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Cybernetic Lenses for Designing and Living in a Complex World

Josh Andres ^a, Alex Zafiroglu ^a, Katherine Daniell ^a, Paul Wong ^a, Mina Henein ^a, Xuanying Zhu ^a, Ben Sweeting ^b, Michael Arnold ^c, Delia Pembrey MacNamara ^d, Ariella Helfgott ^e

^a School of Cybernetics, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia. [first.name@anu.edu.au]

^b School of Architecture, Technology, and Engineering, University of Brighton, Brighton, UK.
r.b.sweeting@brighton.ac.uk

^c School of Historical and Philosophical Studies, The University of Melbourne, Australia.
mvarnold@unimelb.edu.au

^d International Society for the Systems Sciences, Canberra, Australia. deliamacnamara@gmail.com

^e Collaborative Futures, The Netherlands and Australia. ariella.helfgott@collaborativefutures.global

Cybernetics has an exciting history that profoundly influenced HCI theory and practice. However, today, designers, engineers, and researchers are often unaware of how to engage with this powerful approach to inform technology design. We believe a cybernetic lens is vital to investigating and designing technologies for today's complex environments. In this in person, half-day workshop called "Cybernetic Lenses for Designing and Living in a Complex World", we present three cybernetic lenses demonstrated in two case studies: "From mundane objects to systems - asking better questions for technology design", and "Transportation networks, from human-computer interaction to socio-cultural consequences". Our goal is to offer an inclusive environment to provide theory and practical exercises for participants to gain and incorporate a cybernetics lens into their practice.

CCS CONCEPTS • Human-centered computing~Human computer interaction (HCI)~HCI theory, concepts and models

Additional Keywords and Phrases: cybernetics; design; design methods; design research; critical systems thinking.

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1 CYBERNETICS

In ancient Greece, Plato first quoted "Kubernetes", referring to "helmsperson", and meaning the art of steering to navigate [3]. Post-WWII, Norbert Wiener denoted the term "Cybernetics" as "control and communication in the animal and the machine" [8], focusing on studying feedback loops, and patterns of interaction between biological and computational actors and the environment. Cybernetics provided a way of thinking to study circular processes and how meaning is created between actors to investigate and design systems where humans, machines, and the

environment interact [7]. Giving way to biologically inspired computing and neural nets in artificial intelligence, conceptualizing principles of automation and robotics, prescribing humans' role in technology, and influencing the world we live in today.

The "cyber" prefix in cybernetics is used in association with computing, for example, cyberspace, cyberpunk, cybersecurity, cybersex, cyber-physical; these terms can be overwhelming for designers and researchers looking to engage with cybernetics as an approach to study complex relations. This workshop will guide participants through applying a cybernetic lens to two case studies for today's socio-technical context.

2 CYBERNETIC LENSES FOR DESIGNING AND LIVING IN A COM-PLEX WORLD

Today's application of cybernetics is vital due to advances that have progressed the technological paradigm of computational machinery shaping the complex world we live in. From supporting software infrastructure in every area of our life to computation that learns and adapts to the user's context while sensing, interpreting, and acting on vast amounts of data. We present three lenses inspired by cybernetics thinking helpful to investigate and design technological interventions in complex environments.

2.1 Lens One: observed systems - controlling relationships

This lens explores computational systems designed with self-regulating behavior to respond to the environment and regain a desired state. Examples include, self-regulating robot creatures, such as a three-wheeled light-seeking tortoise [5], that exhibited self-regulating behavior by continuously sensing light and using a feedback loop mechanism to recalculate its orientation and follow the light source.

This lens provides a valuable perspective to draw closed-loop boundaries in a system, where the practitioner defines the parameters for self-regulating behavior in a computational actor, so the actor steers its behavior towards a goal. This closed-loop boundary enables the practitioner to observe the system from a third-person perspective and experiment with its dynamics.

2.2 Lens Two: observing systems - evolving relationships

This lens proposes that all systems are open and intertwined in a complex multi-feedback interdependent relation. Examples include how a human piano player, via a modified piano that displays light colors according to the melodies played, can enter a performative state as if the piano was an extension of their body [6]. Another example is a partnership between a rider and a modified eBike that senses traffic light data to adjust engine support and assist the rider in catching traffic lights on green [1].

This lens acknowledges the biological, material, computational actors, and the environment as one ecosystem that co-evolves over micro, human, and macro time scales. Thus, while the first lens offers a third-person perspective to observe closed-loop boundary complex systems, the second lens offers a first-person perspective, where the observer is part of an open co-evolving complex system.

2.3 Cybernetic Lens Three: Mutually observing systems - social relationship

This lens reminds us of the larger social dimension where mutually observing systems are within—as the singer is to the orchestra and the audience—and mutually observation and acting occurs to create something larger than the sum of its parts. Examples include humans and computation working in harmony to adapt to the changing environment. Such as adaptive architectures, where adaptive computation orchestrates changes in the built environment in response to human or infrastructure needs, and humans adapt to such changes [4]. Another

example is tele-robots to enable remote participation in previously considered human-only practices, such as mediation of funeral ceremonies, resulting in emerging social and cultural relationships through technology [2].

