



ruth cohn
institute for **TCI**
international

The art of leading

**Selected texts from the
Legacy of Ruth C. Cohn
(1912-2010)**
for the International Symposium
"Life and work of a courageous woman"
at the Humboldt University of Berlin (October 2022) and
for the Symposium in India Jan. 2024

Based on a pre-selection by Matthias Scharer

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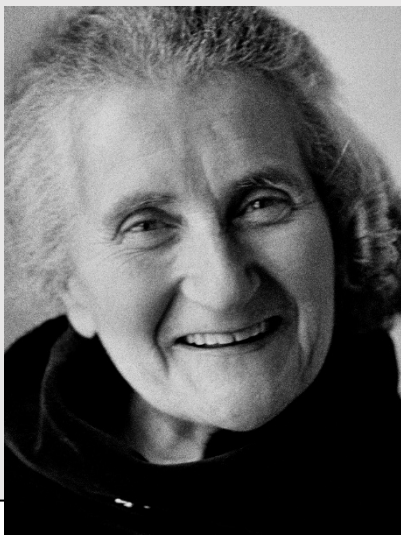
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Content

Introduction	3
1 Ruth C. Cohn and her political thinking	4
2 Ruth C. Cohn and her spiritual search	9
3 Ruth C. Cohn and her universe of values	13
4 Ruth Cohn and her view of being a woman	18
5 Ruth C. Cohn and her Jewishness	22
6 Ruth C. Cohn and her ageing process	27
7 Ruth C. Cohn and her idea of the spread of TCI	32
8 Ruth C. Cohn as a Poet	36
Afterword to the Indian edition of the Reader	41

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Introduction

In an exhibition that was accessible at the venue from the beginning of the symposium, Michaela and Matthias Scharer presented the background of the Ruth C. Cohn legacy, 'peepholes' into the approximately 93,000 sheets stored in the archive of the Humboldt University of Berlin, along with an outlook on existing and future research. The size of the huge legacy forced us to limit ourselves to a few points of view.

The themes for the pre-selection of the texts in the reader resulted, on the one hand, from the legacy and, on the other hand, from questions brought in by the planning group of the symposium under the leadership of Brigitte Mazohl. The preselected texts were edited in teams in such a way that they provided a contextualized and 'readable' basis for the work in ten different thematic groups. Possible theme formulations were offered on the respective 'intermediate sheets', which of course had to be updated and adapted to the respective interests, to be worked in small groups.

The entire symposium was documented in: *Themenzentrierte Interaktion/Theme-Centered Interaction/TCI*, 37 (1) (2023).

Matthias Scharer and the planning team of the Berlin Symposium

A comprehensive overview of the Ruth C. Cohn legacy and the scans made in the course of registration (approx. 19,000 sheets), is provided in the 'Findbuch' by Matthias and Michaela Scharer. It is available on:

Archiv der Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Wagner-Régeny-Straße 5, 12489 Berlin,
Tel. +49 30 2093-99742 (Reading room, general information only during opening hours)
E-Mail: archiv@ub.hu-berlin.de

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The digital finding aid (to date unfortunately without a scan index and with limited designations of the data compared to the print version) is accessible at:

<https://www.archiv-hu-berlin.findbuch.net/php/main.php#4e4c20436f686e>
(last call on Oct.2023)

1 Ruth C. Cohn and her political thinking

There is a wide range of texts on Ruth C. Cohn and her understanding of politics. The legacy mainly offers material in the form of recorded conversations and letters, which show that Ruth C. Cohn continuously dealt with political conditions and world events.

This selection of texts offers a small insight into yet-to-be unpublished notes and conversations from the legacy, as well as a short excerpt of a published dialogue.

Suggested theme:

"Brain and heart" in the contemporary world situation:

What would that mean for Ruth Cohn?

How would she act in today's situation?

1a) Excerpt from a manuscript with no known background (year unknown).

Politics:

Only through inner and outer expansion of consciousness, becoming acquainted with oneself even through spheres that were hitherto unconscious, and becoming acquainted with the world situation, even through events in countries we have not visited yet, can politics and society change. Yet we know that growth is a slow process. We have learned, in all psychotherapies, that small steps are necessary and that too big a step can endanger growth. The same happens in politics. Too rapid changes, before democratisation and humanisation have become internalised in individuals, lead to sharp backlashes. This is the calamity that revolutions based only on economic or hierarchical issues bring. But there is a hope that the beginnings of becoming self-aware will not be lost in their slow process even when overwhelming reactive responses seem to suppress them. What has already been integrated in the small steps of evolutionary growth, since the discovery of the unconscious, and through the obvious interdependence with all human beings, will perhaps remain effective as a ferment of the spirit; remain effective even under the compulsion of violence. (HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 28, pp. 42-43; here: p. 42)

