Reflections on a Weekend of Conversation:
Cybernetics and Society, Changing Thinking

Jude Lombardi
Larry Richards

Our intent with this reflective piece is to provide participants in the March 24-26, 2017 gathering in Urbana, Illinois (and perhaps others), with some thoughts from the "conveners" of the event. We suspect that each participant has their own thoughts and concerns, which might contrast sharply with our own. We welcome corrections, additions, differences, conflicts, even contradictions to our report. We are not attempting to replicate either the substance or dynamics of the conversations, only offer our perspectives. Also, it should not be assumed that we (Jude and Larry) necessarily agree with each other on the significance of all the points recorded in this report. We do agree that the weekend had personal value for each of us.

A list of the original parameters for the weekend as sent to invitees is included as Appendix 1, as is an outline of the event (Appendix 2). A list of attendees is also available there (Appendix 3). Our reflections include a summary of participation, some perspectives on the conversations and some thoughts on going forward. Note that the wording of the theme of this gathering has morphed over time!

Summary of Participation

There were 23 people who participated in the gathering (in person) at some point or another. The most in the room at any one time was 22. During most sessions, 20 people were participating, including during the final session on Sunday afternoon. There were 16 hours of being together in an organized way, with more informal talk happening in the two-hour breaks between sessions.

The meals prepared by Susan and one of her colleagues were outstanding. From Susan: "My strategy with the house and food was to make the outside context reliable and pleasurable, so that whatever we were doing inside would be nested by the necessities being taken care of." We think this worked marvelously and was contributive in many ways. Thank you, Susan. [Question: How *does* one massage kale properly?!]

Most attendees were connected to the Urbana-Champaign community somehow, although some travelled from other locales: e.g., New York, Maine, Virginia, Indiana, and Maryland, as well as Chicago. All had varying angles of interest in cybernetics, and in exploring the connection between cybernetics and social change/transformation.

Our overall assessment is that conversations (or, "deep" conversations to distinguish the cybernetic version of conversation from the everyday version) occurred often throughout the weekend, both in the organized sessions and between sessions. In general, we were content with the depth and thoughtfulness of the conversations.

One of our (Jude and Larry) interests was in seeing if a conversation could actually be sustained in a group larger than, say, 8-10 using a modified consensus model (CM). By Sunday afternoon, we observed everyone in the room engaged in a conversation.

Perspectives on the Conversations

There were seven organized sessions throughout the weekend, each conducted differently and with its own flavor.

Session 1 (Friday, 2:00 – 5:00 p.m.): Following brief introductions, Larry gave a short presentation, using a diagram (see Appendix 4), on a possible relationship between cybernetics and social transformation as an initial prompt for the conversations to follow. He focused on cybernetics as a way of thinking (about ways of thinking), and social transformation as requiring a change in the prevailing way of thinking.

Jude then followed Larry's presentation with *her* version of his chart for thinking about "social transformation." She had added video links related to the concepts included in the chart as possible prompts for exploring deep (cybernetic) conversations during the weekend gathering. (See Appendix 5.) As an example, in relation to our "CURRENT" status, Jude discussed video number 8 in which Jerry Brown talks about how Gregory Bateson wrote that millions of people, whole groups of species, and nations would disappear **unless** we dealt with at least one of the three following conditions:

> population growth,
> technological change,
> our occidental ideas about man.

Bateson wrote that he thought man's best chance was to address our occidental ontology and that cybernetics might be our best alternative for doing that.

An **occidental ontology** perpetuates understanding that is "purpose" oriented and "goal" directed, a "purpose" oriented consciousness limits one's perceptions and possibilities. Whereas a **cybernetic ontology** or consciousness perpetuates understanding that is "presence" oriented and "process" directed. (CM is process directed and presence oriented.)

Jude then shared her distinction and definitions for ontology, epistemology and epigenesis, as well as her desire to co-construct, with others, a cybernetic ontology.

"I use the word **ontology** when I wish to speak about a set of explanations for describing a nature of being - including human being - in our experiential worlds. I use the term **epistemology** when describing anyone's constructions for knowing their experiential world nested in their epigenesis. **Epigenesis:** anyone's starting point, beginning with conception, including gestation and living, from birth until this moment — now.

We are interested in co-constructing a **cybernetic ontology** as a transdisciplinary (video 19) way of thinking about ways of *thinking and explaining experiences* nested in cybernetic ideas. So, explanations are not objective, fixed, or ideological but inclusive (observing), dynamic (floating), recursive (circularity), relational (interdependent), and a mystery (We don't know yet). In other words, a cybernetic ontology is technology for generating new insights regarding what we consider common-sensical (video 16a). To do so I must be willing to change my mind. (video 16b)

> "I think that cybernetics is the biggest bite out of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge that mankind has taken in the last 2000 years…. But most of such bites out of the apple have proved to be rather indigestible—usually for cybernetic reasons." – Gregory Bateson, *From Versailles to Cybernetics*

Jude then presented several false statements regarding consensus model that she thought relevant to her epistemology and, she is hoping, a cybernetic ontology (Appendix 6).

It is Jude's premise that, in our current society, consensus model can be used as a structure and process for moving toward the desirable without violence. Most participants in the room were familiar with a consensus model -- but not all.

Jude then invited Danielle to converse with her about consensus modeling as a presence-process-oriented-structure for generating cybernetic conversations.

The group was then invited to experiment *doing* consensus modeling while discussing proposals for the weekend. Danielle had agreed to facilitate this session prior to the meeting. In our opinion she did an excellent job facilitating: it was not easy to do so.

Some of the proposals that emerged included:

- Formulate strategies towards what to do next, after the weekend is over.
- Formulate a cybernetics for social transformation in our presence.
- Conspire together—cognitively and physically (at times).
- Circle back to cybernetics.
- Discuss how to translate this weekend into our communities, and between communities.
- Define terms; explain consensus model as a tool for generating cybernetic conversations.
- Formulate problems.
- Create a shared note-space.
- Advocate for one another.
- Orient people not yet present to the conversations prior to the start of their first session.

Session 2 (Friday, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.): All participants had an opportunity to talk about one or more projects in which they are currently engaged, have heard about, or are imagining, and how these projects relate or could relate to the subject of the gathering. Given the number of people who wanted to talk about their projects, participants were asked to limit their descriptions to five

minutes (if possible). We think it worth noting the variety of projects and the passion expressed by those presenting them. We noticed some emerging cybernetic themes:

- The potential uniqueness of every individual in some environment (intelligence as a relation between an individual, or group of individuals, and the specific situation, not as a property of the individual).
- The desirability of access by all people to the best currently available human knowledge (knowledge as a constructed and ever-changing process of knowing).

The importance of the arts in making decisions, not just science and technology (anti-communication as an input to society).

"I define 'input' as that which produces a change in a system which the system itself could not have generated. An input produces a change in a system which the system alone could not have generated. An 'output' is the generation of an echo of the system. There are nice words for it: 'reflection upon it,' s'critical appraisal,' 'evaluation,' 'exposure' — and you know well that all these words belong to the wherewithal of political action. So the output is the conformist political action which always reaffirms that system in which it emerged; the input is always critical, disturbing, and never heard of — in that system to which it is directed." H. Brün, Presentation to Music Theory 405 Seminar, 1977

Jude: Composing outputs reflect CURRENT society, composing inputs reflect NEW society. CURRENT system shallow, NEW society deep.

