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ON MATURANA'S CONCEPT OF A LIVING SYSTEM AND WILDEN'S DOUBLE BINDS

- There is no way to do justice to Maturana with a superficial approach to his book. It is however the choice made, thus this essay is more a reflection on an understanding or the lack of it.
- When taking Maturana's concept of a living system and Wilden's descriptions of double-binds, how does one concept relates to the other and what concepts could be elaborated from there, in other words what are some of the implications in psychological, social terms.
- How is this concept radically different?

Maturana's description of a living system. The word autopoiesis (poiesis, creation, production) to describe his concept. Like all revolutions, the only reference point is that there is no references.

*living systems are complete, circular self-contained units the only requirement of a living system is to maintain its circular identity within the environment.*

Is it maintenance of molecular tissues or maintenance of the energy holding it together, or both?

Circularity in term of a closed line  
Circularity in term of a lump of clay

Evidently there is a structure, a basic structure with its possibilities and its limitations.

Besides its circular particularity, what are the limits of its parts in maintaining it? What is so crucial in the first three years of experience of a child that it determines patterns for the rest of his life?

MANDALA  
SELF-CONTAINED  
WHOLE  
COMPLETE  
SELF-SUFFICIENT  
SEPARATE  
DEFINED  
THE BLUES  
UNITY

*(3.P9) A living system defines through its organization the domain of all interaction into which it can possibly enter without losing its identity, and it maintains its identity only as long as the basic circularity that defines it as a unit of interaction remains unbroken.*

*(6p10) the niche is defined by the class of interaction into which an organism can enter.*

The niche  
The master walks the dog  
The dog walks his master

Learning is the ability to replicate each part of the structure of the system.  
(G.Backus 24/11/1990)?

#### BOUNDARIES

The world is the place of perturbation; it is not even the whole boundary.

*Anything said is said by an observer.*

*For the observer, the niche appears to be part of the environment, but for the organism the niche constitutes the entire domain of interaction, thus it cannot be part of the environment that is exclusively in the cognitive domain of the observer (6p10)*

*The nervous system functions only in the present. Future and past exist only for the observer...The system does not know past & future – yet the ability to be observer makes us observer of our self, thus creates future/past references – only in self-consciousness does the notion of past/future exist...*

*Living systems are cognitive systems, and living as a process is a process of cognition.*

*Change is relevant to maintenance.*

*Our cognitive process differs from the cognitive processes of other organisms only in the kinds of interactions into which we can enter, such as linguistic interactions, and not in the nature of the cognitive process itself.*

*Learning would be an attempt, a function of maintaining the self-regulating system.*

The only requirement of constructivism is to not restrict the system.

*Language's function as of orienting the orientee with his cognitive domain and not to point to independent entities. There is no transmission of information through language.*

*An organism cannot determine in advance when to change and not to change, nor determine what is the optimal functional state it must reach.*

Maintenance at all prices has fascinating implications of visual special conceptions.

Implications of Maturana's description at a social level

The effect of double-binds on the system:

Starting with the constructivist view that our system are closed system with the ability to interact with the environment through zones of perturbations, the double-bind can be defined as the freezing of a perturbation area with another living system perturbation area, at which point both system must reintegrate illogical cognitive element in order to maintain their respective structure, with the effect of restricting. Once the system cannot maintain itself with the double-bind, then the double-bind is integrated by the system itself, creating such "dysfunction" as schizophrenia. Physical illness in these terms is also an expression of cognitive dysfunction.

Man/woman double-bind, as described by Wilden would be one that is integrated in the system, if we define society as a living system.

Can it be said that the double binds involving two units such as husband/wife would be either at a different stage in the process or of a slightly different nature.

Schizophrenia would be an example of an integrated double-bind within the individual.

Is there an intrinsic difference between a double-bind involving two living system and a double-bind integrated by each system besides a question of degree or stage in the process.

The world lies in the space between systems, on the boundary, on the perturbation zone. Reality hits you on the boundary, on the transitional line.

- the individual
- the social order

- implications in the area of addictive behavior
- the artist double-bind
- if one defines mental health as the absence of double-binds, (physical illness as the expression of cognitive dysfunction at the biological level) then health does not exist anymore than does reality with a big R. Maturana says that all living systems are cognitive systems, thus cognition, in a causal way of thinking, either comes before biology or is part and inseparable from it.

COGNITION (Derived from Latin cognition, knowledge, to know. The process of knowing in the broadest sense, including perception, memory, and judgment, the result of such a process; perception, conception, etc.)

All the schizo is doing is maintaining his system and preventing it from disintegration

Healthy double-binds of therapeutic purposes are a lie by definition

How do you identify double-binds in interaction? Is an observed double-bind of the observed or of the observer domain? Since it takes two to create a double-bind, how could a therapist's participation truly be free from the very nature of it, thus be in and observer at the same time. Using double-binds to "cure" double-binds seems like fighting violence with violence. The peace maker using the weapons of war.

I see hope in Maturana's concept in that it steps out of cognitive conventions, but integration of revolutionary movement is inevitable by the very nature of revolution or what is been referred to as reality blows. All must lie in the reintegration occurring from the blow, thus in the cognitive ability of the system. The less rigid the more integration can take place. We spend our whole life integrating the stuff of experience to fit our experience into our cognitive domain. A deviant would be someone with the ability, or built-in system, to integrate deviant interaction with the world. As the "normal" system finds it impossible to integrate deviant behaviour without disintegration of their inherent structure so is the deviant incapable of integrating "normal" conduct...

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