

OBITUARY

Humberto Maturana (1928–2021)

Fritjof Capra remembers a groundbreaking biologist

Humberto Maturana, who died on 6 May at the age of 92, was one of the greatest biologists of the 20th century. His theory of autopoiesis and cognition, developed in collaboration with Francisco Varela, provides a clear scientific answer to the age-old question, ‘What is Life?’ It is based on two revolutionary insights: that the essence of biological life is a certain pattern of organisation (a self-generating network of metabolic processes); and that all living organisms continually regenerate themselves by interacting cognitively with their environment. Based on these two insights, Maturana and Varela created the first scientific theory that unifies mind, matter and life.

I still fondly remember the last time I saw Maturana, when I visited him in his home in Santiago in January 2018. He told us the story of autopoiesis, which began in his childhood when, at the age of 10, he made toys for himself and became interested in how things function and how they can be made. At the same time, already at this young age, he was interested in what living beings are and what happens when

they die. I could not help noticing that these two interests were reflected more than 40 years later in the title of his seminal book *De Máquinas y Seres Vivos* (*Of Machines and Living Beings*).

During our conversation, Maturana emphasised that, rather than asking ‘What is life?’ he asked, ‘How do living beings function?’ He thought this was an important difference, which led him to pay attention to the circular organisation of the living, and eventually to the notion of autopoiesis.

Over the last 30 years, Humberto Maturana has had a decisive influence on my scientific thought and writing, and the memory of his great warmth and humanity will be with me forever.

Fritjof Capra is a physicist, systems theorist and author. He teaches the online Capra Course based on his textbook *The Systems View of Life*, co-authored with Pier Luigi Luisi and published by Cambridge University Press.

capracourse.net

Design for life

Gill Coleman shares news of a textile project

Loving Earth is a community textile project offering groups and individuals an opportunity to take part in a touring exhibition to be displayed in the UK and abroad, and in Glasgow during the UN climate summit, COP26.

Organiser Linda Murgatroyd invites anyone who would like to be involved to create a 30cm x 30cm textile panel depicting something they love that is being threatened by the climate crisis, and an action they may be taking.

“Many of the panels we have already received are deeply personal. Creating a design and using the slow process of stitch gives participants time to reflect on ways they can make a difference. An accompanying text will provide additional information which can inspire further conversations about these important issues in the wider community,” she said.

The website provides a range of resources to support participants, a gallery and details of future events. Panels for COP26 are needed by this September.

lovingearth-project.uk



Courtesy of Loving Earth Project



Courtesy of The Heart Movement

The Heart Movement Bus

The Heart Bus will be travelling the length and breadth of the UK this autumn offering Mindfulness, Heart Intelligence and Listening Spaces to people, to help with their mental health post Covid. Developed in response to the pandemic, the Heart Bus is a mobile teaching studio that will be taken into the heart of the communities that need it most.

As the impact of lockdown on people’s mental health unfolds, the Heart Bus will provide a space where people can get crucial support. Wellbeing is a fundamental basic human need, not a lifestyle luxury, yet these practices are not available for everyone. The Heart Bus intends to change that.

theheartmovement.org/bus