- Participatory control of resources; no human is indispensable (control as other than hierarchical and reward-oriented).
- Proliferating ideas through performance and conversation in communities, like a virus (listening for dynamics as well as descriptions/explanations/content).
- Awareness of living in language (alternatives to hierarchy and violence).
- Culture of art-producing vs. consumer-driven values (values and desires as constraints).
- Performance incomplete without conversation; new frameworks needed (cybernetics as making the impossible possible through reconfigurations of resources, constraints, possibilities).
- Responsibility for dynamics (cybernetics as a non-linear way of thinking).
- Social identities as ways of thinking and being (self-awareness as a language of choice).
- Distinguishing the biological domain from the social domain, among others (keeping logical/phenomenal domains separate as a dilemma in problem-solving).
- Mixing logical/phenomenal domains as dangerous, yet essential (awareness of mixing domains as anti-communicative moments).
- Racism as an example of mixing biological and social domains (reduction of participation in society based on biological distinctions).
- The language of needs, necessities and desires/concerns/choice (peace as a need, conflict as a necessity, conversation as an alternative to violence for addressing conflict, generosity as a necessary condition for conversation to emerge without violence).

- The biology of cognition, language and consciousness (caring for the body as a relational rather than physical phenomenon).
- Floating ideologies require suspension of beliefs (the cybernetician—and meta-clown—as a craftsperson in and with time; floating hierarchies without rewards, desires as constraints in an ever-changing present, temporary truths without beliefs).
- The transformation of history (a change in the prevailing way of thinking as accompanied by a transformation of history, with **minimal discontinuity**—i.e., no trace of the transformation is apparent in the new history).

There were certainly more. There was little time for discussion.

Session 3 (Saturday, 10:00 – 12:00 noon): Mark facilitated a conversation using a modified consensus model. A set of notes was prepared by Jacob. (See Appendix 7.) The session started by Jude proposing to show two videos she thought might provoke cybernetic conversations relevant to Friday's dialogue. Both videos were of Herbert Brün. The first was about the importance of generating Desires when wanting a new society. The second was about turning Desires into False Statements (statements currently false, but desired to be the case). The second video included several False Statements that had been presented by Herbert Brün at the 1994 School for Designing a Society in South Dakota (bottom of Appendix 6).

Conversations following the videos wandered a bit, however many of the concepts mentioned in the videos cropped up in conversations throughout the weekend, such as, languaging needs and necessities, transformation with a minimum of discontinuity, the needed transformer, peace and the retardation of decay as needs, the circularity of needs and thus necessities.

A few reflections on the topics of conversation:

- It was hypothesized that the current idea of the corporation depends on a hierarchical way of thinking about organizing and an achievement-oriented way of thinking about motivating that embraces a "myth" of competition. It is based in a rationalistic framework where ends (desires as goals) are separated from means (courses of action without value in themselves), and achievement of goals are rewarded by advancement in the hierarchy and associated perquisites.
- The vocabulary of cybernetics often gets expropriated for corporate (and capitalist) application, resulting in a decay of the language (and of the perceived value of cybernetics). How can inventing new words be a strategy for retarding the decay of the language? How can we prevent the decay of new words, if they catch on at all?
- The idea that the hierarchical way of thinking about organizing complex phenomena/tasks/situations always leads to oppression was questioned. Perhaps what is to be avoided are stable, reward-oriented hierarchies, with the occasional floating hierarchy (without rewards based on position in the hierarchy) can be useful, as a choice. The same question can be asked of desires treated as goals, separated from the means to achieve them, if done with awareness.

- That social transformation can occur without violence implies that the transformation happens with minimal discontinuity—historically, it is recorded as a natural progression rather than a sudden change or crisis, even if crisis might be a contributing factor. This minimizes the perception of loss by those with a vested interest in the status quo, and who have the resources to obstruct the transformation through violence. If the discontinuity is minimal, how do we know a transformation happened?
- In a video, Herbert Brün talked of the need for a "transformer" that would both give all humans access to best currently available human knowledge 24/7 and provide a way for people world-wide to participate in reviewing, updating, modifying, augmenting and changing this knowledge. Such a transformer would need to be able to *accommodate* a change of thinking and a transformation of history; in a way, it would serve as a surrogate for a society. Given that the technology for such an apparatus does not currently exist, this seemed a difficult concept to imagine. In a reflective conversation, we thought perhaps Paul Pangaro's idea regarding a global shift from "an information age" towards a "conversation age," might point us in a useful direction? A "conversation age" suggests technologies that facilitate a generation of insights rather than technologies that send messages, as current technologies do. (video 17)

Session 4 (Saturday, 2:00 – 5:00 p.m.): elizaBeth facilitated this session: The group was given the opportunity to reflect on the gathering so far. Three questions were posed to each participant: 1. Identify something you have experienced that you would like to happen again. 2. Name something that you experienced that you would not like to happen again. 3. State something that has not yet happened that you would like to happen.

The session was initially oriented to the question: Where would participants like to go with their conversations (so far during the weekend) in the context of the current political moment? Some of the ideas included: (See Appendix 8.)

- Explore the distinction between *a* change in a system and a change *of* a system, including the ideas of social transformation (with minimal discontinuity) and of the transformer.
- Articulate (and retard the decay of) the idea of the coordination of a diversity of tactics.
- Describe the dynamics of the current political moment and potential perturbations in and of that dynamics.
- Discuss how, in the current political moment, to address societal problems in denial by most policy-makers (e.g., climate change, population growth, extreme inequality, racism, forms of violence, etc.).
- Navigate the idea of domain changes, including the role of time.
- Generate legitimate questions (questions with no known answers) that could be useful in the current political moment, for example: How would someone labeled a "cybernetician" proceed in a conversation? and, How might someone generate and use alternate "lyrics" to *cybernetish*?
- Consider the distinction between a general (macro, national, global) look at society and a specific (micro, day-to-day) look: How can we do all, simultaneously?

By request from a number of attendees, the group broke up into smaller groups to explore the ideas further (from the perspective of a hypothetical cybernetician). Everyone then reassembled to talk about their conversations.

It was during time in a small group around a discussion on "when is violence," which continued when re-entering the larger group, it occurred to us that deep conversations, cybernetic conversations, conversations that entail conflict and other forms of asynchronicity, are often interpreted as prerequisites to violence in our current society. Hence a needed transformer....

Models for transformations: material, social, cognitive, computational.

Mark: $T=CR^2$ Performance (T=transformation, C=conversation, R=resistance ^{2}=malleable)

"Let's talk about conflict rather than have it?"

"The other is not predicable but orientable."

The larger group then decided to view another video. Jude chose a video she thought relevant to a current conversation regarding control, communication, propaganda and the 2016 election (video 17). In the video, someone suggested that cybernetics could be used for evil, too. Larry later verbalized to Jude that cybernetics could not be used for evil, arguing that, when concepts in cybernetics are expropriated for "evil" uses, the perpetrators are no longer doing cybernetics, as they are not including themselves as thinking, caring observers.

