

Lloyd Fell, David Russell & Alan Stewart (eds)
[Seized by Agreement, Swamped by Understanding](#)

Some Reflections Upon Creative Thinking in the Nineties

Is a cybernetic epistemology emerging?

John Graham

As people have had opportunities to encounter different ideas and ways of thinking, many have developed increased awareness of the stories, myths and legends of humankind.

By living in different countries, by exposure to mass media, and by individuals and groups publicising their viewpoints, it is difficult to be or stay unaware of issues such as culture, race, sex, religion, politics and developments in science and technology. It may be that human beings are inherently curious, and naturally explore themselves and whatever is around them.

It is not possible for persons to avoid being patterned and we can conjecture about those patterns which emerge through genetic molecular biology and those patterns which are learned by individual experience and by the ways persons are stimulated or influenced by the people around them.

Is this a time when more people will be intrigued or curious about these patterns? ... about just how varied are the patterns, and which of the patterns are most useful?

Cybernetics is the study of patterns in systems and how the patterns are run or controlled. For human beings, the patterns include feed-forward (i.e. what we expect, intend or hope for) and feed-back (what actually happened, what we actually got - the consequences or outcomes which emerge).

A dilemma for anyone is to discover how to be aware of what we are doing, what we are expecting or intending and what we are actually achieving. In other words, if you know what you are expecting or intending and if you know what outcomes you want, you are in a strong position to assess how you are succeeding.

It is exciting to me that I can consider wonderful experiences in my own life as well as the experiences of others, to expand and enrich my present and future. For example, the colours of the rainbow are temporarily available in certain weather and can be reproduced by holding a spraying hose in particular

positions in relation to the sun. As I look at prisms of crystal glass I can see the same colours in even brighter and more intense forms. So in nature by an interaction of what is to be seen with my visual system, I can bring forth millions of patterns of seeing.

In all our senses, then, we are bringing forth our experiences of sounds and music, of touch, of caresses and comforting feelings as well as an array of marvellous tastes and aromas.

In our conversations, words and sentences evoke ideas which connect to our experience, - almost as if they awaken that aspect of our memory and bring it to our availability. This notion of how we give a reasonable account of our concepts and ideas excited Gregory Bateson, inspiring him to write his book "Mind and Nature, a necessary unity". Words such as "entropy, sacrament, syntax, number, quantity, pattern, linear relation, name, class, relevance, energy, redundancy, force, probability, parts, whole, information, tautology, homologue, mass (either Newtonian or Christian) explanation, description, rule of dimensions, logical type, metaphor, beauty and ugliness," tumble out as Bateson puzzles "how we can know anything?"

This is indeed the notion of wondering and wonderment.

Bateson reminds us that the very word 'animal', comes from 'animus' (endowed with mind and spirit).

There is in the lives and experiences of people an astonishing capacity to know. How is it that there is still beauty in people who at other times seem vulgar, hateful and cruel.

Now we might struggle to know what is "entropy", but we all have ideas about order and disorder. The words for order connect to pattern and organisation and it is virtually inescapable to us that our systems are organised and bring forth order (and sometimes to our chagrin, a feeling of chaos, or at least a loss of control). Some people claim that we can even measure the "order" in what looks like human disorder! Then, there is the experience of people learning something, be it a team game or a band or orchestra or a stage production, when "it all comes together". At such moments we can echo with Bateson "The whole is greater than the sum of the component parts". It seems to me that when we are frustrated, when it looks like we have no choice, that we can wonder "whoever else" in the present or past has been in a similar dilemma.

It is this situation of "being stuck", or of being oppressed and deprived of choice, that has inspired some people to invent a solution. (Necessity is the mother of invention). Every liberation of people (or other living creatures on our planet) is potentially a message to those who are still oppressed (or held back). These are stories of a people "who will not be slaves again".

In the patterns and habits of our life, we can recognise that we can create other ways of being attentive, other ways of speaking, and of explaining things so that we become less oppressive of ourselves and others.

Fundamentally, the author claims that this creative action emerges when we dare to have conversations and reflections and join in the human activities of movement, dance, songs and respectful story-telling. Every sense is exposed to “richness, variety and diversity”. Then we can say “I know something that I didn’t say before”, and we can respect ways that we don’t know yet, but will encounter at some future time. The creative thinking is indeed part of the cybernetical system.

In the 1980’s and nineties, indigenous peoples began to speak and write more widely about the value of their own cultures. Many observers from other cultures appreciated those values and were moved to re-examine even further cultures including what they could find of their own cultures and traditions. This has resulted not only in more diverse displays of traditional arts and crafts, but also encounters by “participation” in the songs and dances of others. Culture has become influential in therapy and is always to be noticed and respected. Individual problem-solving can therefore be seen in appropriate contexts, as well as being blessed by novel and creative solutions available in the culture and traditions of others.

Another emphasis in current writings and presentation by therapists is the attention and awareness of imbalances in power in the life of people with the associated risks of abuse. This relates very much to dangers of dominant cultural ideas being misused by therapists (sometimes inadvertently and out of awareness). Feedback by peer evaluation may allow such practices to change for the better, liberating client and therapists alike.

This liberation involves a major understanding of the use of language (as mentioned earlier). How is this possible?

Words such as “cannot, should, must not or must, have to, obliged to and expected to”, tend to decrease choice, whereas words such as “free to”, “able to”, “interested in” imply the loosening of restriction. Words which encourage people to discover and create effective ways of living by self-confidence and appropriate self-assessment include “appreciate”, “value” and “respect”.

Because living and languaging are forms of doing, language of liberation brings out the notion of life being “a verb”, which always leads to the question, “how do you do that?”, or “what happens to other people to allow them to find solutions?”. The process involves the cybernetics of language as it is “in action”.

Thus consciousness of the cybernetic nature of our lives is itself a stepping stone to effective and more harmonious living. The necessary experiment is to actually think about something differently and to do something differently. We then bring forth changes and can see if they are the changes and outcomes that work best for ourselves and for others.

In the economics of life on earth, we can seek to know more about getting “the biology” into a “saving ecological balance”. Cybernetics is the appropriate descriptive epistemology for the organisation of life at subcellular,

intracellular and intercellular, bodily organ systems, whole body, inter-body and inter-species levels. Indeed, ecology of all of the planet systems is a cybernetic matter.

For the life of each of us, as people, Gregory Bateson has honoured and valued us by his notion of ecology of mind. If in the domain of our social and intertwining organisations on earth we sufficiently respect cybernetic notions, there may yet emerge an expression of the biological basis for and the all-healing emergence of love.