

Letter to World Citizens

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Of Koresh and Cybernetics

By Garry Davis

I write the day after David Koresh and 86 of his followers perished in a fire at their Waco, Texas, compound. Recriminations are flying thick and fast in the aftermath of the horrible event. Officials blame Koresh for the deaths. He was a “fanatic,” a “madman,” a “murderer.” President Clinton called him “insane.”

But is using force against force sane? Officials claim Koresh brainwashed his followers, even the mothers whose children died in the flames. But is not violence itself a symptom of brainwashing?

The fire at Waco becomes a metaphor for the fire of national wars in which men, women, children, elderly are killed by fire power. What is different between the fires started by the Serbians or Pakistanis or Israelis, or the U.S., and that of the Branch Davidians? Fire is fire.

The FBI officials, the attorney general and the president himself apparently do not understand the most elementary psychology: violence begets violence. They grew “impatient.” They were “tired.” They had no “backup” team to replace them. The children were being “abused.” Koresh was “defying” authority. To the authoritarian mind, that’s enough reason to attack.

All the bleating about Koresh being responsible for the deaths in the compound doesn’t erase the fact that the FBI used violence first. And both the attorney general and the president concurred in that usage. Is that not the perfect metaphor for the entire nation-state system?

What has cybernetics to do with world peace?

First, let’s examine more closely the phrase, “world peace.” Its apparent opposite is “world war.” And war, world or not, is a breakdown of society. Cyberneticians would call it “dysfunction.” Put another way, war occurs because of a lack of an overarching social contract or law between the seemingly opposing social/political units. So peace would result, given the tacit or overt recognition of the social/political contract between fellow humans.

Now what about cybernetics? Well, it concerns itself with systems that can be practiced. For instance, when you drive down the road, your brain is taking in perceptions rapidly. This is raw data flowing into a complex organic computer which instantly turns it into an informational system which in turn becomes useful in driving the car.

Environmentalist James Lovelock has called planet Earth a giant cybernetic system. Absorbing millions of bits of raw data continually, it turns them into information used to preserve its natural integrity.

When I first met Stafford Beer in 1975, he was giving a lecture as an associate professor at the University of Pennsylvania on the “epistemology of cybernetics.” I hardly knew what the word meant. I did know, however, that the nation-state world was dysfunctional, i.e., warring with itself — as a fundamental policy of its “system.” Beer’s talk fascinated me. He was explaining in many diagrams precisely how social order worked. Here was a real political science! After reading his book, “Platform for Change,” wherein he claimed that “managing complexity” was our 21st century challenge rather than simply making things, I appointed Beer the coordinator of the World Cybernetic Commission of our World Government. I explained to him that our new government was a working “model” — the only one — which subscribed to the holistic premise of cybernetics. As self-declared World Citizens, I said, we had proclaimed and created a world system as the seminal condition for a peaceful world.