1b) From a conversation on Ruth C. Cohn's understanding of politics with Friedemann Schulz von Thun (published)

"Today it is already political whether I give my chickens fish food from the Third World or grains from my garden. Because if I feed Third World fodder to my animals, I fail politically. We are connected globally in everything. Every act I do, whether I feed myself or whether I teach, is political because everything is connected to everything. This is my political principle."

from: Cohn, Ruth C. and Friedemann Schulz von Thun (1994), We are politicians - all of us!, in: Rüdiger Standhardt - Cornelia Löhmer, Zur Tat befreien. Socio-political perspectives of TCI group work, Mainz: Grünewald, 30-62; here: 42.

2. Original excerpt from a tape recorded conversation (transcribed) with Ruth C. Cohn and a Rolf (unknown) on 13 May 1985 in Goldern, Hasliberg, Switzerland.

Question:

But with all that you say, Ruth, the question always arises for me, what is it that[s] actually attracted you to this question of values for so many years. I have the impression that it is no longer your goal to work with TCI, but that the question of values is a much bigger goal for you, in the sense of: How is it possible for people to live happily and meaningfully together! TCI can play a role in this. But what is essential is the larger framework, and that is obviously the question of values for you.

Ruth:

I see TCI as a compass. I have only discovered in the last few years that basically in the working hypothesis of TCI, i.e. in the triangle, in the sphere itself, the ethics are already contained, which I have expressed in the axioms (principles). This ethics is implicit in the TCI symbol. But the compass is never the ethics, just as the map is never the landscape. The map of TCI says: "Be and become who you are and become yourself; and be and become the part in the We that participate in the life, the joy, the tasks of the community as it corresponds to its own person; i.e. "look inward, look outward, guide yourself according to your values and abilities, and according to the reality as you see it".

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 114, p. 135)

3. A letter written by Ruth C. Cohn at age 72, in response to Ronald Reagan's presidency. The letter is given without a year in the legacy, however, based on the statement of Ruth C. Cohn herself "I am myself close to 72 years old" we can date it to the year 1984. Presumably, the letter was addressed to the public. However, this cannot be verified, since it was not published in any magazine. Probably, she also sent it to the Reagan Administration.

"Ronald Reagan, Age 73 –

A Contemporary's Reflections

Do you know anyone in your family or among your friends (including yourself) who is about 70 years of age, whom you would entrust with the new leadership of a big firm especially if s/he has not had a particularly relevant education and years of experience in the specialty of this organization? I, for one, don't and so I am quite concerned about our aging Presidents' wish to be re-elected.

I am myself close to 72 years old and am – what you would call – a successful and skilled woman in the fields of my lifelong occupations – in psychology, psychotherapy, and education. As such I pay attention to my own aging processes and to those of other old people.

I have observed that I have not declined in responsiveness, logic, intuition and skills which I have accumulated in long years of practice: teaching, counseling and doing therapy. I still conceive new ideas and act accordingly.

Yet there are losses too: I frequently forget and cannot momentarily recall names, places and multiple connections of events. Such data may return to my consciousness within minutes or apparently be erased from the storage of my recollections. – In your experience are such symptoms common with most older people? What would they mean for a president who may have to make 3 – 5-minute decisions over the life and death of millions of people and possibly over life itself?

Is President Reagan an exception? Can he grasp and integrate and adequately use knowledge of important national data and that of the multitude of other nations, races, their problems and societal conditions? Or ought we to take seriously the many reports of his own staff and of journalists who report on his innumerable lapses, i.e. when he toasted to the Bolivian people when he was in Brazil, or that he showed confusion about who was fighting whom in Central America? Can 73-year-old Reagan encompass and accommodate the difficulties which our civilization's mind-boggling electronic advances and ecological damages put before us? Could he comprehend and integrate the brilliant thoughts of social and natural scientists, especially physicists who see our time as a hopeful turning point for humankind if we are wise enough to perceive of its opportunities?

Are we 1984 citizens possibly being led by our aging President's handicaps and our own regressive thinking that being richer and more powerful than others will solve our own and the world's problems? Have we not learned the lesson of the catastrophic consequences of national collective egotism which followed "... good is what is good for the Germans..." and "for the superior white race"? Do we want to remain on the track of self-adulation built on putting down or mowing down cultures, countries, forests and people?