This lens empowers practitioners to think broadly about the social dimension our systems contribute to when mutually observing and acting alongside other systems.

3 PLANNED ACTIVITIES AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Our team brings a range of experiences in design research and cybernetics and includes senior, mid and early career members. **Workshop duration:** Half day, approx. 3-4 hours. **Delivery mode:** In-person. **Participants** ~15-25.

Workshop activities and outcomes				
	Activity	Time	Objective	Outcomes
1	Welcome and Introductions through playful activities.	30 mins	To learn about the group coming together.	To build connections and promote empathy and understanding for the workshop.
2	Presentation: Cybernetic Lenses for Designing and Living in a Complex World.	30	Introduce cybernetics and the cybernetic lenses for studying and designing technological interventions in complex environments.	Provide participants with a starting cybernetics foundation to observe and study complex environments in which humans, non-humans and technology coexist.
3	Break	15		
4	Exercise one – case study, cybernetics in practice. Introduction 5 Group work - applying the lenses 10 Groups show and tell 10 Discussion 10	35	To put to practice the cybernetic lenses to study a scenario. “From mundane objects to systems” - asking better questions for technology design.	Scenario one. To guide participants in applying the cybernetic lenses as a design research approach to study human, non-human, technology relationships in complex environments.
5	Exercise two – case study, cybernetics in practice. Introduction 5 Group work - applying the lenses 10 Groups show and tell 10 Discussion 10	35	To put to practice the cybernetic lenses to study a situation. “Transportation networks, from human-computer interaction to socio-cultural consequences”.	Scenario two. To let participants, apply the cybernetic lenses more independently as a design research approach to study human, non-human, technology relationships in complex environments.
6	Break	15		

7	Summary, reflections and Thank you	20	Recap: cybernetic lenses, open discussion, identify next steps and thank participants.	Identify future collaboration opportunities and set up working group to begin work.
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4. WORKSHOP GOALS

- To bring together designers, systems thinkers, engineers, researchers, practitioners, and adjacent disciplines engaging with human computer interaction to learn from their multidisciplinary explorations.
- To create an inclusive, accessible, and supportive environment to welcome participants across all experience levels, from newcomers looking to learn what is and how to apply cybernetics in their practice to experienced practitioners looking to learn from contemporary explorations.

5 ORGANISERS

The team comprises established, senior, mid and early career practitioners to lean on past experiences and emerging views and technologies. In addition, each of the organisers is experienced at developing and delivering virtual and in-person workshops.

Josh Andres is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Cybernetics at the Australian National University (ANU). His research advances the design of human-cyber-physical AI systems using cybernetic lenses. His work has been covered by Openbci, Newatlas, The Age, Zdnet and Insiderobotics, and published at top tier conferences such as CHI, DIS, CHIPLAY, IUI, TEI, KDD and UbiComp. Before the ANU, he spent seven years at IBM Research on HCI, UX, AI and health, and Blockchain, where he co-invented over 20 patents. The decade prior, he worked in UX and innovation, leading the design of multi-device experiences enjoyed by millions of users.

Alex Zafiroglu is a Professor of Cybernetics, School of Cybernetics, Australian National University. A cultural anthropologist by training, Dr. Zafiroglu is currently Professor and Deputy Director at the School of Cybernetics, Australian National University. Prior to this, she was with Intel Corporation, where during her 15-year stint she worked in various divisions including People and Practices, Digital Home, Client Computing, and the Internet of Things.

Paul Wong is a Senior Lecturer at 3Ai within the School of Cybernetics. He completed his PhD with the Automated Reasoning Group in the Research School of Information Sciences and Engineering at the ANU. Paul was formerly a lecturer in Software Engineering at the University of Wollongong, a Senior Policy Analyst with the Commonwealth Grants Commission, and a Defence Analyst with the Defence Science and Technology Organisation. Over the last decade, Paul has been a data practitioner covering all aspects of the strategic use of data as an enterprise and national asset. Paul has managed enterprise class systems and data, played a key role in the establishment of a national consortium to support digital research infrastructure, and contributed to the improvement of research data management practices nationally. Paul also has a love-hate relationship with his collection of guitars.

