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Westermann, Claudia, Bardakos, Ioannis, Salvaggio, Eryk, Lombardi, Jude and Richards, Larry

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#NewMacy Studio in Sympoiesis

Claudia Westermann, Ioannis Bardakos, Eryk Salvaggio, Jude Lombardi, and Larry Richards

Sympoiesis, a term coined by Beth Dempster and further developed by Donna Haraway, works as a conceptual remedy against misappropriations of autopoiesis. Replacing the prefix auto- with syn- emphasises interdependence. Sympoiesis, one could say, is what the concept of autopoiesis needs to become when the observation moves from the molecular domain to the domain of living beings. Sympoiesis emphasises the interdependence of living beings and other living beings, environments, things, concepts, and ideas.

As Larry Richards has outlined, the making of something new – the process of poiesis – requires the suspension of synchronicity. In our Studio, asynchronicity will create the necessary condition for engendering the collision of two distinct phenomenal and logical domains – the domain of relations and the domain of dynamics – and affirm sympoiesis as a cybernetic concept. The *#NewMacy Studio in Sympoiesis* will be an exercise in the suspension of clock time.

KEYWORDS: second-order cybernetics, sympoiesis, autopoiesis, anticommunication, asynchronicity

RSD TOPIC(S): Methods & Methodology, Society & Culture, Sociotechnical Systems

Studio introduction and overview

Figuring prominently in the cybernetics literature, the term autopoiesis emphasises a living cell's dependence on its biophysical constitution for its development and the interpretation of events in its environment. Self-reproduction is characteristic of this process. Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela coined the term autopoiesis to capture and communicate that creation and self-referentiality, a form of autonomy, is fundamental to biological life (Maturana & Varela, 1980; Maturana, 2002). Since the concept's invention, there has been an ongoing discussion of whether autopoiesis is a process that defines not only the individual cell but also multi-cellular organisms and even societies. Maturana rejected the transferability of the concept of autopoiesis, limiting it to the molecular domain (Maturana, 2002, p. 8; see also Whitaker, 2022, p. 126).

Nevertheless, autopoiesis has been appropriated in various disciplines, sometimes far removed from biology. The concept's decontextualisation has led to misappropriations. Stripped of the important idea of structural coupling, for example, autopoiesis appears to prioritise solipsistic entities that incorporate the idea of dynamics but not the idea of environmental embeddedness – both of which are inherent in the concept of autopoiesis (see Maturana, 2002, pp. 15-17). The result, in this case, is a Cartesian entity looping onto itself, detached from its world.

Sympoiesis, a term devised by Beth Dempster and further developed by Donna Haraway, works as a conceptual remedy against misappropriations of autopoiesis (Dempster, 1998; Dempster, 2000; Haraway, 2016). Replacing the prefix auto- with syn- emphasises interdependence. Sympoiesis, one could say, is what the concept of autopoiesis needs to become when the observation moves from the molecular domain to the domain of living beings. Sympoiesis emphasises the interdependence of living beings and other living beings, environments, things, concepts, and ideas.

Sympoiesis is a simple word; it means 'making-with.' Nothing makes itself; nothing is really autopoietic or self-organizing. In the words of the Inupiat computer 'world game,' earthlings are never alone. That is the radical implication of sympoiesis.

Sympoiesis is a word proper to complex, dynamic, responsive, situated, historical systems. It is a word for worlding-with, in company. Sympoiesis enfolds autopoiesis and generatively unfurls and extends it. (Haraway, 2016, p. 58)

Sympoiesis emergences in the dynamic entanglements of everyone and everything with everyone and everything. The *#NewMacy Studio in Sympoiesis* will be an exercise in making these entanglements present. We suggest a simple experimental setup. It involves introducing a few more constraints.

As Larry Richards, in reference to Herbert Brün, has outlined, the making of something new – the process of poiesis – requires the suspension of synchronicity (Richards, 2010, p. 12; Brün, 1972). In our Studio, asynchronicity will create the necessary condition for engendering the collision of two distinct phenomenal and logical domains – the domain of relations and the domain of dynamics – and affirm sympoiesis as a cybernetic concept (Richards, 2010, pp. 4–5). We will suspend the concept that has ensured, since the Industrial Revolution, the efficiency of life (see Ramirez, 2020, p. 5). The *#NewMacy Studio in Sympoiesis* will be an exercise in the suspension of clock time.