As a side note, Larry offered the following formula for thinking about perturbations in the dynamics of the current political moment, in the light of cybernetics:

1. Identify a potential logical anomaly in the current discourse.
2. Compose a pivot around the anomaly. (The word "pivot" is used in the sense of a pivot in movement, ala, Lisa and Jeff—i.e., an unexpected motion, a shift in frame/phase/plane, an unanticipated discontinuity in thought process, not minimal. Note that while non-violent social transformation must occur with minimal discontinuity, the performance of new ideas needs to accentuate the identified anomalies and the distinctions represented by the new—so that performed pivots can be experienced as surprises, i.e., "aha" experiences.)
3. Perform the pivot → invite conversations.
4. Work to avoid undesirable dynamics. (Give attention to desirable constraints.)

In another side note, Jude offers video 18 as one possible formula for generating social transformations. She also thinks that when consensus modeling is a means for embracing conflict and generating cybernetic conversations *at least* the following elements are necessary: deep listening (deep listening as a way of being.), understanding understanding (any way of knowing),

deep observing (observing one's observing) and **when** one *needs* cybernetic conversations, in order for the desirable to emerge, generosity. (video 3)

Generosity: "Just as the fish is the last to know it lives in water, we seem to be the last to know we live in language and that it is our actions in language that give rise to generosity or its opposite meanness. Generosity is expansiveness. It is freedom from smallness of mind. It is openness to newness, and respect and delight in our difference of understanding because these differences mean the conversation can continue…!" (K. Forsythe)

"There is an undesirable presence—how can one let the present transform itself into a more desirable one? There is always the idea of radical change, radical change takes place in the mind." (video 24 to be added)

Session 5 (Saturday, 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.): The evening session was facilitated by Elizabeth, who walked us through an exercise in problem formulation. Snow took notes (Appendix 9). The exercise consisted of four steps. The first was for everyone who wished to participate to write a problem statement (of personal interest) on a piece of paper. The problem could have emerged from the conversations held so far, or it could be a new problem to insert into the conversations going forward.

In contrast to a desire statement in the form of a false statement we wish was true, it was suggested that the problem statement could take the form of a true statement that we wish was false.

The second step involved passing the problem statements to the person on our left, who was asked to offer one or more responses to the problem statement; responses could take the form of any of a long list of possibilities (a diagram, a reformulation, alternative versions, intentional misunderstandings, etc.). (See Appendix 10 for an image of the whiteboard with a list of some possibilities.)

The third step involved again passing the piece of paper (problem formulation and responses) to the person on our left, who was asked to write three questions about what was on the paper in an attempt to "unfurl the problem further."

After again passing the piece of paper to our left, the fourth step was to offer answers to the questions. The pieces of paper were then passed back to the right, giving everyone who had written on it a chance to read what everyone else had written, ending with the original formulator.

Elizabeth then asked us to break out into groups of two or three and have a conversation about our problem statements, preferably with someone who had not written on the other's piece of paper. From these conversations, each person then formulated a statement or question to share with the group as a whole. One observation included an appreciation of (unintentional)

misunderstandings of others; it was noted the important role than misunderstanding can have as a source of conflict that can trigger and sustain a conversation. There was also a discussion of how conversation can be suppressed or obstructed.

Session 6 (Sunday, 10:00 – 12:00 noon): Keith facilitated and began with a video short from Jude's chart of Herbert Brün talking about: "Why Cybernetics." It could also be titled: When is cybernetics needed? (video 13) It was played twice and people seemed to connect it to the previous videos on social transformation (with minimal discontinuity), desires and false statements including: people speak at least three languages; the language of needs: the language of necessities: the language of desires, concerns and choice.

The consensus model was employed again to determine whether to remain in the large group or break up into smaller groups. There were differing opinions about this. It was pointed out that one of the interests in the weekend was to see if a sustained conversation could be held in a large group (greater than 8-10 people) using a tool like the consensus model. A consensus was reached to do both large group and smaller group conversations during the morning.

Larry then suggested the following modification of the consensus model when applied to the whole group: Since the stack (the list of people waiting to speak) seemed to be getting in the way of the back-and-forth that is characteristic of a conversation among 2-5 participants, the suggestion was to have each person in the stack respond to the conversation that had started prior (or pass to the next person) as though they were a part of the original provocation/conversation, rather than use their turn to unload the thoughts that had accumulated as they waited for their turn. So, someone first makes a statement; the next person in the stack responds to it; then the next person in the stack responds to the previous person as though they are the first person; and, so on…. This creates a back-and-forth, but with different people performing the roles of the conversants (which wouldn't be necessary in a small group). A short time limit for each speaker—say, 2 minutes, was also suggested as a way to help minimize the possibility of monologue. The facilitator would assist in keeping the conversation on track as long as there was interest in the topic at hand, and in moving the conversation in new directions if and when the participants were ready and not doing it themselves.

The conversation in the large group then converged on a common theme: the apparent contradiction in working to improve the current society while wanting a new one. So, the questions to be addressed in the small groups were of the type: What are the implications for social transformation of the contradiction between improving the current system when wanting a new system? Does not improving the current system raise the possibility of a delay in getting a new one? Does improving a system that is undesirable (corrupt) just make it more undesirable (more corrupt, etc.)? A few thoughts were introduced here:

- Conflict can be resolved by a change *in* a system; contradiction requires a change *of* system.

- The closer a system is to "perfection" under its rules of operation, the greater the opportunity for contradiction.
- The contradiction in a "perfect" system will be experienced by the people, not the ruling class for whom the system is perfect. It is up to the people, then, to change the prevailing way of thinking.

After talking in two small groups for a while, one small group joined the other in a conversation on how the current system was approaching perfection at the expense of everyday people, and on what potential contradictions this raised. Could these contradictions be turned into performances to provoke conversations on a new system and its thinking? Could "intentional" changes in the current system be undertaken to alleviate temporarily some aspect of human misery in that system while also being performed as contradictions to the undesirable rules of operation of the current system? When meshing the smaller groups into a large group, participants seemed to follow the guidelines for speaking established earlier in the day without a stack.

Session 7 (Sunday, 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.): Larry facilitated the final session on the topic: What ideas from the weekend, if any, would the group like to disseminate (or does it feel worth disseminating) beyond the current participants? What, if anything, could/should be taken public? The modified consensus model was used to facilitate, although minimal use was made of a written stack on the whiteboard to keep track of a speaker list. As long as there were only two or three people waiting, the facilitator could keep track without the whiteboard. The conversation produced a list of possible activities going forward, some of which are specific and some more general, including:

- Perform conversations in various media and venues: e.g., radio, video, stage, a position paper, an imposition paper, etc.
- Act to retard the decay of the coordination of a diversity of tactics for the perturbation of the dynamics of the current political moment.
- Conduct mutual projects in which the dynamics desired can be practiced.
- Use the language of needs, necessities and desires/concerns/choice to address needs and their necessities beyond the biological.
- Explore the concept of generosity as a necessity for meeting the need of conversation, where generosity implies an openness to change through interactions with others, their ideas and our conflicts.
- Possible social forms of the respondent….
- Reformulate the ideas of strategy and organizing.
- Create places/locations (to conspire, think, converse, perform, etc.).

