Conference Theme: Listening

We live in a time that emphasizes the importance of giving people their voice. But, as Heinz von Foerster noted, the listener makes the meaning, not the speaker, so it is the act of listening that transforms a stream of sounds into that meaning. The act of listening begins to make human interaction circular and creative.

As a subject, Cybernetics informs circular or recursive systems, and listening provides a key to circularity in human systems, allowing us to respond in appropriate manners, possibly leading into new territory, generating new ideas and creating choice. This is cybernetic circularity in action.

We also use the word listening “metaphorically,” beyond its origin in hearing. But whichever metaphor we choose, listening requires opening up, having an open mind, and not judging until having listened properly and emphatically, not only to what is said, but also to what “what is said” does. Such heightened sensitivity, we argue, goes to the core of the idea of “caring” for and with each other.

In our conference, we will not only discuss and think about listening. We will also practise it. We intend not just to understand (and hence to position) “metaphorical” listening, but also to learn to do it better. Through listening, the idea of participation will come alive. We will enjoy each others’ company, experience what we each have to contribute and leave the conference with ideas that none of us had when we arrived.

The ASC endeavors, each year, to reach out to new communities as well as those it has already established links with. Last year we welcomed artists, designers and mathematicians, This year we hope to add those in listening practices and professions—musicians, therapists, managers, educators and others—as well as our artist, designer and mathematician friends, to enrich our meeting.

Join us in exploring listening in all its glory, 11 to 13 August 2011 in Richmond, Indiana. Join us, too, in the pre-conference (9 and 10 August) and post-conference (14 and 15 August) events.