

# Liberating Conversations

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**> Context** • The cultural worlds that we generate in our living are worlds in which we frequently live in a self-depreciating relational pain. This arises when we feel that we do not deserve to be loved and respected because we think that we are intrinsically incapable of satisfying what we think are legitimate cultural expectations about how we should be. **> Problem** • Can we find an answer to the general question, “How is it that our life is so frequently painful?” **> Hypothesis** • The pain for which a person asks for relational help is always of cultural origin, and arises from some experience in which she has not been loved and has accepted that she deserved not being loved because as a result of that experience she began to feel that she is intrinsically deficient. I propose that that person will come out of her pain – and will recover her self-love and self-respect as she reconnects with her fundamental loving nature as a biological-cultural human being – when she becomes able to realize that she is not intrinsically defective and that the expectations put on her are only arbitrary cultural demands. **> Results** • I show (a) that the recovering of self-love and self-respect occurs as a result of a conversation that opens a relational space for the interplay of the conscious and unconscious reflections in which the person in pain finds that she is an intrinsically loving biological-cultural human being; (b) that this occurs through the reflexive evocation of the inner feelings of self-love and self-respect in the consulting person as she reflexively contemplates her life while she is revealing it to a caring reflective listener in a conversation that flows without expectations, demands or judgment. In such reflective “liberating conversations,” the consulting person finds herself in self-love and self-respect, not through a rational argument but through her spontaneous connection to her unconscious constitutive human inner feelings as a loving being. **> Implications** • We do not need to suppose any reality independent of the operational coherences of our living to explain and understand the different worlds that we generate in the realization of our living. **> Key words** • Love, self-depreciation, reflexive conversation, self-love, languaging, structural determinism, predictability.

## Introduction

Living is spontaneous. We find ourselves living when we ask ourselves what living is and how we live our living alone and with others. The operational and relational domain in which we realize our living alone and with others is our niche. As organisms, we realize in our living interlaced with our niche the dynamic organism-niche unity in which occurs all that we do as persons (human individuals) with other persons that are in fact part of our niche while we are part of theirs.

We human beings are born as loving beings (Davila 2006) with an anatomy and a physiology that entails the implicit trust that we will be received in a human domain that will care for and protect us. Sometimes the cultural ambiance that receives us does not care for us with tenderness and betrays us with abuse and demands that deny us love. We might then submerge into the cultural pain and suffering of the self-depreciation and lack of self-respect of feeling not loved because we

cannot satisfy social demands that we believe to be legitimate.

The reflections that I present in this essay happen in the domain of our living as persons that can be conscious of what they do in the organism-niche unity that they integrate with other persons with whom they can reflect, observe, and explain their living, alone and together. We human beings live as persons that can generate beautiful cultural worlds of well-being in the *domain of love*, or ugly cultural worlds that give rise to the *relational pains* of self-depreciation that arise when they live in the denial of love. In the course of these reflections I have asked myself about what life is, what living is, and what it is to live. In this process I have learned the art of reflecting on my reflecting as well as the art of listening to my own reflecting, particularly when I ask myself such basic questions as: How do we do what we do as living human beings and as persons? How is it that although we live a culture that gives rise to conversations that generates pain, we can also generate conversations through which we come out of it?

For Maturana (1990), in science we explain what we do in our living with the operational coherencies of what we do in our living, so our living in the many forms that it adopts in the many worlds that we generate is always our subject. Furthermore, he emphasizes that to understand any subject of our concern in its locality we must be able to consider the broad systemic constellation of relations in which it is embedded. This essay arises as a scientific reflection on the operational, relational, and reflective processes involved in a therapeutic relation in which two persons are involved in a changing dynamics of feelings, emotions, and actions. The way it is presented here aims at consciously involving that systemic multidimensionality.

