

A Her-story of (Cybernetics)

Jude Lombardi

I was attracted to cybernetics by its ideas.

One beauty of my cybernetics or (cybernetics) is that it embraces individuality, recognizing at its core that observing is fundamental. For it is I who constructs his or her experiential world and it is I who is responsible for it, (within the constraints that emerge through my living of course.) It is me who constructs *this* story.

My first exposure to cybernetics was in the early 1980s. The state had hired a man (his name I don't remember) to teach people working with "emotionally disturbed" children how to de-escalate behavior without having to put "hands on."

I wanted to explore cybernetics so I went to the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., where I found the book Self-Steering and Cognition in Complex Systems: Toward a New Cybernetics, (1990) edited by Francis Heylighen, Eric Rosseel and F. Demeyere.

I hardly understood a word I read, and yet I was provoked to keep reading. I contacted several of the authors and editors. All of them responded, all were in Europe, some invited me to visit, and so I did. It was during this visit to Europe that I learned about the American Society for Cybernetics (ASC).

My first ASC conference/workshop took place outside Seattle WA, in 1992, on a small island on the Puget Sound. I remember the mountains, only clearly visible on the last morning of the conference. Many of us laughed together about this.

Organized by Rodney Donaldson, this conference was entitled "Language, Emotion, The Social and the Ethical: An In-depth Exploration of the Cybernetics of Herbert Brun and Humberto Maturana." We worked in small and large groups most of the day. There was lots of love, arguing, lecturing, listening, talking, thinking, performing, eating, participating, laughing, and in the evenings, when it was just us and the "help," Brun and Rick Burkhardt played the piano while Paul Pangaro sang. There was lots of dancing.

What resonates most about Brun's presentation is his being love with others while in conflict with them. What a performance. I remember Maturana talking about anticomunication and the possible consequences of our living immersed for 3.5 millions years in languaging -- always in a present -- so, "Your present changes, your past changes, your present changes your future changes." How hopeful.

Two very different "cyberneticians," whose similarities and radical differences converge when doing (cybernetics).