



Relating Systems Thinking and Design
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Redefining Stability

#NewMacy ACT I

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Royal Roads University | Rochester Institute of Technology | Kingston University | Rutgers University—Newark | Zhejiang University | Independent | University of Illinois Chicago | Independent | Carnegie Mellon University | University of Illinois Chicago | Indiana University East | Rochester Institute of Technology | Fielding Graduate University | MSU Museum / CoLab Studio | Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University

This introductory session provided a contextual framing for #NewMacy and the #NewMacy “Acts” at RSD11. We began with an overview of #NewMacy — its emergence in 2020, the principles for action that evolved, and our current activities. We then moved forward by looking back to an excerpt of the now infamous interview of Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead by Stewart Brand. By performing this historical piece, we invoked participants from the original Macy Meetings of the 1940s and 50s to establish our lineage with those also committed to a second-order cybernetic epistemology. Next, we explained our construction of *ontogenetic resilience* as a framework for approaching today’s wicked challenges and a framework for the #NewMacy activities at RSD11. Act I closed with a Batesonian metalogue that provided a conceptual foundation and instruction for the Act II Studios.

KEYWORDS: pandemics, wicked challenges, cybernetics, second-order cybernetics, systemic change, ontological security, conversation, ontogenetic resilience, recursive feedback

RSD TOPIC(S): Methods & Methodology, Socioecological Design, Sociotechnical System



#NewMacy | Conversations for Action¹

Reflection

Setting a contextual framing for #NewMacy and the #NewMacy ACT II Studios and ACT III at RSD11, this session began with an overview of #NewMacy, its emergence in 2020, the principles for action that evolved, and our current activities. We then moved forward by looking back to an excerpt of the now infamous interview of Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead by Stewart Brand (Brand, Mead, and Bateson 1976; 1986). Performing this historical piece, Larry Richards as Gregory Bateson, Goran Matic as Stewart Brand, and Eve Pinsker as Margaret Mead invoked the original Macy Meetings of the 1940s and 50s and a way of questioning indicative of second-order cybernetic epistemology (Pias 2016).

¹ <https://newmacy.pubpub.org/>

Next, we explained our construction of *ontogenetic resilience* as a framework for approaching today's wicked challenges *and* a framework for the #NewMacy activities at RSD11. To survive in a changing world, we must embrace *resilience* in lieu of security, interpreted as constancy. Hence we substitute ontogenetic resilience² as our framing intention — and cybernetics as key³ (Salvaggio, 2022; Westermann, 2022).

We ended Act I with a Batesonian metalogue that provided conceptual foundation and instruction for the Act II Studios⁴ taking place throughout Friday and Saturday.

Metalogue

Introduction to Metalogue

Kate: A metalogue is a form of conversation created by Gregory Bateson and developed by Mary Catherine Bateson in which the process and structure of the conversation as a whole parallel the subject (Bateson [1972] 1987; Bateson and Bateson [1987] 1988). We will use a metalogue to introduce the six *Studios* that will occur over the course of the next two days. Bateson famously used the figure of his then-young daughter, Mary Catherine, as his partner in these metalogues, a casting that allowed for the retainment of childhood wonderment and parental affection in conversation. Here, we re-imagine this relationship as one of Mother-Son.

Studio Metalogue

Fred: Mom, what's a Studio?

Kate: A Studio is an event during which ideas emerge through action. It draws its concept from the studio space, where people hold conversations with the self and others through a variety of forms and materials.

² <https://newmacy.pubpub.org/pub/ontogenetic-resilience>

³ <https://newmacy.pubpub.org/pub/behaviour-of>

⁴ <https://rdsymposium.org/newmacy-act-ii-studios/>

Fred: What does the studio space look like? What does it sound like? What does it smell like?

Kate: It can be a big or small room, it can hold painting easels, video cameras, and musical instruments, it can smell like turpentine or wood or metal, it can sound very quiet or sound like violins coming into tune, and it can be a public or a private space ...

Fred: When is it public and when is it private?

Kate: Good, the question of privacy in the studio is an interesting one. Studios are spaces where people devise and construct ideas, where they create ... sometimes people want the first or subsequent versions of their creation to be private.

Fred: Like when I'm writing a poem or composing a song in my room, and I don't want anyone to see or hear it yet, so I keep the door closed?

Kate: Yes, like that.

Fred: But, actually, wouldn't it be interesting if people *could* see or hear me while I was writing the poem or composing the song, and the poem and song before I finish it?

Kate: Also, yes. And this is why the studio is a very intriguing space – it is where one can witness process.

Fred: Process?

Kate: Yes, process – where ideas and things are *becoming*.

Fred: By witnessing, can you become part of the process and participate in bringing something forth?

Kate: That's right.

Fred: (Laughing) Did people sneak into studios?

Kate: Well, the studio owners began to invite others in. Sometimes these became events called salons and occurred in people's homes. Sometimes studios were held in public spaces like taverns or coffee shops. They can happen anywhere.

Fred: BUT WAIT—It might be uncomfortable for other people to see my process as I'm working on something.

Kate: True, but that's the fun of it! We might think of making processes public as prototyping – sharing our experimentation, exploration, and play with ideas and the forms that they take.

Fred: Aren't I doing this now by walking into your studio while you are preparing for what the studios will do?

Kate: Yes. You found me trying to work out how I would explain what a studio is. I did—by prototyping my explanation with you. Taking advantage of your visit!

Fred: I think it could use some work.

Kate: You do? What kind of work?

Fred: Well, you've used words, but I might also like to see pictures, or maybe hear some music, or something else I'm not thinking of yet ...

Kate: What you're considering now is what many of these studios will address – how we exchange ideas in conversation, the possibilities for expression, the ways in which information is shared and transformed among humans, animals, plants, and machines ...

Fred: And create new prototypes. And maybe even new processes

Kate: Exactly. So that our conversation is always-expanding.

Fred: Will it be uncomfortable? I think I know what you're going to say.

Kate: (Laughs) Yes, you probably do, and that is – I hope so! But some discomfort allows us to adapt, to grow resilient, to *become* in wonderful ways – and we experience joy in doing so.

Fred: I think I'd like to go to a studio.

Kate: Good! Let me expand our conversation to another person so that you can learn more about that.

Fred: What a nice surprise! I am so glad you had your door open. I like studios with open doors. What person?

Kate: Paul! Paul, would you tell us about the #NewMacy studios on Friday and Saturday?

References

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