

Klaus Krippendorff
A Directory

Compiled, edited and produced by
Ranulph Glanville

published by BKS+, Southsea, UK, on behalf of the ASC

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<http://www.asc-cybernetics.org/cyberneticians/krippendorff.html>

The American Society for Cybernetics
offers this small book to Klaus Krippendorff
as a tribute to mark the year of his 80th birthday.

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Klaus Krippendorff

introduction

ranulph glanville

this small book is a gift to our loyal and long-term member, klaus krippendorff, by which the american society for cybernetics (asc) marks and celebrates his 80th birthday.

klaus krippendorff has been a member of the american society for cybernetics for almost its whole life. after an early period of friction and division, he was responsible for writing the bylaws that form the constitution of the recovered society, and has been an alert and vocal critic of any hints that the asc might be veering from the bylaws and becoming undemocratic. in this, he has been a persistent and probing conscience. we admire and cherish him for this.

however, his contribution to the asc is much greater. his loyal attendance at our conferences, his willingness to support by reporting on his leading research in our field (and others), and by lending us his considerable international reputation. he has made many good suggestions the society has been able to act on. we have also benefitted from his talent as a designer, the route by which he came to cybernetics in the 1960s, studying for his phd with that doyen of exactness, w ross ashby.

in recognition of his contributions, the asc made klaus an honorary emeritus member, on his 80th birthday.

the small book is made of a critical appreciation of klaus and his work by former asc president, stuart umpleby, the reconciliation president of the society at the time when klaus prepared the bylaws that marked the society's healing. stuart reminds us that klaus's work has been and continues to be significant in several fields (as is so often the case with cyberneticians). there then follows the directory, which is a reference list of klaus's own selection of his publications, obtained in a somewhat underhand manner that placed surprise above openness. i hope klaus will forgive me for this, on this occasion.

an electronic version of the booklet, with live hyperlinks to the urls klaus has provided for those who want to access the papers themselves, will appear on the asc web site at <http://www.asc-cybernetics.org/cyberneticians/krippendorff.html>. i hope that many will do this: asc members know klaus's presence. we do not all know his work so well.

for those who ask why this book is presented without capital (upper case) letters, the answer is not to mimic ee cummings, but because this is klaus's manner: it is a style that originated around the time that klaus studied design in ulm.

it is my honor to offer this tribute to klaus, on behalf of all our members.

ranulph glanville
asc president
july 2012

about klaus krippendorff

stuart umpleby

klaus krippendorff has been a leading contributor to the fields of cybernetics and communication studies for several decades. he is the gregory bateson term professor of cybernetics, culture and language and professor emeritus of communication in the annenberg school of communication at the university of pennsylvania.

education

klaus krippendorff received an engineering degree from the state engineering school in hanover, germany, and a diploma in design from the very innovative ulm school of design (home of the design methods movement) in germany. he then received a phd in communication from the university of illinois urbana-champaign, studying with w. ross ashby.

contributions to communications studies

like so many other cyberneticians, klaus earned his living doing something else: in his case, teaching communication studies. as a professor at the annenberg school of communication at the university of pennsylvania since 1964, his early contributions were methodological. he is widely recognized as the leading authority on content analysis, to which he has contributed many insights including a clarification of the epistemology and logic of the methodology. he also worked for many years on applications of information theory and was a leading contributor to product semantics, which brought with it the metamorphosis from what had been called graphic design into visual communications. his essay on the macintosh computer remains a classic.

contributions to cybernetics

i first met klaus in 1974 when he arranged a significant conference in philadelphia on *communication and control in society*. it was at this conference that heinz von foerster first presented for publication the idea of second order cybernetics or the cybernetics of cybernetics. (the idea was to go beyond the study of control sys-

tems in the observed world and instead to turn attention to the observer as also being a control system: klaus was an important contributor in developing this position.)

klaus has written two encyclopedia articles explaining cybernetics, including one for the *encyclopedia of communication theory* and one for the *international encyclopedia of communication*. he has also written encyclopedia articles on information theory and claude shannon.

let me briefly describe some of his intellectual contributions.

the key idea in his recent book *the semantic turn* is that there is a paradigm shift in the design of artifacts— industrial, graphic, informational, architectural, and social—from an emphasis on how artifacts function to what they mean to those affected by them. the semantic turn suggests a distinction between the technical and user-irrelevant working of artifacts, and human interactions with artifacts; individually, socially, and culturally. attending to the technical dimension of artifacts is called technology-centered design. for ordinary users, the technical functioning of artifacts is mere background for what matters to them. the semantic turn suggests that human-centered design is the design of human interfaces that are meaningful, easy to use, even enjoyable to experience, be it computer operating systems, kitchen implements, public service systems, architectural spaces, or information campaigns. in this formulation the technological workings of an artifact have assumed the role of “black box”, a favorite concept of his teacher ashby.

