4: That's right. Because Bateson constantly emphasised the relationship perspective, his attention was focused on non-verbal, "paralinguistic" communication.

M5: So it is not a competition between you and me, it is not about who understands Bateson more or better, but it is our dialogue, and creating and developing our relationship through this dialogue which is crucial. The most important aspect of this dialogue is if we can between us bring out more variety, new ideas, which would evolve around our target question – how to understand Bateson.

G5: Yes, because according to Bateson's cybernetic epistemology, what we say about his understanding will inevitably tell a lot (perhaps even more) about us and about the context of our conversation and about our topic, which is how to understand Bateson.

M6: And we should talk about how to understand Bateson without knowing exactly what we are exploring and what is to be understood? Not only should we dip into what is unknown to us, we should also, as Socrates did, not hide our knowing about not knowing?

G6: Exactly, on the one hand I propose that we focus on Bateson's view of science and put together the pieces of our understanding of his understanding, but on the other hand I would also like our dialogue to make visible the meta level, which would open the space for exploring what is our process of knowing through our dialogue and how do we know what we know, because this was crucial in Bateson's search for the »new scientific territory« or »epistemology«. And we should also link Bateson's epistemology to psychotherapy.

M7: It is interesting that what we have talked about up to now is very relevant to what psychotherapy is all about. What we have discussed about Bateson's understanding of confusion, vagueness, learning, context, dialogue, conscious and unconscious, verbal and non-verbal, and relationships can all be applied to psychotherapy. From a dialogical point of view the (psycho)therapist is not only a practitioner, a technician who knows how to guide the client in a certain direction, but is always also a researcher, who is guided by curiosity, who takes the risk of exploration, who dares to be open for the unknown, unexpected and new. If therapists are able to discover something new about themselves in the dialogue with clients then on the meta-level they are inviting clients to do the same. It is circular. And it is much safer and more ethical if the therapist is mindful

⁴ Brockman, J. 1977: 5.

of his or her own processes of change. So that the therapist is not trying to change the client, but rather the therapist's own perception, thinking and acting.

G7: And therapists are also theorists who should be able to develop the second-order theory – the theory about the theory they are using. This can bring them to the surprising turning-point when they become aware how the theory is using or shaping them, what the theory is doing to them, for better or worse.

M8: The therapist becomes aware of the dangers of using theory or being used by the theory in an unreflected way. For example, the vocabularies and interpretations they use to understand their clients and themselves in the therapeutic process can be harmful if they become rigid and final instead of flexible and contingent. And I mean reflection in Heinz von Foerster's sense, who defined it as "knowing one's knowing, an epistemology of how we know, not what." It is "seeing oneself through oneself, [...] causing oneself".⁵

G8: Yes, that's right. If we, as psychotherapists, try to grasp Bateson's epistemology seriously then we, as psychotherapy practitioners, must incorporate in our professional work the second-order investigation – the *psychotherapy of psychotherapy* or *second-order psychotherapy*. We must turn psychotherapy on itself to bite its own tail (picture 2).