The Studio

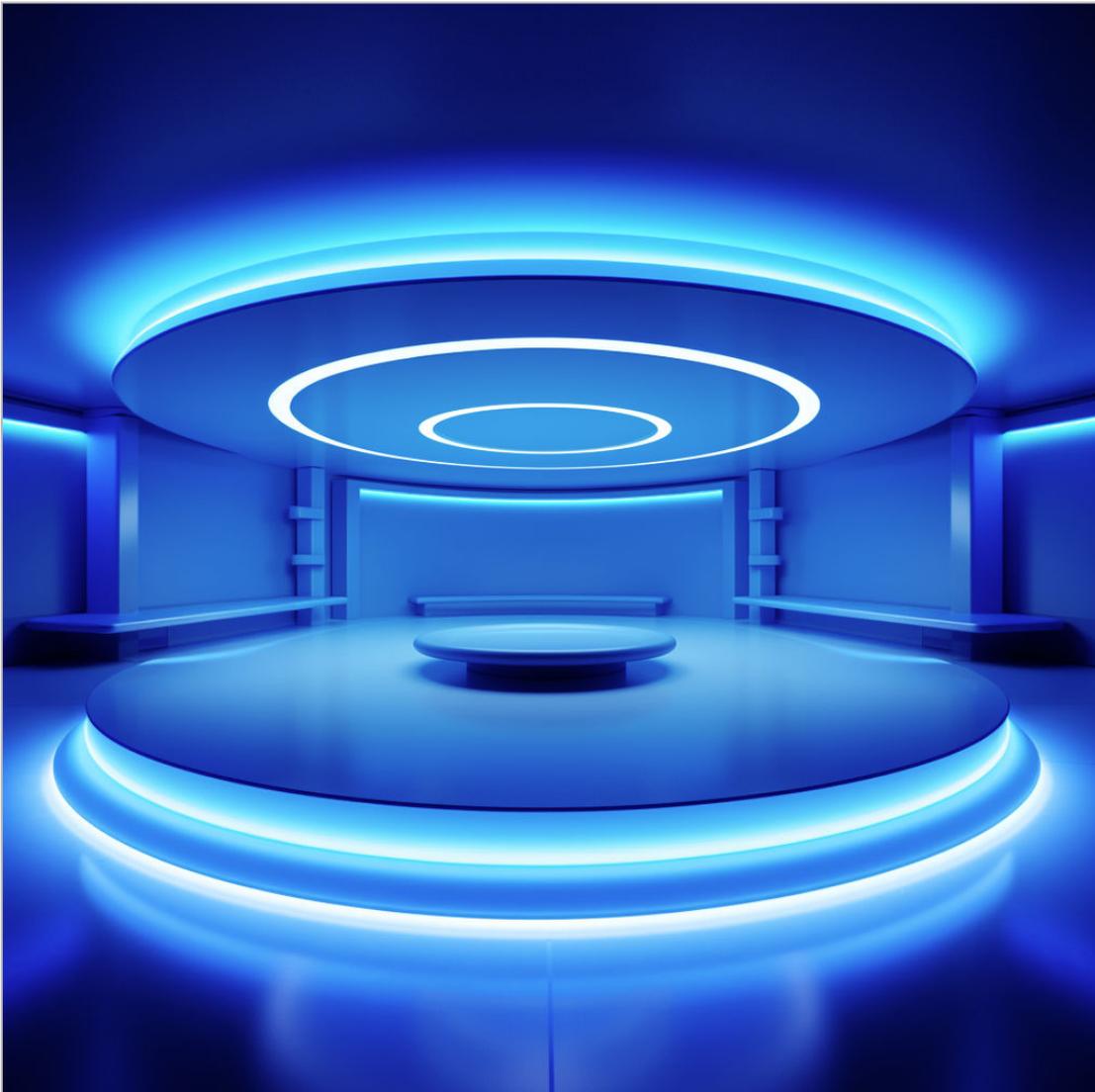
Be advised, entering *#NewMacy Studio* lands is not entirely free. There is one obstruction. You have to bring with your virtual self one object that can suspend clock time. Choose wisely. Objects that suspend clock time may be related to a story, an anecdote or an idea that incorporates cybernetics.

Here are some examples:

- **A witch's mask**, marking supernatural transformation in performative action and leading to Gregory Bateson's observations of autocosmic play interpreted as identity performance.
- **A fragrant clock** (香印), unlike the clocks we use to synchronize, these clocks initiate states of lingering; they fill the air with scent.

An object that suspends clock time is more than an object. It is the initiation of a new way of seeing, feeling, touching, observing—in short, being.

During the studio, we listen to each object's story and ask how the object performs to suspend clock time. We ask how this way of acting can possibly be translated into new objects. If this is confusing, please note that virtual lands do not require physical objects. Stories of objects will do! However, you should be prepared to tell the stories of your object. We weave your objects and your stories into other objects and stories to make new objects, new uses, and new ways of being.



#NewMacy Studio space

Technicalities

The #NewMacy Studio in Sympoiesis takes place on the [Spatial](#) platform. Your device should have a camera, a microphone, and audio output. A link to the #NewMacy Studio space is provided.

No prior knowledge of the Spatial platform is required. We aim to permit participants who do not want to be in VR to join via Zoom and provide an update on how to join.

Agenda for a 90 minutes studio

- Introduction to the Studio and the Spatial platform (~15 minutes)
- Conversations on sympoiesis facilitated by objects suspending clock time (~45 minutes)
- Designing new objects through a process of re-composition (~30 minutes)

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Authors

Claudia Westermann, PhD, Xi-an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, <https://www.litra-design.com>, claudia.westermann@xjtlu.edu.cn

Ioannis Bardakos, Shanghai Institute of Visual Arts, Paris 8 University and Athens School of Fine Arts, <https://www.johnbardakos.com>, jbardakos@gmail.com

Eryk Salvaggio, Rochester Institute of Technology, <https://www.cyberneticforests.com>, eryk.salvaggio@gmail.com

Jude Lombardi, PhD, <https://judelombardi.us>, jlombardi@jlombardi.net

Larry Richards, PhD, Indiana University East, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Larry_Richards, laudrich@iue.edu