It is in this context that I present my reflections about the sensory, operational, and relational circumstances of our daily living that give rise to conversations that free us from the cultural relational pain and suffering that we live. These conversations, which sometimes seem to arise accidentally because they take place unexpectedly, are never fully so, because there is always

**BOX: Terminology**

**Domain of love:** The domain of human coexistence lived without demands, expectations or prejudices

**Networks of networks:** Living beings in their constitution and in the flow of their living operate as networks of processes embedded in networks of processes that can be conceptually abstracted but not necessarily operationally separated.

**Recursively systemic:** In living systems most processes operate recursively on the consequences of their operation, and it is this that makes them historical systems.

**Relational pains:** Relational situations that are lived painfully because one feels that one is unjustly not fully respected or loved

**Sensorial-operational-relational coherences:** All processes occur through the operation of the dynamic structures involved in their realization, regardless of the nature of the domain in which they take place.

**Systemic-systemic-systemic:** In nature and in most of what we do, all that we distinguish arises as a local abstraction in some systemically interconnected network of processes and relations of processes.

particular reciprocal orientation of the inner feelings of those persons that participate in them. Whichever the case, when one of these conversations takes place, conversations that I call “liberating conversations” (Dávila 2008), the person that was in pain lives the awe of finding herself in well-being again through having recovered her inner feelings of self-love and self-respect in the course of it.

The unexpected reflective conversation that I describe below is a case of this kind. In this case one can see that it is the process of its happening that leads the person to recover self-love and self-respect as she connects with her intimate inner feelings that constitute the fundamentals of the intrinsic ethical nature of the biological-cultural human living since its arising in the ancestral family.<sup>1</sup>

1| Maturana and Verden-Zöller (2008) argue that humanness arose some three million years ago in some ancestral family of bipedal primates with the beginning of living in languaging and its conservation from one generation to the next in the learning of the children. Maturana and I think that since the basic emotion for the origin of language in an ambiance of doing the things of living together in the pleasure of doing it must have been love, human initial coexistence must have been spontaneously ethical (Dávila & Maturana 2008).

## How do I do what I do in a liberating conversation?

The reflexive question that concerns me now has somehow been in my mind since my youth under the form: “How is it that our life is so frequently painful?” As humanity we have advanced in knowledge, in technology, in abilities to do practically all that we may want to do, and yet there is always so much pain and suffering. This question, which accompanied me during my studies, and my own experience of pain, led me to realize in my observations and my reflections that all the relational pain and suffering for which one asks for relational help is always of cultural origin (Dávila 2007). I say this in the understanding that a culture occurs as a closed network of conversations that one generates, realizes, and conserves in one’s own living by living it. A conversation that frees us from a cultural pain in any domain of our living alone and with others is not a technique, not a methodology, not dependent on some theory. Its roots are in our daily living, in the understanding of the biological-cultural matrix of human existence (human manner of living), and in whether or not we care for the well-being of all human beings as persons.

The following case illustrates the nature of liberating conversations.

## A case: An unexpected conversation

In a café in Madrid I observe a young woman taking her place at a neighboring table. I feel that she is not in well-being and that she is suffering. She is centered in herself, and while she begins to eat what she has asked for, I see, feel that there is no pleasure in her as she eats what she eats and drinks what she drinks, and I feel that she eats as a sad being just to survive. She is no longer alien to me as she takes up her cell phone and I begin to drink my coffee; I feel and hear in the tone of her voice, in the sound of her words, that I am unwillingly listening to a dispute, a quarrel. I feel moved, I halt for a moment, and as I listen, listening from where she was saying what she was saying, I hear a desperate appeal: *Please listen to me, listen to what I am saying! Father! Can you for once put yourself in my place?*

In the middle of my coffee, my reflections, and my conversation with the friend that is accompanying me, I feel moved in front of a growing pain that I am listening to unwillingly. My friend, almost by accident, obscures my vision with his body in an unintended desire that we concentrate on our conversation. However the psychic space in that cafe shop has changed, a moment of silence appears. She turns off her cell phone, my gaze and her gaze cross, and I feel her somewhat defiant; she immerses again in her inner feelings, in her inner conversation, in her soliloquy, and I can feel in her the denial of love lived. I say to my friend that I will go to fetch something, and as I pass by her side I stop, we look at each other, and I say to her, “My girl you are in great pain; you are in great suffering.” Now I am no longer alien to her world.