Or do we want to lead ourselves toward respect for each of us and for our planetary companions – such as water, grain, trees, animals and people? Should we not strive for realistic humility and accept the burden of our weaknesses and shadows and mitigate them with our ability to care beyond ourselves, to be capable of anticipating dangers and finding social solutions? Evil enemy images are pleasing national egos everywhere. They serve to project one's own fallibilities onto others and prevent constructive solutions.

Ronald Reagan, like most other old and healthy people, exaggerates his previously acquired capabilities. He has undoubtedly improved on his acting skills. He is a brilliant "actor-president". He can and does learn many roles and plays them well: yet this does not necessarily mean that he has overcome in his mind and in his heart or actions, 19th century theories and values, absorbed by him as a child at the time of World War I.

We are blessed with the right to vote under civilized circumstances. Yet it is hard for us as privileged people of the First World to acknowledge that we live amidst worlds of suffering and starvation and have to recognize that we are partly causing this misery.

We need to overcome our intellectual avoidance of facing economic and ecological causations and connections and our emotional passivity towards neighbors and towards the future. We need to be wise in electing people who believe in using the moral compass and the skills of human understanding, planetary rationality and generous cooperation. No commercials, no charisma nor acting skills, nor one's own resignation or grandiosity should lead us to disregard some essential criteria in our choice for the job of the president. These include intellectual clarity, emotional authenticity, the wisdom of global concerns and the right time of the biological clock."

Ruth C. Cohn

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 161 pp. 253–255)

2 Ruth C. Cohn and her spiritual search

The question of God accompanied Ruth Cohn throughout her life. When WILL International was founded in Europe in 1972, the inclusion of spiritual questions was a major concern of hers which she was unable to push through.

However, Ruth C. Cohn's TCI is based on a holistic, universally related, perhaps even transcendent view of human beings and the world and these values find expression in the axioms, among other things. Without the all-connectedness, which is an expression of her spirituality, not explicitly mentioned, but presupposed in the First Axiom, TCI would be reduced to a mere method of action and guidance.

Behind Ruth C. Cohn's universal understanding of the world and human beings and her value orientation is a spiritual norm that has not yet been sufficiently described and clarified. In any case, a relatively large number of texts in the estate refer to a religio-spiritual search process that occupied her intensively for years and later into old age, after her return from exile. Traces of this can be found in the texts for this working group.

Suggested theme:

Ruth C. Cohn's spiritual search - as reflected in the axioms

Selected Texts on Ruth C. Cohn and her Spiritual Search

1. *Excerpt from a letter by Ruth Cohn to Ruth Zenhäusern and Jürgen vom Scheit, 8 September 1997. The art therapist Ruth Zenhäusern (1946-2016) and the psychologist and author Jürgen vom Scheidt (born 1940) jointly conducted a writing workshop in Munich in 1979, from which the Institute for Applied Creativity Psychology, established in 1996, emerged.*

[...] I was able to create TCI and its first design in total solitude and only with God's help.

[...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 196, pp. 290–292, here: 290)

2. *Excerpts from an unpublished transcription of a tape recording by Ruth Cohn, presumably from 1982 (In the Antechamber of the Unfathomable)*

I was now surprised by the fact that I experienced prayers for strength as relieving and helpful, even though I did not believe in a personal-listening or help-giving God.

"Autosuggestion", however, was not an explanation for me, but just a cheap word that said nothing factual. Then it occurred to me that perhaps concentration could act like a kind of magnet, supplying energy to the conscious will.

This became a figurative hypothesis: micro-particles/waves or vibrations inside and outside a person can be quasi-magnetically attracted from the outside and/or strengthen or deepen forces from the inside through concentration.

This hypothesis can serve as a physical or personal-pantheistic explanation for the phenomenon of how prayers, suggestion, telepathy, homeopathy, laying on of hands, etc. can bring about healing success.

If the Divine-Spiritual weaves through the universe, moving and moving, then we are both effectees and effectors in the Divine Becoming and Change. Theologically, this paradox could be a mental aid to defend the thesis of a God who is at once eternal, timeless, and yet becoming. Being divine is both given to us and demanded of us; the moving power in the universe is us and is moved by us. Our prayers and our actions can be co-movers of the divine. We are autonomous and interdependent.

[...]

I had put the question of religiosity aside for myself since I had left my childhood God, read Goethe and become a convinced pantheist. My belief in divinity in and outside of my body continued without me paying much attention to it. I also felt no need to pursue the question of a "God from outside" or to pray, and surprised myself when my poems often became prayers.