Billy offered to distribute to participants an outline for a table that could serve as a basis for a position (or imposition) paper. It goes something like this:

Type of Change		Elements	Dynamics
Change in a system:			
	Continuity		
	Change		
Change of system:			
	Desires		

If Billy could provide a little explanation of the table, the participants could propose values to insert under elements and dynamics. Additional rows and columns may be useful.

A legitimate question was asked at the beginning of the gathering, and again at the end: How can someone present cybernetics to people who cannot currently relate to the vocabulary (say, someone with mild dementia, or a young child)? A suggestion was made to engage people in a percussive exercise in which the dynamics could NOT be ignored? With little time remaining, the group tried to improvise an exercise at the end of this session. It did not work as a demonstration of cybernetics. **The exercise cannot be improvised, it must be intentional**.

Example, take five young children, put them in a circle, give them some percussion instruments or suggest clapping of hands, etc., and then provide some instructions they can easily follow in which they are responding to others in the group. Perhaps one child starts with a simple sound; then the child to the right responds to the first (some prompts may initially be necessary); then, the third child responds to the second until it goes full circle and the first has to respond to the fifth, which then changes the response of the second, and so on. Listen for the sound to move toward a stable state. Ask a participant to suggest another pattern, etc. There could be many variations, with each demonstrating some concept in cybernetics.

"Listening is a way of being." (video 23 Pauline Oliveors to be added)

Going Forward

We (Jude and Larry) would like to hold additional gatherings like this one at different locations. A proposal for the next one would be Detroit, although details still need to be worked out. While we are thinking of groups of 7-10, larger groups could also be accommodated as they were this weekend. The general topic (Cybernetics and Society, Changing Thinking) would remain the same, but the conversations would go in new directions depending on the interests of the participants in the group. We are not sure how long this could be (or should be) sustained. We might be able to do two or three gatherings a year ourselves; we also encourage others to do something similar. A possible outcome is a network of people across North America, and eventually world-wide who have participated in a gathering, with a few carrying forward gatherings of their own. As came up during the weekend, we do worry about the decay of the

vocabulary of cybernetics, which currently serves as the avenue into the way of thinking for which we are advocating.

We would like to thank all of those who participated in the weekend, especially Susan for making her house available and preparing and serving the meals. To those who hosted attendees, to the facilitators, dishwashers, note-takers and others who provided services, a special thank you. We both learned some things and appreciate the opportunity you all afforded us. We hope to see you in the future.

From: The New Yorker

By: Sam Gross Item #: 8544587

"It sort of makes you stop and think, doesn't it."

Appendix 1: Conversations on Cybernetics and Society: Initial Parameters

We (Larry and Jude) write to invite you to a gathering of a small group of cyberneticians/change-agents to hold a series of conversations on the socio-economic-political uses of cybernetics in the U.S. and world-wide. Here are some initial parameters on the content and process of the conversations:

1. This gathering is not associated with the American Society for Cybernetics (ASC), even if follow-up conversations might happen at future ASC conferences. We recognize that some of you may not want to spend your time on an activity like this, which is fine. However, we would like to try to accommodate all of you who do have a strong interest in participating in such a gathering. If you have an interest, but are not available for this weekend, we may schedule a follow-up gathering.

2. While we would like to be as informal as possible, we expect the conversations to be intense and would like people to stay engaged and commit for the entire weekend. We know that most of you are quite busy, and no one with a strong interest will be turned away. However, a commitment of time is requested. We also plan to start the conversations at the time they are scheduled and would ask that people arrive on time.

3. You are being invited as someone who we or someone else thought might be interested in cybernetics as a way of thinking that could, should it become a prevailing way of thinking, establish the conditions for new socio-economic-political systems—that is, a new order of things (not simply as a tool for improvements in current systems).

4. While this gathering intends to create a political agenda (of sorts), it would not be associated with any current political party or ideology. In fact, a premise of the gathering would be that the current order of things is unsustainable, as well as undesirable for other reasons—new structures and processes are needed. All ideas that can be connected to cybernetic thinking and that can be defended as desirable would be welcome.

5. Although open for discussion, a starting point for conversation might be the desire for a world without violence. Depending on how we define violence, there are, of course, many implications for structures and processes: for example, the satisfaction unconditionally of all basic human needs, the sustainability of the natural environment, the full participation of all humans in the decisions that could affect them, the acceptance of all humans as legitimate others and unique contributors, etc.

6. The cybernetic dialogic (conversation) might provide a framework for thinking about non-violent, participative structures/processes—for example, alternatives to hierarchy as a way of thinking about organizing, to achievement/reward as a way of thinking about motivating, to ideology as a way of thinking about creating human significance and potential, etc. These could be topics of discussion.

7. Participants would be invited to bring and discuss projects in which they are engaged or about which they are aware that may be moving the prevailing way of thinking in a "cybernetic" direction, including the possibility of making the way of thinking a choice. One outcome of the gathering could be the connecting of projects with mutual intentions (or yet to be formulated intentions) and how that might be done in a useful way. If you wish to prepare a 10-minute presentation of a current project, we will try to find time for such presentations.

8. Some guidelines for our conversations may need to be agreed upon at the outset—for example, acceptance of disagreement as desirable without loss of mutual respect, ability to interrupt a conversation when one feels violated by the dynamics, etc. We propose using a consensus method as a way to facilitate a conversation that meets some of these guidelines, including conversations about the guidelines themselves.

Appendix 2: Conversations on Cybernetics and Society—Details

<u>When</u>: Friday, March 24, 2017, 2:00 p.m. through Sunday, March 26, 2017, at 4:00 p.m. (or so).

<u>Meals</u>: We have a generous offer for preparation of two lunches (Saturday and Sunday) and two suppers (Friday and Saturday) at the location of the gathering for those who might prefer this mode of eating to dining out. The cost would be $20 per person for supplies for the four meals.

<u>Location</u>: The Parkhouse, 122 Franklin Street, Urbana, IL 61801.

<u>Expectations</u>: To reiterate a few key expectations, please consider the following—

a. Plan to attend the entire weekend and to arrive on time for each session.
b. Focus on cybernetics as a way of thinking that could, should it become the prevailing way of thinking, establish the conditions for new systems to emerge, not simply as a tool for improvements in current systems. (If anyone would like some related reading or video material ahead of time, just let us know.)
c. Participate in a consensus model approach as an experiment in facilitating a conversation among participants in a group substantially larger than 7-8.
d. For those interested, prepare a 10-minute **(or less)** presentation on a project in which you are engaged, aware or imagining that might move the prevailing way of thinking in a "cybernetic" direction.