The young woman looks at me with her great brown eyes, agreeing at the same time with a movement of the head, and in that instant a magic space opens for our meeting. She accepts that I may sit beside her, and says to me: “Yes, I am in great pain, my father is very hard on me. I live with him and my mother.” “How old are you, what is your name?” I ask. She says that she is thirty years old and that her name is María. I say, “My name is Ximena.” We continue our conversation and I ask her if she depends on her father and if she is working. She answers yes

and that she is working. Then she goes on to say that with her earnings she helps her father to pay the mortgage for his house because he recently lost his business and owes money to the bank.

As María speaks she reveals to me, with what she says and in the way she says it, her place in the sensory, operational, and relational matrix of her family living. What I had heard previously as she spoke through the phone was her asking her father: "Give me some breathing space to live!" I feel that she is living under a great and unbearable demand, and as I sit beside her I say: "Do not try to change your father, do not go on pushing him to change; the person who has to reflect and change is you, according to how you want to live, and according to what you want to preserve in your living, whether alone or with others." As I listen to her I feel that something is changing in the way she looked, as if what has just been said has been heard and listened to for the first time.

After a moment I ask her, "Do you depend now on your father to live? Do you work to help him pay his debts? Which are your domains of autonomy?" She listens, halts for an instant, and says: "I cannot come out of this situation because I have to continue helping my father, and besides the doctors have said that I have a mental illness." "What mental illness?" I ask. And she answers, "The doctors have told me that I have a borderline illness, that I am mentally borderline." I feel her trapped in the feeling of guilt for wanting to do something for herself when she has learned that one should not care for oneself when in the face of a social obligation or social duty that says one must always help others first, particularly the parents. And she adds: "I cannot live my life because I cannot leave them alone ... and they cannot leave me alone."

What María tells shows me that her pain is of cultural origin, and it pains and moves me to confirm once more that with the words that we use to explain our pains, with the diagnoses that we make and accept as valid, we jail our souls, obscuring our vision of the cultural nature of our living together. I answer her, saying that she does not have an illness of the mind but that she has a pain of the soul that arises out of feeling that she is not seen and not heard. I feel that as she listens to me something changes

again in the configuration of her intimate inner feelings, and that the possibility of reflection opens for her, and therefore also the possibility of living a process that may lead her out of her pain and suffering. We talk for a while about the attachments that do not let us change the manner of living that we wish to change. She agrees with a movement of the head, and I say: "If you want to come out of that painful manner of living with yourself and others, and if you indeed want a more autonomous manner of living, now is the moment to act, now is the moment in which all can be improved because now you and your father are destroying each other." And then I add: "Your mother and your father love you in the way they know, they love you very much, and they do what they do, the best that they can do it, because that is what they learned to do." She cries, takes my hands and asks me whether I am a psychologist. In that moment there is no longer an illness of the mind that limits her; there is a pain of the soul that weighs on her heart, a pain of the soul that is a way of living in self-depreciation that can be changed, if one wants to do so, because it is a learned cultural pain.

I feel at that moment that we have changed together in the course of our conversation. She smiles, and I feel that our inner feeling has shifted and changed. She asks me if I see people that wish to consult me; I answer that I live in Chile. She asks: "How do we continue?" I give her my e-mail address. She then takes a small heap of sweets from her tray and puts them in my hands closing my fingers on them, in an act of the greatest tenderness. We said goodbye with a close, friendly embrace.

I can feel that María is now "a different person," agile, upright, and more free. What will happen with her? I do not know. Will she take a way of seeing-feeling-reflecting with her that was not there before her visit to the café?