in addition to his work on design, klaus is the leading figure defining the connection between cybernetics and social phenomena. he goes beyond the traditional second order cybernetics preoccupation with individual cognition—observation and description—and emphasizes the social domain of participation. in contrast to ernst von glasersfeld, who said that “cognition, in spite of adaptation to perturbations created by others, is ‘a private affair’,” krippendorff prefers to emphasize the social nature of language, and hence cognition. for example, “saying ‘i understand’ can cause a conversation to terminate, go on to something else or be challenged by a listener for all kinds of reasons. all speech acts can be rejected or

accepted in many ways. there could be many reasons for saying 'i understand.' we will not know the reasons unless we ask and receive the speaker's answer." as a further point klaus notes that a constructivist's vocabulary—"experiences, networks of ideas, coherency, fit, and viability carry a social history into the present." hence, talk of cognition in psychological terms is not "a private affair." (*constructivist foundations*, 3/2:102, 2008)

klaus has also addressed social organizations from the position of their active participants, rather than from their position of the participants as passive observers. in his paper, "reconciling radical constructivism with social organizations as networks of conversations and of stakeholders," asc conference may 11-14, 2008, in champaign-urbana), he offers two conceptions of organizations. first, he sees them as reconstitutable networks of conversations, noting "that the central feature of all social organizations is their reconstitutability at different times, with same or different people, and perhaps at different locations". second, he sees organizations as self-organizing networks of stakeholders wherein cooperation emerges in the production of material culture. klaus sees the construction of social organizations as resulting from participation and human agency.

i think it is also important to point to klaus's article on *cybernetics's reflexive turns*. "in the history of cybernetics there have been several attempts by cyberneticians to put themselves into the circularities of their theories and designs, invoking a shift from the cybernetics of mechanisms to a cybernetics of cybernetics... von foerster introduced the concept of second-order cybernetics, which may have overshadowed or sidelined other reflexivities." klaus attempts to recover four reflexive turns. he describes their origin and implications and suggests ways in which these reflexive turns constitute what karl and albert mueller call "an unfinished revolution" (2001). he discusses these reflexive turns as conceptual expansions of cybernetics.

contributions to the american society for cybernetics

after the 1974 meeting i have mentioned, klaus and i met again in the late 1970s and early 1980s. during the mid 1970s the american society for cybernetics (asc) encountered a number of difficul-

ties due to conflicts with the then asc president. the situation became so tense that a second cybernetics society was founded.

the american society for cybernetics (asc) had grown out of a luncheon discussion group that met in washington, dc. many of the members and officers lived in the washington area. the american cybernetics association (aca) was based in philadelphia, and klaus krippendorff and doreen steg were key members. when the (problematic) president of the asc died, members of the two societies decided to get back together. the key people in bringing about the merger were barry clemson, then president of the asc, and doreen steg, then president of aca. the two groups decided to use the name of the american society for cybernetics and the constitution of the american cybernetics association, which had been written primarily by klaus.

in subsequent years there were frequent suggestions that asc should merge with the society for general systems research, which is now the international society for the systems sciences. most people in issi thought that cybernetics should be a special interest group within issi. klaus and heinz von foerster were the most outspoken opponents of these plans. the issue that maintained the separation of asc and issi was epistemology. asc was developing a constructivist epistemology whereas most members of issi remained committed to a realist epistemology. some members of issi regarded any move toward what they considered a subjectivist epistemology to be a serious error which should be strongly condemned. this attitude made it difficult to hold productive conversations within issi meetings (although the asc and issi are now on a more friendly and mutually supportive footing). in all of these administrative discussions klaus played a vital role, making sure that administrative structures supported the needed intellectual work.

in addition to his writings and his administrative contributions to cybernetics, klaus has been an active reviewer, editor, grant writer and grant evaluator in both communication studies and cybernetics. he has been a member of the editorial boards of many journals and frequently revises papers for many other journals and for funding agencies. he is an elected fellow of the american associa-

tion for the advancement of science, the international communication association, the japanese society for science and design, and has been a fellow at the netherlands institute for advanced study in the humanities and social sciences. several years ago he received the norbert wiener medal from the american society for cybernetics for his many contributions to cybernetics. to mark his 80th birthday, he was appointed an honorary emeritus member of the society.

some personal reflections

perhaps a consequence of his education in engineering and design, klaus has always had an interest in designing and the designed object. for example, he remodeled a townhouse in philadelphia in an unusual way. i remember in particular that there was a staircase that was barely visible. each step was cantilevered from the wall. one could see the staircase from above or below, but it was less noticeable from the side. klaus also created silkscreen art works, a few of which he contributed as a set of posters to help promote the society and to explain cybernetics.

klaus has always loved teaching, and his students have been the beneficiaries. many of those students regard him as their mentor, not only in their scholarly endeavors, but also in their lives. he is insistent on clear thinking and quality work, demands with which some students struggle. in time, however, these students come to value the changes that have occurred in their patterns of thinking and communications, and the impact it has on their lives in general. for this they are forever grateful. it is not overstatement to say that klaus is beloved by his students. we all know him as passionate about his ideas and considerate of others as fellow human beings.

stuart a umpleby
june 2012

i would like to acknowledge help in preparing this article from pille bunnell, ranulph glanville and larry richards

Directory:

A selected listing of the publications of Klaus Krippendorff, made by himself.

Cybernetics

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Information Theory: Structural Models for Qualitative Data; 96 pages. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, 1986.

On Communicating; Otherness, Meaning, and Information. Fernando Bermejo (Ed.). 372 pages. New York: Routledge, 2009.

Book Chapters

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