<u>Proposed Friday Schedule</u>:

2:00 p.m. Introductions to the weekend and to each other
2:30 p.m. Cybernetics and society (Larry)
3:00 p.m. Cybernetics and the consensus model (Jude)
3:30 p.m. Break
4:00 p.m. Discussion
5:00 p.m. Supper
7:00 p.m. 10-minute project presentations
9:00 p.m. Adjourn

<u>Saturday Schedule</u>: 10:00 – 12:00 noon, 2:00 – 5:00 p.m., 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

<u>Sunday Schedule</u>: 10:00 – 12:00 noon, 2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Appendix 3: Attendees for Conversations on Uses of Cybernetics for Social Change (*March 24-26, 2017)*

Elizabeth Adams
Jacob Barton
Michael Brün
Stefan Brün
Derek Busby
Anita Chan
Danielle Chynoweth
Mark Enslin
Lisa Fay
Michael Gaiuranos (Snow Leopard)
Brett Hanover
Brian Hagy
Koushalya Jeganathan
Meadow Jones
Billy Keniston
Jude Lombardi
Anne Lutomia
Keith McKenney
Susan Parenti
Larry Richards
Paul Schroeder
elizaBeth Simpson
Ya'aqov Ziso

Appendix 4: A Way of Thinking about Social Transformation
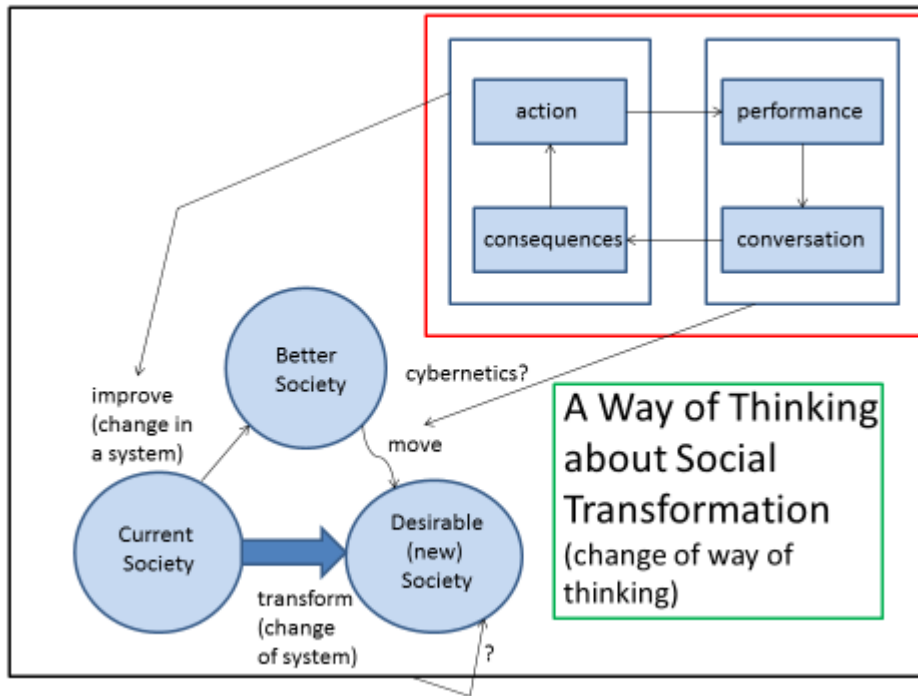
Appendix 5: Appendix 4 Chart with Video Links
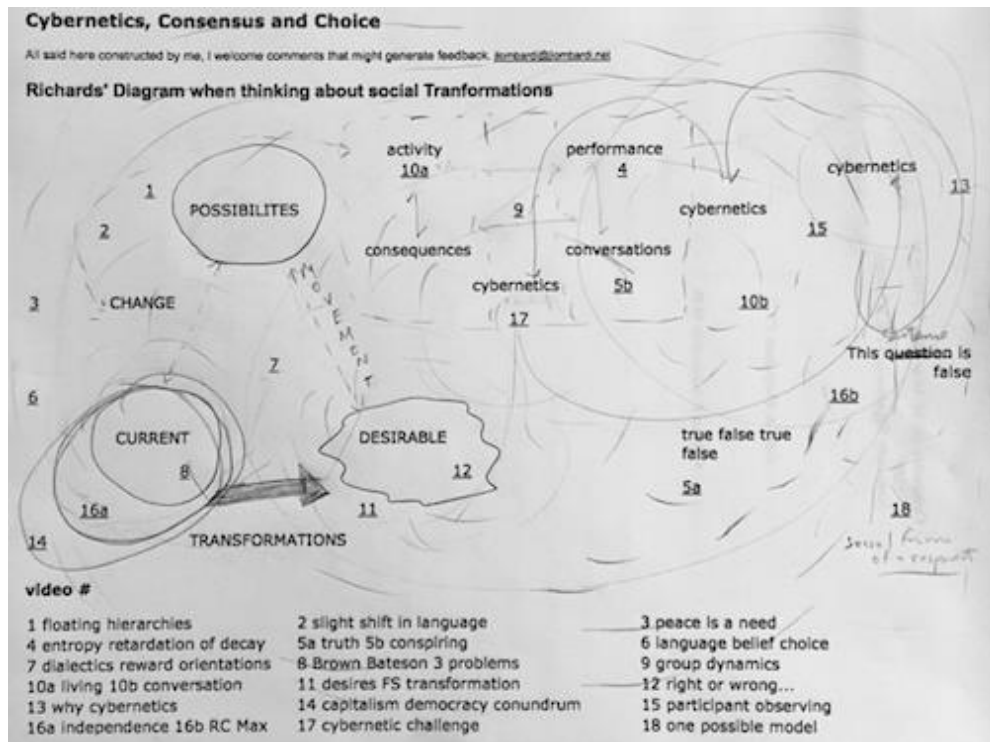
Appendix 6: A Consensus Model

Consensus Model one technology* for generating change while moving toward the Desirable (13)

Consensus model is a technology designed to provoke deep conversation when facing asynchronous interactions so conversation becomes a vehicle by which participants (10b) are invited to be performers in the co-creation of a language space (2).

Consensus Model

only works if all participants want it and work it (9)
is a technology for conspiring with one another. (5)
is a structure that is process directed and presence oriented. (8)
s a non-violent way for conversing that is dialectally oriented. (7)
increases choice and variety while decreasing power relations. (17)
invites transformation to emerge with a minimum of discontinuity. (11)
embraces a-synchronicity as opportunity for conversations to emerge. (3)
is a structure for processing nested in cooperation and interdependence. (16)
entails that each participant be able to observe one's observing in process (15)
encourages and often requires deep listening, understanding and observing. (10)
is structured so that each participant makes a conscious choice to participate. (6)
creates a process and space for peace and the retardation of decay as needs. (4)
provokes floating hierarchies, participation by all and the suspension of beliefs. (1)
Reporting, listening, participating, performing fundamentals for doing consensus. (18)
one possible technology for generating change while moving toward the desirable. (12)

conspire rather than agree

Possible Guides in a Language Space when Forming Desires as Constraints (18)
False Statements articulated by Herbert Brün in1994 (11)

1. Humans use at least three languages, the language of needs, the language of necessities, language of desire, concern and choice.

2. Violence automatically and totally isolates the violator from all participation, until the violator uses the language of creative thought in witnessed monologue.