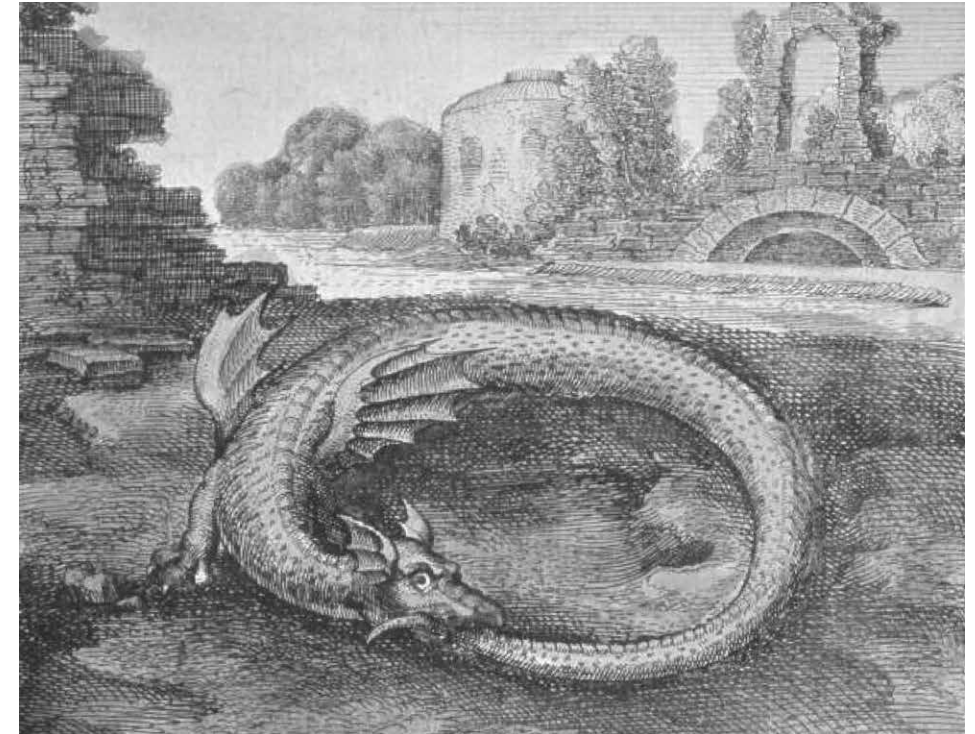
M9: If we do this then we are suddenly confronted with a very difficult set of circular questions. For example, how are our theoretically shaped experiences also shaping our observations and descriptions of our experiences? How can we see with, talk about and speak the language of our theory in such a way that our seeing, talking and speaking will reveal and reflect the premises of our theory?

G9: And what are the assumptions and premises in the theory, which is using us, that ensure or censure such reflections? How can we overcome our habitual ways of thinking and acting that censure, induce amnesia and repress reflection?

And we also begin to wonder about the theoretical self: what kind of person and psychotherapist have I been made through speaking the vocabulary of this or that theory? How does a theory shape us to act as we do and not to act in other ways? What have I become in my relationship to this or that theory and its practice? What kind of self has this theory shaped? What have I been made into by this or that theory?

Picture 2

The Ouroboros as a serpent or dragon eating its own tail is the symbol of circularity in cybernetic epistemology.⁶



M10: Asking such Batesonian questions we can develop a kind of *self-referential* or *recursive* awareness that the painter M. C. Escher has depicted in his famous lithograph *Print Gallery* (picture 3). We are like the man in the gallery who is looking at a print of a seaport, and among the buildings in the seaport is the very gallery in which he is standing. We can't see the territory (the seaport) but only the map (the picture of the seaport). Through the lenses of our theory we are constructing the picture in which we are standing. Inevitably we are (part of) our own picture. We are our own metaphor.⁷

5 Foerster, H. von 1989: 814

6 Internet source: <https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/repr%C3%A9sentation-dun-ouroboros-un-dragon-se-mordant-la-queue-news-photo/840530216?adppopup=true>

7 Bateson, M. C. 2005.

Picture 3

Lithograph Print Gallery by M. C. Escher, 1956⁸.

G10: But we are constantly forgetting that we can only see pictures which are our own creations or »transformations«, which are mapping the territory, as Bateson used to emphasise quoting Korzybski.

M11: Every perception, thought, feeling or action is an idea or a pattern of ideas, the result of multiple transformations which are travelling along complex networks of feedback loops.

G11: One difficulty is that our (psychotherapy) theories or maps are deeply embedded in our own thinking and acting. The unspoken and unwritten assumptions, the »generative ideas«⁹, may be so far removed from our awareness that we may even deny that we share them. We are forgetting that our theoretical vocabularies make our worlds. And we even forget that we are forgetting.

M12: In my lectures I use the same test that Bateson often used with his audiences. I ask them if they see me and if I can see them. They become aware how they are forgetting that they can only see the end product of the complex process of transformation (perceived visual patterns – retina – optical nerve – optical brain cortical areas – associative neuronal pathways – retina), that they can't see me in the sense of *Ding an Sich* and that we don't have direct access to the processes of transformation. We can't see what is happening inside the TV, we can only see what it is on the screen. We can see bits of information that are arranged in a transformation pattern I call »you« and that I can say: »I can see you.« - Whenever I do this little experiment I see the widening of eyes in the audience and there is an atmosphere of surprise, a small shock as the veil of amnesia is lifted. For some moments the students become aware that they don't really see me but only the picture of me, the transformation of me that was

constructed in a very sophisticated way.