*15 minutes had passed.*

This unexpected conversation was a spontaneous happening in my professional activities, not an accident. What this episode of daily living reveals is that seeing, listening, feeling in the relational opening that love makes can free us from the pain of any cultural trap. Indeed, this episode also shows us that the path that leads to

the recovery of well-being alone and in the company of others is the path of recovery of self-love and self-respect. One can see in liberating conversations all that has to occur in the flow of a conversation for the liberating consequences of a liberating conversation to happen.

In these circumstances what I intend to show in what follows is an evocation of the processes that took place spontaneously in the conversation just described, and in doing so I want also to show that these are processes that always occur in a liberating conversation, regardless of whether this conversation arises by accident or whether it is desired. Moreover, I wish to show also that this is an evocation of the actual processes that occurred in the encounter described in the little story presented above, and I do this fully aware that the explanation of an experience never replaces the experience lived, and that the description of the inner feelings lived never replaces the inner feelings lived while they were being lived.

## General configuration of a liberating conversation

In what follows I present in a somewhat systematized manner what I saw, observing my own reflexive observing as I abstracted from the happening of the liberating conversation presented above the configuration of the sensory, operational, and relational coherences that constitute and realize the happening of that kind of conversation.

A liberating conversation occurs between a person *A* and a person *B*. *A* is the observer reflecting on what she is doing. She knows that *B* is in pain, and she also knows how to listen, being present without intruding. A liberating conversation occurs when:

» *A* has the knowledge, the talent, and the intimate disposition for the art of listening to another person in a manner such that the other person spontaneously feels seen and present in her full legitimacy.

» *B*'s presence reveals to *A*, who has the ability to see this, that she is living in a profound pain of self-depreciation arising from not loving her self.

» *A* and *B* meet and look and listen to each other. And as this happens, *A* sees that the pain of self-depreciation that *B* lives

arises from an experience of negation of love that she has lived.

» *A* knows that the pain that person *B* lives is always a pain of cultural origin that arises when one believes that the negation of love lived is justified because it shows an intrinsic limitation of her personal identity.

» *A* knows that human living always occurs in a sensory, operational, and relational dynamics that is of a recursively systemic<sup>2</sup> nature; therefore she also knows that all that occurs in human living necessarily occurs systemically interrelated. In these circumstances, *A* also knows that the self-depreciation that arises when the negation of love lived is accepted as valid by *B* in some particular circumstance of her living is never lived in its particularity only, and will appear consciously or unconsciously in all that person does or feels in all aspects of her living.

» *A* also knows of herself that if she does not in fact care for all people in humanity she cannot properly listen or see anyone in depth because sooner or later she will find herself trapped in some theory that for her will justify a discrimination.

» *A* knows that *B*, like all people, only listens to what happens to her with what she hears when another person speaks, and she knows as well that she, *A*, cannot specify what *B* hears. *A* knows, understands, feels that her fundamental trust in her listening lies in that she knows that *B* will reveal in her conversation the sensory, operational, and relational matrix in which her living takes place and that she (*A*) will only see that matrix if she is looking, feeling, and listening while being in the domain of love.

» *A* also knows that she will listen in the domain of love only if she is present in the center of herself without demands, without expectations, without prejudices, opening the space for *B* to also open her listening in

2| We frequently speak of systems or of systemic processes in a way in which it is not clear that we refer to the dynamic multidimensional interconnectedness of all processes in the worlds that we bring forth with what we do in our living as human beings observing and explaining our living. The two expressions “systemic-systemic-systemic” and “recursively systemic” are used to evoke a systemic reflection so that we remain aware of the interconnections among the many dimensions of our living.

the domain of love, if she so wishes. And if *B* does this, she will in turn be able to see-listen to herself as she sees-listens to *A* actually immersing in the art of the liberating conversation as she listens.

» If all of the above happens, *A* will be able to show in a way that *B* can accept spontaneously that she (*A*) sees that *B* has all the capacities in her feelings-doings to live and act in self-respect in the path of love in self-loving.

» At the same time, *A* understands, comprehends, and feels that the pain and suffering for which a person *B* asks for relational help always arises in a cultural negation of love that she lived as a negative characterization of her identity that she accepted as valid because the culture validates it, even though she unconsciously knows in the depth of her inner feelings that such characterization is not valid.