3. Peace and retardation-of-decay are known and met as needs.

4. There is maintained the needed transformer.

5. Technology finds and initiates ways and methods which allow every human to participate noticeably in the deliberations with the current best available knowledge for contemplating and running human society here and now.

*Technology, any type of know-how (tool) that entails creating and designing solutions to problems.

jLombardi 2017
Urbana Gathering

Appendix 7: Notes from Saturday Morning (Jacob)

ME is facilitator. JB is notetaker. MB stacking peoples.

JL: Response to last night's : I WILL share unedited footage that I take (camera not on all the time). It is YOUR responsibility to get it should you want access.

ME/JL: Jude had proposed, as offer, a short presentation of diagram with 1 or 2 of videos - to use this model as provocations / performances for generating cybernetic conversations.

ME: Erase the board. Ya'aqov has taken picts of it.

Hubbub while projector warms up.

Crescendo.

PS: celebrate the demise of the trump scheme to undo obamacare. Applause and general acclaim and slight skeptical swoons.

Michael comes in to help projector fix. Hamming and hawing. Crosstalk.

PS: I brought some flyers & Constructivist Foundations article &c for the library piano library, something on gerrymandering & lethology. I'm gonna put all of this stuff up there.

JL: JB: 3rd order cybernetics? JL: I don't wanna go there yet now. Responded to I do choose to language about a 1st 2nd 3rd cybernetics but I take the word 'order' out - for my epistemology and my lexicon, take the word order out.

Consensus model is help us move transformations toward a society / full of old paradigms. That are hierarchical and reward-oriented. Movement toward the desirable. ((this is all a review of yesterday's diagram, reconstructed on whiteboard)). Jude would like to show 12 and 11. - desirable and, transformations. Herbert Brün

every person speaks at least 3 languages:

the language of needs

of necessities

of desire, concern, and choice

Michael on stack.

I'm happy. Thanks Lisa.

EAdams: I can see easily why a minimum of disruption seems like it's not violent. Discontinuity seems like violence but maybe the opposite is true.

KM: Let's watch the HB false statement vid again.

SBrü: Continuity can also be violence.

I am laughing. Herbert Brun music and Herbert brun on slides on diagrams. We are cyberneticing.

HB: I maintain that it takes no violence whatsoever to change our society into a nonviolent one.

JB: Can we make Herbert's false statement true?

JL: I'm not here this weekend to generate. Way of thinking about ways of thinking about social transformation. I would like to focus on one of those language - peace is a need.

Derek: moment to conspire. To cherrypick: I and my multiple identities, a cacophony - don't agree of what_to_say - one is meowing all the time. I respect that ppl can offer opinions for so long whereas I can hardly hold a train of thought for a minute without

everyone comes with needs, desires, necessities, yeah um and language.

the interesting thing ~ that i'm still getting at ~ i hear what everyone is saying, want to understand, still understand what I mean - I see this as adapting my own thought - it's difficult to have an absolute understanding now that I'm seeing herbert brun speak for possibly the first time - various states of mind either tired overworked or just not quite there so my experience this time watching these videos is vastly different.

eZB: I like your notes Derek<

DB: Notes help focus a conversation. While it is beautiful to hear voices singing in disunity, it is quite distracting if you're trying to have a conversation.

2 1/2 more things

1. reflection of what i heard from brun videos. peace is a need that needs to be continually fulfilled, needs conflict, not violence. interesting in that - continuously gone toward. you won't actually arrive at peace, you'll just find another conflict to resolve

2. treating this as a technology. i was watching these philosophical big corporation stuff on youtube, applying it to the capitalist system. interesting. as i mentioned, was introduced to this stuff 6 or 7 years ago. but to have someone talk about twisting false statements to a capitalist end. . . . a utopian future where capitalism still exists.

ME: I heard some answers. I interpreted the answer of "I don't know what the conversation is" as answer to "Do you feel left out of conversation"

PS: Thanks everyone. Thank you Derek. Thanks everyone else for being here. I volunteered to be the timekeeper but there are rules around time. I was feeling things were getting a bit chaotic. When we come to a pause, let's make it a reheal pause. Negative timekeeper I propose. On the other heand, let's put those rules in place.

LF: Brun talks about "a transformer" doesn't specify what that transformer is. This is the recursion we've all been waiting 4.

LR: Corporation and capitalism. Language decays. The language of cybernetics is being expropriated all the time for stuff I didn't want it used for. My job every day is to retard that decay. The idea of a corporation cannot exist without being hierarchical as primary way of organizing, future goals, planning, profits usually. That ain't cybernetics buddy. I've been immersed in it so long that I have to make a concerted effort NOT to apply it to those things that don't need it.

BS w/ YZ: (courtesy of notetaker beth): I don't expet anything different, yet, but it's not what I want. But, not naming that it's not yet it KEEPS IT

Conviviance.

MB: Peace and conflict - they can be together.

MB: Abstraction by itself is not a complete thought. Abstraction and thinking go together.

DC: Redirect the energy of the conversation to a desire by Susan from yesterday - strategies of what project we would undertake, "in this political moment". ((jacob was distracting himself)) Our project of investigating language is now more imporant than ever. But what the ffff just happened? How is language working now - the supersizing of bigotry etc. - investigating language, making interventions.

Sno Lep: Having more than one names is not often feasible. Due to meditation now I'm sometimes also a hyena. Words are names, the difficulty of staying power of identity and of people. At what point do they become activist. In cybernetic terms: systems have the key variables that they maintain...eigenvalues

Lots of confusing process talk:

DChyn: that is what people do when they speak. take a question. where i'm at - the big political question moment. when you speak connect project.

ezB: we are who we are in this time in this space. what we say is not a universal explication. trending towards USA middle class.

ME: anyone who hasn't said a peep?

Ann: I like where this is (going). Renaming the clients, consumers, customers. . .shifted.

KJ: I'm listening, trying to you know I mean I have these articulation problems probably for the past year I think. Like what Danielle said. Tells story of patriarchal "revolution for all the wrong reasons" in Tamil Nadu. Hate emails for proposing bull taming and our films. English language of writing, Tamil for movies. Hard to take between.

DB: Fear that language will change.

Those in authority has this fear.

Therefore we have the propogation of media.