G12: And each picture on the screen is different. Each of us constructs and devises an individual version of the series of pictures that constitute their world. Yet, if a theory makes a world and if that world also produces or reproduces the theory, the theory will then reflect that world and that world will validate the theory it reflects.

M13: Uf, I would like to hear this again. Whenever you are describing in one sentence such self-referential circularity I become confused and I have to listen to it or read it again, step by step.

G13: Remember that confusion is ok. What I wanted to emphasise is this: because a theory is a *self-contained*, *ouroboreal* body of thought and way of speaking, it is a *closed*, limited and excluding world.

M14: There is also an emotional side or reason why every creator or reader of theory is seduced into inhabiting the world created by the theory as real, correct, as a real 'discovery'. This closed world can make us feel *safe*. The temptation of *certainty*, with security always lurking in every corner.

And there is also the temptation of *laziness*, which can circularly reinforce the need for certainty, especially if the theory contains explanations and interpretations that Bateson called »dormitive principles« adopting Molière's famous oral doctoral examination in which the learned doctors asked the candidate to state the »cause and reason« why opium puts people to sleep and he triumphantly answered: »Because there is in it a dormitive principle (*virtus dormitiva*)«¹⁰. To think rigorously is hard work, so it is much easier to lull our thinking capacity, to immobilise it with such pseudoexplanations and other tactics to stop engaged thinking which would mobilise us not only personally but also socially for the promotion of democratic values.

G14: The theory cannot expand its language to develop metalanguage to reflect upon itself. To do so would make it a different theory. Its language closes in on itself. It lacks transcendent vocabulary that can question the finality of its self-understanding. It also lacks the mechanisms to speak about the premature perceptual closure made by theoretical concepts.

That is why studying a theory and then learning to practice it poses a »double bind« problem. The theory invites the student to believe that it is a reality, that it explicates or describes reality and that it is not a text about a theory. It takes us inside its construction, within its frame, to its world of reality. Through the world created by studying the text, we are in its context. The text with its claims and its premises ties us up. It does not permit critical comment on itself.

⁸ Internet source: https://www.google.com/search?q=print+gallery&client=firefox-b-d&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjAkfH5s_vIAhWSw4sKHf_I_AZUQ_AUIECgB&biw=1280&bih=596#imgsrc=s4CM8oMF2qFn1M:

⁹ Langer, S. K. 1957.

¹⁰ Bateson, G. 1972: xxi.

M15: Bateson takes as an example early psychoanalytic writings, arguing that the Freudian edifice was allowed to grow too big before the corrective of rigorous thought was applied to it.¹¹ Freud was an excellent writer, so his texts, though they are more fiction than science, are very persuasive and it is easy for the reader to fall into the trap of realism, determinism and reification. Concepts like »ego« or »wishes« or the »id« or the »libido« became concrete realities, real »discoveries« and not fictions.

G15: Yes, Freud with his »loose thinking« blurred the boundary lines between the »symbol« and »the thing symbolised«. And among psychotherapy authors he was not the only one who slid into writing about the world of psychotherapy as it is. From »is« they tend to move to »ought«, and when they return to »is«, they have endowed it with authority.

M16: So what are we to do? How can we step out of such double binds?

G16: Bateson gave us a good example during his lifetime and his writings are still available to help us. His »epistemology« can be understood as a second-order theory or meta-theory. For psychotherapists it can be helpful to develop second-order psychotherapy. The »epistemological shift« that he proposes is a long journey, which can't be only intellectual but also includes emotional strain, shocking experiences and it is impossible without changes in our ways of being and acting.

M17: How could we start such a journey? What could be a starting point?

G17: Bateson used Spencer Brown's most basic act of epistemology as a starting point : »Draw a distinction!«¹² This basic command, which we implement consciously or unconsciously, creates a starting-point for our every action, decision, perception, thinking, describing, theory and epistemology. Whenever we are making a difference, we draw a boundary. We are constructing a world or universe, when we break or divide the space. Whenever we define, or delineate something, for example when we draw a circle, we separate that which is inside the circle from that which is outside the circle. We can draw boundaries arbitrarily, which means that we can create unlimited number of worlds or universes.

