

Cybernetics of Caring / Caring through Cybernetics

As the COVID-19 pandemic spread around the globe, it became evident that there had been a lack of attention to the idea of care. Daily news in many countries was marked by helplessness and emergency decrees. An entire planet seemed to have forgotten what it meant to live. Care emerged as the oblivion of modernity.

Yet writing about care is hardly new. Pre-pandemic theorists of care range from Confucius and Plato, through Carol Gilligan and Nel Noddings, to Michel Foucault and María Puig de la Bellacasa. In cybernetics circles, consider the care implicit in Norbert Wiener's *The Human Use of Human Beings*, or in Humberto Maturana's emphasis on languaging, Ranulph Glanville's on control as enabling, and Annetta Pedretti's on weaving, flowing, and rhythms.

In this workshop we host a participatory inquiry to juxtapose cybernetics and care, positing and probing analogies, distinctions, and involutions. We present this session in fishbowl format, inviting audience members to join us in conversation. This circle begins with two seated participants and an empty chair. Anyone may take an open chair, and seated participants may voluntarily relinquish their chairs. A full circle may be enjoined by indicating or standing silently behind one of the players, who then cedes the chair. After exiting, one may rejoin again later.

Initial propositions and provocations--

A similarity between cybernetics and care is their boundlessness, their participation in the infinite. We are living cybernetics, whether or not we appreciate it. Likewise, we all experience being cared for, which thereby invites reciprocities. Both cybernetics and care begin with the intimacies of proximate relations.

Like cybernetics, care is explicitly transdisciplinary, attracting scholars from across academia. Both defy easy definition or description. Pluralities coexist.

The ethics described by Heinz von Foerster is an ethics of care (or a version thereof). It is an ethics that manifests without becoming explicit. Responsibilities and rewards reside in actions themselves.

A cybernetic politics, one that reflects this ethics, would be a politics of care. Theorizing on a politics of care would be complemented by recent theorizing on cybersystemic governance. A cybernetics of care points to a post-liberal imaginary.