YZ, define transistance - word invented by Cristina Finotti - the dynamic of when translating something, use words that will propogate in a very nuanced way, resistance.
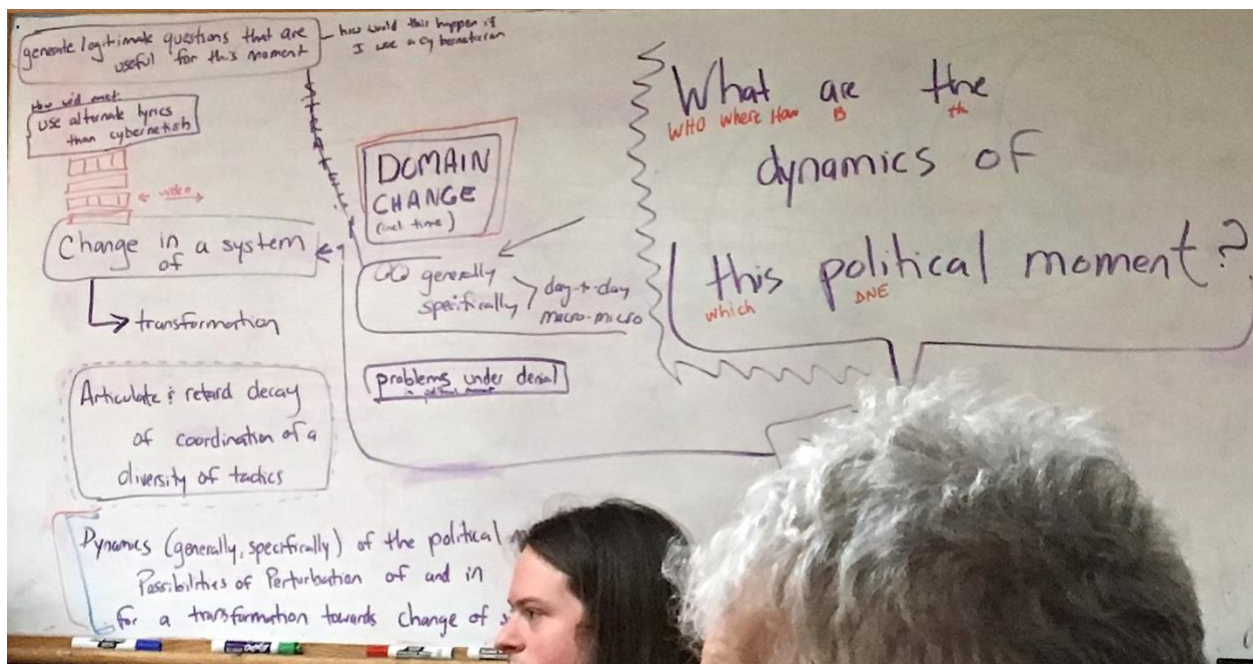
MB: conviviance - a state of getting along well together

The collapse of (simile into) metaphor into a truism.

IDENTITY 1=1

you can "prove" that .0999999999999 = .1 however THIS IS NOT THE CASE

Appendix 8: Diagram from Saturday Afternoon

Appendix 9: Notes from Saturday Evening (Snow)

A Kind of Record 25 March 2017, Urbana, IL

NOTE: my desire would be that participants could add in-line additions, without directly modifying the original attempted transcript, in order to clarify or correct this attempt at transcript. This is called member-checking; a standard part of qualitative research that helps to enhance the validity of a document generated about other people.

Elizabeth Adams facilitating: called for a formulation of problems.

We thought about the political moment; this is a next small step. The purpose of this is to meet a cybernetic value of recursion and reflection. Temperature check.

Each formulate a problem; pass our papers with that formulation, and we respond to that formulation according to particular constraints, that we will generate together.

Are we responding to what people said last session, or are we now making new statements?

It could be either. If you are engaged in what happened in the last session and that's the problem you want to work on, or a different one, this might be a place to bring it in. I'm aiming to end up in one-on-one discussion as another modality of response.

Different constraints?

No.

Should it be a question or statement?

As a suggestion: a problem statement is a true statement as opposed to false, but still incorporating the desire. Some people would start it with "I want" but it doesn't have to. "I have difficulties starting conversations with neighbors" is a problem statement.

[giggling]

These are true statements we wish were false.

[people spend time writing problems].

Just as personification need not be a reductive gesture to the biology of a living system neither should technologification be permitted to be a reductive gesture to the language of process

Suggestions of ways to respond to one another's problem formulations.

1. Any of these, but drawn [originally #10]

2. Look at the problem formulating and recognize the needs not being met

Clarification: These are operations on sentences about to be handed to you

3. [Describe something you are doing that could work toward a solution; withdrawn, replaced]

4. You could commiserate in really mawkish terms with the problem, with the author.

5. Describe a transformation with a minimal discontinuity from the problem statement to a desired state

6. Offer other versions of the problem

7. Ask what this problem addresses and does not address

8. Intensify the problem, bringing it near to implosion

9. See if it is possible to reformulate, such that subject and object are switched

10. Describe a change of state that might generate a minimum of discontinuity toward your

    desirable [this is intended as distinct from #5 above]

11. Continue to focus on methods so as to not have to confront the problem (that's what

    we're doing)

12. Try misunderstanding it five ways.

Whether you do one of these operations or another, please specify which one you are performing.

How much time? Seven minutes.

mawkish (*comparative* **more** mawkish, *superlative* **most** mawkish)

1. (archaic or dialectal) Feeling sick, queasy.
2. (archaic) Sickening or insipid in taste or smell.
3. Excessively or falsely sentimental; showing a sickly excess of sentiment.

Now, we will pass again (both problem description and response), read what has been passed to us, and ask three questions about that. Perhaps in another colour pen or distinctive handwriting.

Who are these questions addressed to?

Their ultimate audience will be the original formulator, but they are about the problem, to unfurl the problem further than the just done reformulations.

Time?

Five.

Again please. The task?

Redigest the problem, in a different colour.

The three questions are based on the original formulation?

Everything. Anything

GESUNDHEIT!

Product placement.

When in Rome.

Okay so …

Could I have another minute?

Sure.

[reconvene]

Okay. Pass one more time. This time, try answering the three questions. Reading through the original problem, the response, the questions.

[lots of crosstalk, the noisiest dynamic moment of the session]

I would like to answer the questions being asked!

I have a question about the procedure; I thought we were insularly responding to how we read it, rather than how the previous respondent meant it. Understand?

…

So my question is, is this an insular project, to what was written previously, or can this person ask his or her neighbour what they meant?

It might be more interesting if you misunderstand them.

[writing]

Okay. We passed three times. Now offer answers to the questions asked in light of the problem statements and responses.

[discontinuities in passing the papers along.]

The order of passing matters less than not getting paper you have already had or originally generated.

Time?

Five minutes.

[writing]

> The argument for complexity as paralysis calls for an increase of (requisite?) variety as a corrective.

I would like to return the problem statements to the original formulators, then pair up, and use these sheets and responses as inputs to the conversations you want to have. And I suggest doing this for 45 minutes, so that each person gets 20 minutes or so to talk about the problem they formulated.

Too long; half that time.

Could I suggest that the process of return be return, return, return. So, in other words … rather than a direct return.

With reading?

I don't want to only have half the time.

I want to be in a group of three.

[summarising] We are going to pass back, slowly, three times (incrementally), that will take two to three minutes, then we are going to pair up. I would recommend pairing up across the circle, not with someone who has responded on your paper.

So a fourth person.

And you get time to talk through your problem and your conversant.

So, now: two or three minutes of silence to formulate a statement or question from the conversation in light of what was written: formulation, response, questions, answers.

[silence, then returns start]

I've been accused of fearmongering, so I'll say the opposite. So, we were talking about the intentional processes of suppressing conversation, so what I wanted to offer about that was, we could think about what are the structures or spaces that people might agree to enter into where they are not told the goal is to have a conversation but that it is the necessary action. For example, when students took over the administration building, nominally they have a goal or a demand, but they also have lots of time for conversation. What are the policies to suppress conversation and how do we open up those questions.