M18: And in doing so we get something which *is* and something which *is not*. From the point of view of information both are equivalent. When for example a lover for the first time reveals his feelings in a letter to his beloved but then he doesn't get any answer, this is in itself important news which can trigger even stronger feelings (for example suffering and yearning) than if he had received a reply.

G18: Right. Once upon a time people drew a line between what is therapy

and that which isn't therapy. The distinctions between »therapist« and »client«, »intervention« and »symptom«, »solution« and »problem«, »(psycho)pathology« and »health« enable us to construct our clinical world.

M19: In Slovenia sharp public polemics have been going on for fifteen years about what psychotherapy is and what it isn't, because we don't yet have any official psychotherapy regulation. There are different opinions represented by different professional groups, for example psychologists, psychiatrists, alternative healers, psychotherapists etc. There is an ongoing dispute as to whether psychotherapy is an autonomous profession or not, who can practise it and where etc.¹³

G19: Although different regulations are possible, with different boundaries around these questions, we quickly find out that they are the result of the same basic epistemological act – drawing a difference. Our mental world can't exist without distinctions but at the same time we can never make a map which would cover all the territory. There is always something that we excluded, something that we didn't take into consideration.

But of course I am not arguing for epistemological relativism in the sense »anything goes«, but for a circular relationship between epistemology and ontology, and for a sociologically pragmatic point of view. Every act of knowing which presents itself as a thought, emotion or action influences how we are with ourselves and with others. For example, are we satisfied and compassionate at the same time, do we have, wherever we are, some bigger or smaller (local) task on the side of justice, are we contributing to the diminishing of poverty and suffering in the community etc.

M20: Some Slovenian but also numerous European psychiatrists and (clinical) psychologists¹⁴ are constructing just such a psychotherapy map, according to which they are the only ones who can practise psychotherapy as a method within the health care system. They reject the idea of psychotherapy as an autonomous profession and in this way they exclude professional psychotherapists from the health care system. Although they emphasise that their standpoint is ethical, arguing they are protecting clients from less competent therapists and that they are the only ones who can deliver it at the necessary high professional and scientifically empirically based level, they are displaying the self-interest of a trade guild. The fact is that with their map they are maintaining and even enlarging the big white patches of injustice, where people, who need psychotherapeutic help, can't get it within the frame of the health care system.

G20: Thank you for this up-to-date example of how our distinctions can have

11 Bateson, G. 1972: 86.

12 Spencer-Brown, B. 1973.

13 Možina, M., Flajs, T., Jerebic, D., Kosovel, I., Kranjc Jakša, U. & Rakovec, P. 2018: 7–39.

14 Možina, M. 2010a: 63–104; Možina, M. & Kranjc Jakša, U. 2019: 171–207.

far reaching ethical consequences. But let me go back to the basics of Bateson's epistemology, to his definition of idea, with which he built upon Hegel's usage of »idea«. In the Korzybski Memorial Lecture¹⁵ he proposed that the basic meaning of »idea« is equal to »difference«. He defined information as transformation or as *news of difference that makes a difference*. This is the basic unit of mind. On this foundation he developed a new understanding of the relationship between mind and nature, which is the main topic of his book *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*.

Although Bateson with his definition of mind has overcome the cartesian dualism between mind and matter, it would perhaps be better if he'd used the word body instead of the word mind, so that the title of his book would be *Steps to an Ecology of Body*.

M21: This is very interesting and provocative. It's refreshing, thank you! I also understand Bateson's concept of mind as »embodied mind«.

G21: Which also implies »minded body«. During the last years of his life Bateson shifted his emphasis from mind to life. His basic question became what is life and how it preserves itself.

M22: This question was also crucial for Maturana and Varela in their famous book *The Tree of Knowledge*¹⁶.

G22: Right, but before them, Bateson pondered on this question using cybernetic epistemology. If I try to understand the world of ideas, as Bateson did, then ideas are connected with body and language. Ideas are products of sensory experiences. Information is news of differences that make differences in each sensory (end) organ. Eventually these are transformed into words and there we get to linguistics, to language. If we understand ideas and language in this way then we can also say that trees are talking. They have their own language that we don't understand. They are working with information in their roots, stems, leaves, they are working with all kind of differences. We were not able or challenged to learn the language of trees, wolves or dolphins.