» Furthermore, *A* also understands, comprehends, and feels that *B* unconsciously “knows” the relational matrix in which the negation of love occurred that she lived. She also understands, comprehends, and feels that *B* also “knows,” without knowing it, which is the relational matrix in which the way out of the cultural depreciation that she is living is to be found. And *A* knows as well that *B* also knows unconsciously that that way out is through her recovery of her self-respect and self-love. *B* reveals this unconscious knowledge of hers without being aware that she does so, and reveals it in the way that she moves and in the words that she chooses as she talks in her conversation with *A*, who understands, comprehends, and feels the feelings of *B* as she looks and sees her in the domain of love.

» *A* also understands, comprehends, and feels that *B* can only find the path out of her self-depreciation if she sees herself in self-love and self-respect in the reflexive mirror that *A* presents her as she hears her, listening to her in the flow of their conversation.

» Finally, *A* must know, and indeed knows from her understanding, comprehending, and feeling of human living – as she carries out liberating conversations as an aspect of her counseling profession – that the act of reflection as an act in the emotion that release certainties and attachments is the only thing that permits a person to come

out of any psychic-corporeal trap. And it is due to this knowledge that *A* knows, and should know, that the art and science of the conversation that liberates a person *B* from her cultural pain and suffering is possible only, and can take place only, in the listening of love.

In summary: For the liberating conversation to happen, person *A* must: a) understand, comprehend, and feel that reflection is an act of self-respect and self-love in which one observes what one does without prejudices, without expectations, and without demands; b) understand, comprehend, and feel that the person that reflects on what she feels, thinks, and does lives a spontaneous transformation of the configuration of her inner feelings and emotions that frees her from the hold of her certainties and attachments; c) understand, comprehend, and feel that the act of reflection as an act-process of seeing-listening in the domain of love is the only act-process of self observing that permits a person to come out of any psychic and bodily trap; and d) understand, comprehend, and feel that a liberating conversation can only occur in the domain of listening-seeing without prejudices, without demands, and without expectations, that is, the domain of love.

Now the reader can see that the answer that I propose to the general question, “How is it that our life is so frequently painful?” that I asked above, is: “Our lives become painful when we become trapped in living, accepting as valid, a culturally validated negation of love.” Liberating conversations are a way of escaping this trap because:

- The art and science of liberating conversations is the art and science of seeing and listening in the domain of love.
- A liberating conversation can only occur in the art and science of a conversation that takes place in the listening and seeing of love.

## Reflections

What I have done in this essay is attempt to evoke a vision of the intimate unconscious processes of congruent transformation that occur with the participants of any conversation, particularly in those that have to do with the pains of the “soul.” The



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Ximena Dávila Y. studied human and family relations, specializing in work relations at the Instituto Profesional Carlos Casanueva (IPCC). In 1998 she was a student of Humberto Maturana at the Faculty of Sciences of the Universidad de Chile, graduating under him in experimental epistemology. Following this theme over the last eleven years, she has developed her vision of the biological-cultural nature of humanness as a foundation of all that we human beings do as languaging reflective beings, which she calls “unitary epistemology.” She has worked for various companies as well as for the Chilean government. In particular, her preoccupation in the domain of human relations has been to understand how relational pain and suffering arises and how a person can come out of it. Following this path and based on the comprehension of the biology of cognition and biology of loving, she has developed the understanding and praxis of liberating conversations. In 2000, together with Maturana, she founded the Instituto Matrizítico, now Escuela Matrizítica de Santiago, as a center of research and reflection on the biological-cultural nature of humanness. There she works as researcher and as a professor.

conversations of this last kind are in general called “therapeutic” because they attempt to ease the pain of some illness. I originally called my work “reflexive conversations with therapeutic consequences,” but the persons that consulted me at some final point began to move and act with a self-confidence and autonomy that they had not shown before, and frequently said to me, “Thanks, I feel liberated.” So I began to call what I did “liberating conversations with therapeutic consequences.” I do not pretend under any circumstance that my work constitutes a therapeutic panacea, or that it represents a new therapeutic discovery, and this is why I do not use the word “therapy” to refer to what I do.