Professor Katherine A. Daniell, BEng(Civil)(Hons)/BA (Adel.), PhD (ANU/AgroParisTech, France), MIEAust, is a transdisciplinary academic at the Australian National University's 3A Institute in the School of Cybernetics, Fenner

School of Environment and Society, and Institute for Water Futures. Trained in engineering, arts and public policy, her work bridges multiple domains including multi-level governance, participatory processes, risk management, sustainability science, river basin management, politics and cultures of innovation, and international science and technology cooperation. Katherine currently convenes the ANU Master of Applied Cybernetics, and serves as a member of the National Committee on Water Engineering (Engineers Australia), Director and Board Member of the Peter Cullen Water and Environment Trust, a member of the Initiatives of the Future of Great Rivers, Editor of the Australasian Journal of Water Resources and President of the Australian-French Association for Research and Innovation Inc.

Mina Henein is a lecturer and researcher at the 3A Institute in the School of Cybernetics at the Australian National University. He received his Ph.D. at the Australian National University, and the Australian Centre of Excellence for Robotic Vision working on localisation and mapping algorithms for autonomous robots. His research interests lie at the intersection of robotics, computer vision, artificial intelligence, sustainability and responsibility of algorithms. With a background in mechatronics engineering, advanced robotics, business intelligence and market analysis, his work focuses on tangible impacts on today's society. He currently serves as a reviewer for a number of international robotics conferences and journals and has been involved in the entrepreneurial circle in Australia and worldwide for the last five years.

Xuanying Zhu is a lecturer and researcher at the 3A Institute in the School of Cybernetics at the Australian National University (ANU). Xuanying is completing her PhD at the ANU focusing on using human body signals and machine learning algorithms to recognise depression and deception. She has a broad range of research interests in the field of Physiological Sensing, Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), Artificial Intelligence (AI) and their social implications. She serves as a community member of the International Conference on Neural Information Processing (ICONIP) and as a reviewer for several international conferences on HCI, Cybernetics and AI.

Michael Arnold is Professor and Head of Discipline in the History and Philosophy of Science Programme at the University of Melbourne. His on-going research activities lie at the intersection of contemporary technologies and daily life, including studies of online memorials, body disposal and other technologies associated with death, technologies used in domestic settings and in medical settings. Michael is also interested in philosophical approaches to technologies, in particular, Heidegger, Actor-Network Theory, and Object Oriented Ontology. Michael has been Chief Investigator on many research projects, and has co-authored 4 research books and over 150 other research publications.

Ben Sweeting teaches architecture and design at the University of Brighton, Brighton, UK. Ben's work is situated in the fields of cybernetics, systemic design, and architectural theory, with focuses including ethics, place, and methodology. Ben is a member of the Executive Committee of the American Society for Cybernetics (2018-present) and has guest edited journals including *Kybernetes*, *Cybernetics and Human Knowing*, and *Constructivist Foundations*.

Delia Pembrey MacNamara is a past-President of the International Society for the Systems Sciences, a Trustee of the American Society for Cybernetics and an assistant director at Services Australia Intelligent Automation Centre

of Excellence, Research, Advisory and Development. Delia is completing her PhD at the University of Hull focusing on the ontology of Boundary and systemics in sociotechnical activity systems using a critical systems and cybernetic approach. Delia's research has led her to develop perspectives from the viewpoint of the artificial intelligence and her research interests include Human Development and Learning, Gender Pathologies, Physiological Sensing, Humanoid Robotics, Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), Artificial Intelligence (AI) and their systemic impacts.

Dr Ariella Helfgott is an Experienced Senior Researcher with a demonstrated history of working across disciplines, sectors and social worlds to achieve sustainable and equitable futures. She is a Senior Researcher at the University of Adelaide, and a founding Director of Collaborative Futures. Ariella undertakes Multi-Actor Collaborative Action Research supporting sustainability transitions. Her research spans conceptual and mathematical modeling of system resilience and adaptability, through to participatory approaches to building resilience and adaptive capacity on-the-ground. Within the later, she brings together stakeholders across and within multiple decision-making levels and engages them in programs that develop strategic capacity, for example exploratory scenarios, visioning and back-casting and resilience-based planning.

5.1 Pre & Post workshop plans

Recruitment to occur via newsletters and social media. Post: We hope to collaborate on a blog post / publication.

6 CALL FOR PARTICIPATION

Cybernetics has an exciting history that profoundly influenced HCI theory and practice. However, today, designers, engineers, and researchers are often unaware of how to engage with this powerful approach to inform technology design. We believe a cybernetic lens is vital to investigating and designing technologies for today's complex environments. In this in person, half-day workshop called "Cybernetic Lenses for Designing and Living in a Complex World", we offer an introduction to cybernetics and present three lenses demonstrated in two case studies: "From mundane objects to systems - asking better questions for technology design", and "Transportation networks, from human-computer interaction to socio-cultural consequences". Our goal is to offer an inclusive environment to provide theory about using cybernetic and practical exercises for participants to gain a cybernetics lens to incorporate into their practice.

Register to this workshop by emailing (josh.andres@anu.edu.au) and submitting half a page, a drawing, schematics, or video about what you'd like to gain from this workshop and your interest in the topic. <https://sites.google.com/view/ozchi22workshopcybernetics/home>

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