M23: Even if we are very broad and inclusive in our perception and understanding, we are still ignorant about so much in and around us. So Bateson's view is an invitation to humility, isn't it?

G23: Yes, because our drawing of distinctions is always selective, partial, contingent, breaking the whole into pieces. The most we can do with our descriptions is that we punctuate, emphasise something on account, to the

detriment of something else. There is always another possible distinction and interpretation. There is no final or absolute explanation. We can just dance around any (target) concept which is important for us and try to make it match up to our reality. And because of that ...

M24: (in his enthusiasm interrupts Graham) So when we are thinking and talking we are somehow always wrong, which is typical for a double bind situation. We can't escape it, if we want to solve it. We must take into consideration constant paradoxes that arise out of it. Sometimes we go crazy, sometimes we are confused and there are also many moments of pain. But sometimes we make unexpected creative moves which enable us to break out of the bind.¹⁷

G24: (remains silent)

M25: (waits a little bit and then continues) This reminds me of a Zen master who was invited to give a lecture about the essentials of meditation and enlightenment. He came onto the stage, and then sat in the lotus position in silence for an hour and a half. Then he made a bow and left the stage. Some people in the audience were enthusiastic, deeply moved about his performance but others were dissatisfied because they were convinced that he was making fool of them.

G25: (remains silent)

M26: (waits a little bit and then continues) There can be no single correct interpretation of such an event. Every person in that audience created their own meaning out of that silence and of the whole situation. One could for example say that the master created a paradox or counter-paradox, while another would claim that it was total nonsense, making fools of the audience etc. The meaning is in the interpretation and the interpretation is the meaning. With this may come a shock of recognition, a sense of becoming free from a double bind situation. This is, of course, the goal of some therapeutic ...

(Waits a little bit more and then continues) Being silent or talking can be right or wrong. You never know, it depends on the context. Because in both cases, keeping silent or talking, you can never express directly or indirectly what the essence is, what is *it*. We can't find the final description of what it means to boil an egg or to be enlightened. There is no *essence* unless you believe there is and make it, construct it.

G26: (remains silent)

M27: (waits a little bit and then continues) I like very much what Bateson said: »Great teachers and therapists avoid all direct attempts to influence the action of others and instead try to provide the settings or contexts in which some (usually imperfectly specified) change can occur.«¹⁸

¹⁵ Bateson, G. 1972: 454–471.

¹⁶ Maturana, H. & Varela, F. 1988.

¹⁷ Možina, M. 2010b: 67–96.

¹⁸ Bateson, G. 1991: 254.

G27: (remains silent)

M28: Why are you silent? Don't you want to add something more? It seemed to me that our dialogue was going well. Will you not continue?

G28: I was adding to our conversation, with silence ... with *not* saying something... And I would like to keep it that way for some moments more, but you can say more if you want ... We've been trying so hard to make your and my understanding of Bateson as clear as possible and to grasp in general what understanding is all about that I got a little bit tired ...

M29: OK, I can keep quiet for some minutes, no problem ... I was just wondering if perhaps something was wrong when you suddenly stopped talking. That perhaps you didn't like what I said about the essence or that perhaps you didn't like it when I interrupted you in the middle of a sentence which is not generally a habit of mine.

G29: (remains silent)

M30: (waits a little bit and then continues) I am sorry. I got a little bit too enthusiastic, overwhelmed with so many thoughts, so many associations with ideas that started to blossom. It was very stimulating and enlivening. In most of our conversations I am the one who mainly listens because you were my teacher and I still experience you as someone who knows better and more than me. This time it seemed to me that we were cooperating in the dialogue more equally so that I felt a sort of liberation through moments of clarity and new insights.

G30: No, I was not disturbed with your interruption. I also enjoyed very much how our dialogue unfolded. It was a pleasant surprise *how* we shared our understandings. I must say that I was a little bit tired when we started because of a heavy work load during last few days. I was even thinking of postponing our meeting but then I became more and more absorbed in the flow of our conversation. As many times before I admired your ability for rigorous thinking, your persistence in developing the kind of epistemology that Bateson proposed.

M31: I am glad that nothing was wrong.