[conspiring]

Comment on Billy's …

No, no, please.

Just on your formulation please.

It was interesting that this was seen by four people, and one of them, two of them missed the point, and one completely took it exactly as meant. So, I enjoyed that and that others had not understood. In a way, it was a conversation in writing.

Me? I didn't formulate anything but I will say that not understanding is a form of conflict that is useful. Elizabeth [Adams] also brought up not understanding as useful. It is something I do in my work, to deliberately not understand, or stand under, which means a lot to me. I'm done. This is exhausting.

Okay. We grappled with how to preserve conflict through conversation and in conversation, how to preserve that a as a force toward creative outcomes of a conversation, and we arrived at a focus on how audience contest and changes in key, sometimes no explicit, influence colour and determine changes in relationship through the conversation. [repeat requested; not fully transcribed, but capturing added distinctions not already mentioned →] As a force toward *creative and mutual* outcomes. What each person brings will change the relationship created through the context.

So, I described the fear I have that, by trying to show the dynamics of the current political moment in the US, the more accurately it was being described, the more I was adding to the power and permanence of this particular undesirable political structure. I had several good responses. Someone in the chain suggested that if someone nested the national in the global, could that undermine the power? That I thought was an interesting way .. with developments of that … that one could describe the

national politics accurately but in a global context without contributing to the status power of what is being described.

Solidarity to articulate and confront fear. Solidarity to articulate and confront fear.

In a situation of A vs. B, and B vs. A, one of your desires could come from left field, and be made by you into an issue that will thus not be co-opted or resisted. For instance, an Alternatives to Hierarchy Workshop in a public school. Or, "Dear Congressperson, we need to get hierarchy out of healthcare."

Speaking of left field, AA is an interesting case to explore as a non-hierarchical governance structure, an apparatus that connects every meeting everywhere everyday might be the needed transformer.

Hierarchics Anonymous

Synonymous.

I like the part where you said it's okay to misunderstand. I am unwilling to show compassion to patriarchal conditions, a true statement. I had written a false statement that had no response, that's okay. What I got from my conversation: if I expect compassion for my capacity as a human being, then I would think that the other, in this conversation (the patriarch), is only capable of so much. So me wanting to extend compassion would come from me wanting to give compassion … could come from expecting compassion, out of my capacity to be human.

Did you say patriarchal conditions or …

Patriarchal conditioning.

Bakhtin speaks of a truth that can only emerge in dialogue—I would say Larry's sense of conversation—between the specifically people having the dialogue. A truth, little t (by the way), that I noticed was the similarity between the dismissal of petitions for help and the lack of willingness to have conversations in the present political environment. That is to say, the phenomenon observed (in one of the conversations with my conversation partner) of an *unwillingness* of people to have conversations is integrally and intimated related to the dismissals of performed vulnerability, i.e., to petitions for help, asking others for help.

Could you repeat that.

Reread the above through the italics, meaning that the phenomenon of an unwillingness in people to have conversations is related to how asking for help is dismissed. Will that do? Err, sorry; that sounded snarky. I didn't mean to sound snarky.

From my very helpful groupmates, in my strategy for doing antiracist work, the community in … As a group: engage a change of frame, step back to talk about space, breath, and humour. [apologies; this one went very quickly and I couldn't keep up.]

Scratch, scribble, argggggghhh.

Turb where you are, and dig the hole, don't get in it.

This is a mash of our conversation. How can communities leverage our fears for solidarity and vision.

If you are overwhelmed and don't know how to talk about a problem, if you can't find a key, then reframe it.

When can I solve a problem by becoming or creating another?

The story of your life.

> Audry Lourde has already told us about the master's tools, but we forget because we are so busy dismantling his house.

Thank you all so much for this marathon of your attention which is so precious. Come back at 10:00am.
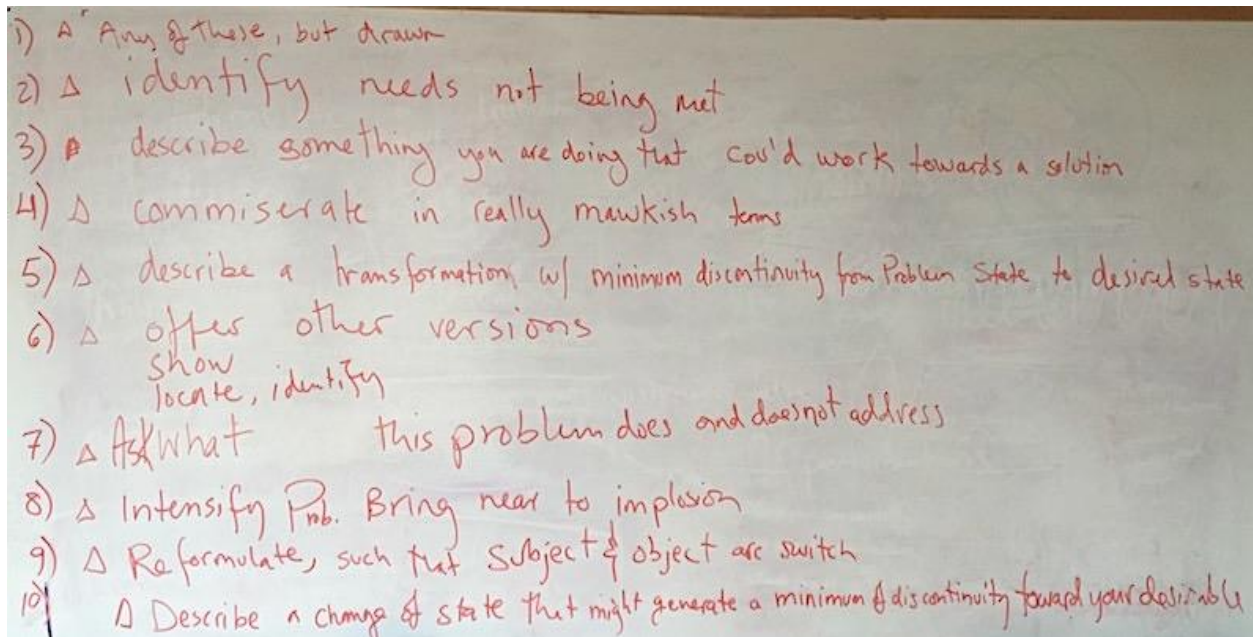
Would also like to acknowledge and thank Elizabeth and beth and Susan for hosting and feeding us.

Who is the keeper of the roles for tomorrow?

Ya'aqov took the picture.

Who is facilitating, etc. [closing]

Appendix 10: Image of List of Ways to Respond to Problem Statements

1) A Any of these, but drawn
2) Δ identify needs not being met
3) θ describe something you are doing that cou'd work towards a solution
4) Δ commiserate in really mawkish terms
5) Δ describe a transformation w/ minimum discontinuity from Problem State to desired state
6) Δ offer other versions
   show
   locate, identify
7) Δ Ask what   this problem does and does not address
8) Δ Intensify Prob. Bring near to implosion
9) Δ Reformulate, such that subject & object are switch
10) Δ Describe a change of state that might generate a minimum of discontinuity toward your desirable