In his work, Maturana has shown that languaging occurs as a flow in living together in consensual co-ordinations of co-ordinations of behaviors (Maturana 1978). I add that that happens in a flow of consensual co-ordinations of co-ordinations of consensual inner feelings and emotions that are what, in fact, guide all that we do alone or together with others, regardless of the kinds of conversations in which we live. What I also see in what Maturana says, and what I also discovered in my work, is that languaging as a biological-cultural process does not designate objects. Instead it evokes, without describing what happens in the flow of the congruent transformations, that we live as we dance together the conversations that generate the worlds that we live in a changing unity with what we feel and do as well as with the changes of what we feel and do in the flow of the congruent transformations of our bodies and souls.

In these circumstances, what I want to reveal now in this essay is the processes that occur in our intimate being as we pass from a painful living without self-love and without self-respect, to a not painful living in which both self-love and self-respect are recovered as a manner of living in which they are natural manners of being alone and with others. Yet, in all that I have said I am not presenting a new therapeutic procedure; if anything I am rather suggesting, from my own understanding of my work as a Family Counselor with people that ask for relational help, that in general all effective therapeutic experience occurs only when the people that have lived such an experience live the inner feelings of the processes of recovery of self-love and self-respect that I have evoked and connoted in this article without attempting to describe them.

According to Maturana (e.g., Maturana 2008), we human beings are structure determined living beings. Hence we cannot specify what somebody else hears from what we say and so we are not responsible for what another person listens to in what we say. However, we are responsible for what we say and for the circumstances in which we choose to say what we say. The conscious art and science of liberating conversations arises in understanding of living together that only happens as a living together when living together occurs in listening others and listening oneself, without prejudices, expectation or demands in the non-competitive relational domain. That is what love is as a biological happening of co-existence.

Accordingly, what I have described above is not a method, not a procedure to obtain a liberating conversation as a result. It is the presentation of the flow of the processes that constitute a central aspect of the harmonization of the conversation that the person who understands, comprehends, and feels how the art and science of liberating conversations occurs must consciously generate when he or she receives and accepts a petition for relational help.

One never helps anyone because one never knows what another person wants, wishes or feels that she needs. Yet if one listens in the domain of love and understands the biological-cultural nature of human existence alone or with others, and if one also knows how to understand, comprehend, and feel what one sees and listens in that domain, one can participate with the other person in a dance of generating together a world of well-being without the pain that arises when one believes that one is guilty of not having some social relational capability that one believes that one should have.

Due to structural determinism we are not responsible for what others see or hear in what we say or do, but we are totally responsible for what we say or do and for the opportunity in which we say or do what we say and do. Also, we cannot describe or point to a “reality” that exists independently of what we do as we distinguish it and that, as a result of being independent of what we do, would be equally accessible to all living beings in general and to all human beings in particular. This knowledge has led to constructivist thinking as a way of admitting that we “construct” the worlds that we live

as we live together according to what the background of the “real in itself,” although inaccessible to us, permits us to do.

Since we cannot describe an independent reality, we do not and cannot know if an experience that we live as valid in the moment that we live it is something that we will later invalidate as an illusion or if we shall confirm it as a perception when we compare it with another experience, the validity of which we do not doubt at that instant. In these circumstances, what this work shows, if one is willing to follow the sensory, operational, and relational consequences of what I have just said, is that the worlds that we live, alone or with others, have only to do with the operational coherences of what we do in the realization of our living as human beings. They are not to do with any supposed reality that would exist independent of what we do as we operate as an observer making distinctions in our living.