G31: Let's talk a little bit more about what happened on the relationship level. It is interesting how quickly you became insecure when I stayed silent and one part of you started to ask if something was wrong while I on the other hand was quiet because I felt good. I was full of creative ideas and enjoyed the pleasant atmosphere that developed between us. Although we started off saying how we don't want to judge about right or wrong understanding and that our emphasis is not on who knows more or better, this was exactly what happened on the relationship level. My short silence, which was not in any way meant as something bad, instantly triggered your doubts about your understanding and about our relationship. For me it is precious that you didn't behave as if nothing

happened, but that you checked, what is happening between us on the relationship level. This small event is a clear illustration how relevant Bateson's warning is when he emphasised how easy it is to fall into negative double binds if we can't reflect on our relationships and contexts in which the contents of our conversations evolve. And how for the relationship the non-verbal level is crucial, isn't it?

M32: I agree. I can also see now how this small misunderstanding connected to your silence reflects the history of our relationship and the roles we played. I remember how we started our collaboration in 1985 and how for many years you were my main teacher. You introduced me to Bateson's work as well. As a beginner in the psychotherapy field I experienced you as the outstanding expert, teacher and authority. Slowly, over the years, our cooperation and relationship started to become more equal in the sense of professional competence. But you are 21 years older than me and I still admire your incredible knowledge, experience and wisdom. I still take over spontaneously and easily what Bateson called the »complementary role« in our relationship, so that you are more in the front, more assertive, talkative, fostering, you exhibit more, while I am more submissive and admiring.

And I still feel a little bit insecure when we shift our positions in our conversation, when you are listening and I am talking. I start to worry if perhaps my understanding will not interest you and that you will be bored. One part of me doubts that you could learn anything from my experiences and understanding. And especially I have doubts whenever you express admiration of my professional skills and personal qualities. I can't really believe that you are sincere, and that you are doing it more out of politeness.

G32: I am sorry if you experienced it in such a way, because my admiration was and is sincere.

* * *

G33: I agree that if we take Bateson's frame of understanding psychotherapy, there is no separation between clinical practice, theory and research. Theory is practical and practice is constant research. This facilitates permanent learning and change, not only about what we as therapists do but also who we are and how are we developing as human beings together with our clients in the environment in which we are embedded.

M34: For me a clear example of Bateson's modelling how practice, theory and research can intertwine is his work with schizophrenic clients in the Palo Alto project. In his writings, not only about this project but also throughout all of his career, he tried to make transparent how his scientific journey wasn't only intellectual but also ontological. He pointed out that for the development of

epistemology his proposed thinking is not enough, but requires the transition from the habitual way of knowing including new modes of deciding, acting and a new quality of being.

For example, I like very much the story about how he communicated with the client who was repeatedly saying, »I am an end table made of Manzanita wood.«¹⁹ For me this story is touching because it shows how Bateson was not only a genius in his research but also accessible and engaged as a person, a sensitive and empathic human being.

The client was refusing food and on the psychiatric ward they wanted to force-feed him. Bateson was searching for an alternative solution and wondered if the client might respond differently if he were in a different context. So he arranged to take the client to visit his parents and on the way they could stop in a restaurant:

»When the waitress presented the menu, Bateson ordered ham and eggs. His client then said that he would like ham and eggs and toast. When the food arrived, Bateson ate everything but his toast. The client, after staring at Bateson's toast, said that he would like to eat it. He then proceeded to devour all of the remaining food, including his own meal. After a second cup of coffee, he leaned back and said, 'Manzanita [man's an eater]. If the circumstances were resolved, he would [wood].'«

After this exchange Bateson asked the client what was wrong with the psychiatric treatment he was receiving. The client replied: »A contrivance to change the colour of a man's eye to please a psychologist is too much. And you're all psychologists, though some of you turn and become medical doctors for that part of you which hurts. Never mind thinking of the man who is so sick he has to munch on his own.«

G34: This story is really inspiring and there are many more like it. So it is not surprising that many people, who experienced Bateson in his interactions with psychiatric clients, saw him as being a very talented therapist. There is an impressive beauty in the art of communication between Bateson and the client. One can feel the openness and vulnerability in the moment of meeting between the two. Bateson's sensibility for the context and for the intricacies of metaphoric communication, goes far beyond the usual range of therapeutic interaction. One can only wonder, how many times we miss the opportunity to interact with our clients in a similar way.

