

Nora Bateson

Guest=Editor's Introduction

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

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GUEST-EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

“The time has come
The walrus said
To talk of many things:
Of shoes – and ships-
And sealing wax-
Of cabbages and kings-
And why the sea is boiling hot-
And whether pigs have wings.”
Lewis Carroll, *Alice in Wonderland*

Time has come and gone, and sits now at the window – watching. When I was a child I sat at tables of concerned and brilliant people who discussed the fate of the world with great passion. It was the early 1970's and publications were springing around the globe to announce the need to change the way humanity was living with each other and the biosphere. The radical revolutionaries were penning beautiful texts on systems theory, cybernetics, ecology, new forms of education, steady state economics, and exploratory versions of non-violent democracies. It was quite clear at my dinner table in 1976 that there were a few basic steps to be taken immediately to save mankind and the planet. They were: be respectful to all cultures, save the ecology, offer equal opportunity to all, resist runaway capitalism, and stop building nuclear weapons. More than 40 years later, whatever measures have been taken, no matter how well intended, we must admit that they have not been enough. While we may be ready now to embrace some of the criteria for survival from the mid-seventies – it is no longer the seventies. While still viable, these criteria appear quaint and insufficient now. Fixing economies, making civil rights laws, or developing sustainable architecture seems now to have been merely a form of prolongation of the epistemology that defaults to exploitation. Incremental change, it would appear, was an idea that ate decades. So, from this beginning point, (which is really a middle point), we sit today, with father time, by the window, watching.

I will not mention an end point. There is no indication that there has ever been any leverage in the threat of apocalypse, and anyway, complex systems are not linear; this much is basic. The moment that we share now, here, today, reaches both backward and forward in human experience within the biosphere. In these pages we are rolling up our sleeves, getting dirtier, braver, and more anxious as we ask our questions. The stakes are higher now. Will our conversations, our contributions, our combined discoveries and our dedication be worthwhile? In this group, in this publication, there is history that is dripping with poetic connection to a possible future beyond the ubiquitous epistemological default to exploitation. Generations of Bateson ideas are folding here, fidgeting and fumbling toward the warm hands of the future's doers, makers, thinkers and beautifiers.

Knitting history to future is an evolutionary poetry that is precarious, and edges tragedy with a wry smile. This text is a pause. This is a stepping back from the manic doing and changing that we may feel the impulse to engage in to "save the planet". Here our essays are studies of the saturation of patterns that form and inform the "stuckness". There are mechanistic metaphors whispering constantly into the cultural zeitgeist of "solutions". Those parts and wholes metaphors infect the process of meeting and responding to complex problems with reductionist habits – habits that are not easy to break.

The excuse that to survive we must all take part in the socio-economic systems that are going to kill us is what my father, Gregory Bateson, called a double bind. Knowing that the way we are living is actually destroying not only our health but that of future generations, but doing it anyway, is very nearly a definition of addiction. These are a couple of theories and processes that we are dipping into in these essays. Another concept we are lifting into the lexicon is "transcontextual description". Transcontextual is more than transdisciplinary, it is looking into the multiple contexts that any complex system exists within. And doing so with the understanding that the vitality of any system is not locatable in any particular context but rather in the relationships between them. Life after all, does not happen in disciplines, it happens in contexts. To meet complexity it takes complexity. Illustrating transcontextual processes is a way to better recognize interdependency.

These are subjects, questions and processes that are the fruits of three years of the International Bateson Institute inquiry. We as a group have been grappling and playing with creating an approach to research that generates information about the contextual relationships of our studies. We call this in-

formation Warm Data. We started out asking about how systems get unstuck, and this course of research brought us deeply into subjects that Gregory had been alerting his students to for decades, addiction and double binds.

Now more than ever these topics are necessary to open. It is with honor and gratitude that we of the International Bateson Institute, along with a few selected Bateson scholars from around the world have been gathered by Lech Witkowski and the Polish Bateson Research Group to explore a context of mutual learning (Symmathesy), about where and how to better form the questions that will bring the more elegant inquiry into view. We do this with hearts open, soft to the sensitizing necessary, and minds nimble and rigorous, ready to meet the intensity of the hours of theoretical exploration necessary. As we sit with time now, not on our side, but by our side, we remind each other to steer clear of habituated comfort zones that make lazy learners of us. Evolution, after all is a harsh nanny, not tolerant of excuses and feeble justifications for not making change.