We can imagine a domain of existence that is transcendent to what we do as human living beings that we choose to call “the real in itself.” Yet if we want to speak of what happens in that transcendent world, we find ourselves dealing only with the sensory, operational, and relational coherences of the realization of our living as biological-cultural beings. The different worlds that we live in all their diversity are *networks of networks of systemic-systemic-systemic sensory, operational, and relational coherences of the realization of our human living that as networks of conversations constitute and realize all that we do, whether we call them fantasies, poetic creations, philosophies, religions, art, cooking ... or ... quantum mechanics.*<sup>3</sup>

3| In these circumstances, and as an invitation for reflection for personal answers, we can still ask ourselves: “How do the worlds that we live arise in all their diversity, complexity, and splendor as different domains of sensory-operational-relational coherences as well as independent operational domains? How do the worlds that we live appear as not intersecting operational domains of existence if they arise from the same operational relational domain that is the realization of our living? Do we construct them? What do they have in common? What is the origin of the operational coherences that arise in our living together in conversations?”

We do not generate the worlds that we live as conscious or unconscious intentional acts of construction or creation. Nor do they preexist to our living them. The worlds that we live arise as we live them as the spontaneous domains of sensory, operational, and relational coherences in which we realize and explain our living with the sensory, operational, and relational coherences of the realization of our living. And what all of them have in common as domains of sensory, operational, and relational coherences or worlds that we generate in our living, is that all of them arise in all that we do as we live them and explain them as domains of structural determinism, whatever the nature of the elements and processes that compose them as they arise as we live them.

However, the different worlds that we generate in our living do not intersect in their operation due to the different nature of their components, and it is not possible to deduce what happens in one from what happens in another. Yet what we can do as observers that contemplate from the broader perspective of our external observing is to make historical correlations between them as we compare the flow of their independent happenings because all of them exist as domains of structural determinism that become accessible to our reflections as soon as we discover their structural regularities.

The human sensory, operational, and relational domain in which occurs and operates a liberating conversation is structurally determined, and the participants cannot predict what will happen with each other in their encounters because none of them can specify what the other listens to. Person *A* moves in the understanding of the deep inner feelings and emotions that guide the living of human beings as loving beings, and she also understands, comprehends, and feels the course of congruent transformation that she and person *B* must have undergone along their conversation. Therefore, person *A* can, from her full unconscious-conscious understanding of the congruent present that she and the person *B* live, participate without effort or intent in the spontaneous arising of the liberating “reflexive mirror” as she listens to her listening of person *B*’s listening in the flow of their conversation.

The recovery of self-love and self-respect occurs without mystery in a liberating conversation, and the possibility that this should occur is in the biological-cultural constitution of our humanness. Love and willingness to listen in a domain in which we care for the well-being of all people is all that is needed. Love and listening in love with understanding, comprehension, and sensitivity in the domain of a human coexistence that is guided by inner feelings, desires, and purposes that can be contradictory, when it happens, arises from the fundamentals of our humanness. We know that as we ask a question to a person we trigger in him or her a change that we cannot predict, and strictly we never know what will happen, and it is because of this that a conversation that flows as a transformation in living together that generates harmony in our coexistence is an art, the art of human living, the art of loving.

## Conclusion

In summary, I argued for the following four points: 1. We human beings exist as living beings in languaging, and as singular individuals we exist as persons in conversations and in networks of conversations. 2. As human beings we are born, due to our biological constitution, in the implicit (anatomical and physiological) trust that there will be a world that will receive and care for us in tenderness and respect for our existence, in which it will be possible that we conserve the basic configuration of intimate feelings proper to us as loving beings. 3. However, the cultural manner of living that we unconsciously and consciously generate and conserve now in our daily living frequently destroys that fundamental trust along our life through situations that deny love, trapping us in realizing and conserving, without being aware of this, a manner of living grounded in the pain of a continuous unconscious self-depreciation that leads us to search for relational help. 4. Yet it is possible for a person that is in this trap to come out of it, recovering her self-respect if she enters with another person into a reflective conversation that permits her to realize that the self-depreciation in which she finds herself after the negation of love lived is not

valid because it arose through her acceptance of a cultural negation that does not represent his or her intrinsic being.