M35: When I read this story I get confused and amazed: How could he do it?

How is it possible to learn to interact in such a way? How deep should the understanding of human relationships and communication be that the development of such sensibility is possible?

G35: Bateson developed the concept »double bind« to help us to understand the patterns of interactions of people who are labelled as »schizophrenic«. And he extended his double bind theory to the description of other »transcontextual syndromes«²⁰ and related behavioural patterns, such as humour, art, poetry, religion etc.

M36: Because since the 1950's up until today regarding the exaggerated pathologization and medicalisation of the phenomena which we call »schizophrenia« nothing much has changed, his contribution to the theory of schizophrenia is still very precious but unfortunately not well understood and mostly forgotten.

G36: Yes, I agree. In this particular »Manzanita case« and in similar well documented cases with the help of understanding, which could be called *second-order understanding* or *transcontextual understanding*, Bateson has shown how it is possible to break the double bind pattern and how psychotherapy could contribute to the experiences of *positive* double binds.

M37: That here we have an example of a positive double bind is confirmed also with what happened afterwards. Later that same year in 1957 the »Manzanita client« said: "Bateson, you want me to come and live in your world. I lived in it from 1920 to 1943, and I don't like it." The client was born in 1920 and hospitalised in 1943.

G37: Is it possible after such a statement to see the communication and behaviour of this client as pathological? His »autistic« behaviour can be understood from an entirely new perspective, as a rebellion against the »normal« world. Unfortunately, I suppose that if this client were still alive today, taking in consideration the present world situation his revolt would be even more reasonable.

M38: I am afraid you are right. Perhaps both of us who are trying to stay included in what is considered to be the »normal« world are crazier than the Manzanita client. What brings me a little bit of solace is that from day to day I can enjoy being in dialogue with my »sick« and »crazy« clients in my psychotherapeutic and psychiatric practice. They help me to break the double binds of my »normal« life. Though we can't change much in the face of the present escalation of the world's ecological, population, economic, political, ethical and other problems which threaten the survival of humanity on our planet, they are at least enabling me to stop for a moment, and to reflect on the absurdity of the »development«, which is propagated by the main »normal« stream.

Bateson has helped me to recognise that the experiences of psychotic and

19 Keeney, B. 1983: 174-175.

20 Bateson, G. 1972: 273.

other »psychopathological« symptoms and syndromes can be a »pass-way, through to other sorts of knowledge of our own humanity, of what it is to be a human being, what it is to think, to write, to make words ...«²¹ And that »it is one thing to see the symptom as a part of a defense mechanism; it is quite another to conceive that the body or the mind contains, in some form, such wisdom that it can create that *attack* upon itself that will lead to a later resolution of the pathology.«²²

G38: The same holds true for me. He helped me to reframe the whole field of »psychopathology« and to recognise how the theory of psychiatry and psychotherapy can produce psychopathology²³ and how the epistemology proposed by Bateson can be corrective for the terrible mess that we, psychotherapists and psychiatrists, are producing when we reify our diagnostic labels. He helped me to direct my psychotherapeutic practice in the direction of justice, love and wisdom²⁴.

In my approach to psychotherapy which I called »dialogotherapy«²⁵ I nurtured stories and metaphors instead of diagnostic categories. I try to establish direct contact with clients as much as possible so that together we co-create stories and metaphors which help them to recover, live ethically and keep hoping. Instead of breaking them down into small pieces by diagnosing them I am trying to recover a sense of wholeness by bestowing *innocence*.

This innocence is not naiveté but it locates us within our ecology, within our stories. It does not give us a place somewhere outside where we can stand with camera in hand to photograph the whole thing or even a part of it. This innocence encloses us in the sense of the whole and shows us where we are enclosed within the ecology. From this we can move to suggest that it is not we who speak our story but the story speaks through us – it is the theory acting through its practitioners and it is the dance that dances through the dancers. The metaphor is kinetic rather than cinematic. The importance of movement, rhythm and time are paramount. The innocence that restores the sense of wholeness is the beginning of wisdom and wisdom is an understanding of relations as ecological whether the relationship is between a person, group, forest or an even larger ecology. For me the art of interaction that is described in the Manzanita case bestows on us the flavour of what innocence is about.

M39: I can taste the connection between your understanding of innocence and

Bateson's concepts of »grace«²⁶, »aesthetic sensibility«²⁷, »aesthetic understanding«²⁸ and »aesthetic engagement«²⁹. The problem of grace was for him fundamentally a problem of *integration* of the diverse parts of mind, for example how to integrate multiple levels of which one extreme is called »consciousness« and the other »unconsciousness« or how to integrate Blaise Pascal's »reasons of heart« with the »reasons of the reason«. And we can continue with a list of all kinds of dualisms, for which Bateson has shown how the integration, reconnection or enabling wholeness can be the big, lifelong intellectual and personal challenge. For example, the integration of »mind« and »matter«, »conscious purpose« and »nature«, »rigour« and »imagination«, »pattern« and »quantity«, »feedback« and »calibration«, »form« and »function«,³⁰ and so on.

G39: I would add the integration of aesthetics and ethics. If research and therapeutic practice don't have an aesthetic dimension, they lose all other dimensions. Without an aesthetic dimension they become infertile, trees without fruits or as water running from a broken tap, too polluted to be drinkable. Bateson constantly tried to contribute to the elegance of the process of scientific thinking and practical research. And for beautiful to stay beautiful, it has to reveal itself ethically.

M40: For me reading his lectures or essays is a never ending adventure, full of surprises, shocks, confusions and refreshing »aha« moments when some insight gets deeper and wider. It is not only the content but the art of his writing, not only what but how he presented his ideas, which demonstrates the high level of integration. Perhaps I could call it *second-order integration* where the content and the process of writing (or reading) constantly oscillate in a double bind pattern. He is continually inviting us to join him on a sort of children's swing, where playfulness and rigour can meet and melt for the nurturing of justice, love and wisdom. Perhaps this can explain why I can read his texts over and over again and they remain fresh, exciting, inspiring, like drinking from a spring of living water.

G40: It's the same for me. I always find reading Bateson's texts fresh and refreshing, because it is not only an intellectual challenge but above all an invitation to test the faults of integration. For example, the principle of justice is always one of integration or inclusion, of making a place for all minorities, of unity, and of minimising suffering and eschewing torture, cruelty and violence.

21 Berger, M. 1978: 191.

22 Bateson, G. (ed.) 1974: xii.

23 Barnes, G. 2002.

24 Barnes, G. 1993.

25 Barnes, G. 2008: 25–60.

26 Bateson, G. 1972: 128–152.

27 Možina, M. 2019: 7–23; Tramonti, F. 2019: 141–151.

28 Keeney, B. 1983: 138–142.

29 Charlton, N. G. 2008: 141.

30 Bateson, G. 1985: 237.

A big challenge surrounding integration is for me the evolution of love. I understand love as the emotion or feeling that defines acceptance of the self and the other as legitimate. A prerequisite for acceptance of the self is the acceptance by others in a discourse and through participation freely in the discourse. This idea underpins all psychotherapy. Love makes participation possible by overcoming the dualism of subject and object. Love overcomes effectively the oscillation between the part and the whole through wisdom. This wisdom unites subject and object and differentiates the parts of the circuits from the whole while seeing the parts participating in the whole.

Love keeps the dance going. Without justice it does not ask about the fairness or unfairness of the dance. Love united with justice brings in a creativity that may increase the complexity of the dance or invent a new one. Love informed by wisdom sees the systematic nature of the dance.

M41: So, let's close our dialogue with a new beginning, with a question which Bateson asked many times: Are we wise?³¹

G41: And I would add: Are we innocent and graceful, loving and just?

3.

Epilogue

By presenting our dialogues as an exemplary metalogue, we propose that metalogues could be a valuable didactic way for promoting epistemological and constructivist teaching and learning, not only for psychotherapists, but for all professionals who need better understanding of their understanding. Our proposal is also meant as an encouragement for contemporary constructivist thinkers to continue to reflect on Bateson's contribution to the foundation and evolution of constructivism.

After Graham Barnes passed away on 9th of August 2020, in Slovenia and Croatia we are continuing to work on the project of second-order psychotherapy that he started.

³¹ Ibid.: 239.

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