While the work described here cannot be considered a direct continuation of his work, Humberto Maturana has influenced me in various ways. He gave me the understanding of how living systems operate as molecular systems and of how the nervous system operates as a closed system. The comprehension of this understanding liberated my way of thinking in a such way that in my work as Family Counselor first, and later in my reflections and work as an epistemologist oriented to "think thinking," as Gregory Bateson (Bateson 1991) invited us to do: a) I could become conscious and aware of the fact that the pain for which one asks for relational help always arises in some cultural experience of negation of love; b) I could see that in the people that consult for a cultural pain, their inner feelings of pain are active at every moment of their continuously changing present, giving form at every instant to the way they act in their

relational living; and c) I could realize that the people that ask for relational help have conserved and conserve as a valid manner of daily living since the moment in which it took place the self-depreciation that evoked in them the pain of the negation of love that they lived. And as I realized all this in my many reflections, and as I observed in my work that this actually occurred, I began to generate, almost as a spontaneous happening in my work, the liberating conversations as an expression of a deep understanding of the poetry of love.

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ASC Annual Conference  
9-15 August 2011  
in Richmond, Indiana, USA



### Second Announcement

The American Society for Cybernetics (ASC) is pleased to make a second announcement of our conference, to be held in Richmond, Indiana, 11 to 13 August 2011, focussing on the theme of Listening. We take listening to be a metaphor for attentively attending to others, to understand their intentions and wishes in the most generous manner. We hold that listening is the key to conversation, making conversation possible in the first place while also providing the mind set in which conversation can succeed, including (for instance) generosity towards others and being non-judgmental, without which we just impose our own ideas and understandings of our conversational partners. We use both the terms listening and conversation in ways expanded from their original, aural forms.

The conference is based in holding conversations in small groups around given themes. These conversations are reported back to all groups in plenary sessions. There are possibilities to present papers in a number of ways. We are currently building a list of workshops and performances, which will be posted on the conference web site.

There will be evening events some of which will be preplanned, but many of which will arise as a result of conference conversations. Our aim is to be responsive to possibilities. We are also offering pre- and post-conferences, which are without fee for those attending the main conference. The pre-conference will be concerned with a discussion arising from the Cybernetics of Cybernetics Competition recently sponsored by the ASC. The post conference will provide an opportunity to study selected papers by Heinz von Foerster (whose centenary we are celebrating) and Ernst von Glasersfeld (who died shortly after addressing our conference last year).

A number of very distinguished people with major international reputations have already expressed a wish to attend.

There is a second early bird rate which holds until 7 July. We ask those who wish to attend to register and then make a Statement of Interest (which allows us to assemble the conference booklet). If you have any question regarding this procedure, please contact [secretary@asc-cybernetics.org](mailto:secretary@asc-cybernetics.org).

Ranulph Glanville (Conference Co-Chair and President of the ASC)



### Venue

The conference will be held at the Quality Inn Hotel and Conference Center in Richmond, Indiana. Accommodation will be available there, too.

### Paper Refereeing and Proceedings

Although this is a conference that values conversation between participants above all, we have made arrangements for those who need or want to submit papers. This conference is expected to generate a set of proceedings published after the conference by one of several journals and publishers with which the ASC is well connected. The process of refereeing and publishing is a cumulative one that allows for continuous improvement of each paper, especially in reflecting discussions at the conference. Papers will be accepted in the first instance by blind refereeing of 400 word extended abstracts. There are 2 submission dates, giving a chance to rework abstracts. Authors of accepted abstracts will be asked to post drafts on the conference website for open refereeing by conference participants. All comments and responses will be visible to all conference attendees. This is the second level of refereeing. Paper presentation consists of listening to and including benefits from comments, encouragements and criticisms made at the conference, as well as incorporating new material found by authors as a result of their participation. After the conference, authors will be expected to rework their papers. Reworked papers will be subject to rigorous, traditional blind refereeing processes, after the conference. For the latest details and submission deadlines, please visit the conference website.