[...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 299, pp. 200–208; here: 200, 208)

3. *Excerpts from unpublished typewritten notes by Ruth Cohn after conversations with the theologian and psychotherapist Matthias Kroeger (1935–2021), with whom she frequently exchanged views on questions of spirituality [Without specifying the date, but already during the time when she lived in Hasliberg in Switzerland, i.e. after 1974; heading: Religion from outside].*

[...] God came to me from the outside. My mother taught me that He existed. Or my teacher told me about Him. Or a clergyman. Or the congregation. There were psalms, chorales, harvest festivals, funeral ceremonies. There were Bible lessons, baptisms or circumcisions, candles, songs, festive evenings with gifts. The God from outside was placed in my soul like a flowering plant in a flowerpot. (If nothing mischievous happens, it will grow).

"Religion from without" does not have to be worked out primarily, for all those who are given God as children; they only have to deepen the relationship. Children who are not given Him sometimes meet Him later in life - through human encounters or experiences that arrive as a voice of God from the outside. Or through scriptures. Or thoughts. Or all kinds of missionaries. The second category has a harder time coming to God. The roots of faith are less deeply grounded. But there is also the other: Faithful children who no longer trust their original educators and reject "religion from the outside". Thus, trustworthy signposts through the physical, somatic and psychical nature of the earth and the human being seem to supersede questions of every should and sense.

"Religion from outside": God created me in His freedom. He gave me meaning and word. I owe Him answer and responsibility. My life for or against Him is my judgement. [...] (HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 295, pp. 181–182)

4. *Excerpts from unpublished typewritten notes by Ruth Cohn after conversations with the theologian and psychotherapist Matthias Kroeger (1935–2021), with whom she frequently exchanged views on questions of spirituality [Without specifying the date, but already during the time when she lived in Hasliberg in Switzerland, i.e. after 1974; heading: Religion from within].*

I look for the divine in me and find it. Or the divine in me finds me. I may be tense or sick and focus on the breath as the "healing wind" - and it (often) heals. The divine speaks from the grace of breathing.

[...] I accept myself, I respect (and love) others and sense in me and through others the One Divine in You, me and us and a responsibility to recognise it in us, to nurture it and to choose the Divine as the centre of what I do and to be there for You. The meaning of life appears as the uncovering of the Divine in us -- the loving, the creative, the nurturing. I am moved by the divine in me - by letting go and allowing the healing process in the physical, by the ability to love and by my human spirit, which can penetrate and survey the visible beyond the world of sensation and feeling. [...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 295, pp. 185–189)

5. Excerpts from the typed and unpublished transcription of a conversation between Ruth Cohn, the German psychotherapist Franz-Wilhelm Kandra (year of birth unknown) and the Swiss journalist Christoph Pfluger (born 1954): Hope Grows by Doing. A conversation between Ruth Cohn, the founder of Theme-Centred Interaction, the psychotherapist Franz Kandra and Christoph Pfluger [A journal publication was presumably planned].

[...] Christoph Pfluger: Do you think people have more or less hope now than, say, 20 years ago?

Ruth Cohn: Hope has shifted to the small circles and to the transcendental. For a while, everything was feasible, and through that we had the great hope of making peace. Today we have realized that we cannot make it and that we only have hope again when we live in a way that is actually expected of human beings, with a higher ethic, so to speak. It is not less or more hope than before, but a different one. The belief in feasibility has fallen away. On the other hand, I am convinced that it is not possible without doing. [...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 282, pp. 56–60; here: 56)

3 Ruth C. Cohn and her universe of values

Ruth Cohn's explicit preoccupation with her "universe of values" only occurs in her confrontation with the one-sided use of TCI as a "method". She becomes aware that the values she took for granted from her childhood have to be made explicit so that TCI is not misunderstood. At the same time, she connects the question of values with her universal "cosmic-transcendental" worldview.

A first consequence of this development is the renaming of the approach from TIM - "Theme Centered-Interactional Method" to TCI - "Theme-Centred Interaction".

In contrast to the "division" into "attitude and method" that is sometimes practised in TCI, for Ruth C. Cohn the two are inseparable and can be understood from her world view of a transcendently anchored universe of values.

Her view of values becomes concrete in the assumption of an innate "sense of values" that is supposed to be anchored in every human being. This connects with the question of "absolute" values and conscience; in understanding the latter, Ruth C. Cohn clearly deviates from Sigmund Freud.

Suggested theme:

Ruth C. Cohn's universe of values and my awareness of values: What strikes me, what comes to mind? What beats each other, what gets along?

1 This (abridged) text is a preliminary draft for the later discussion on "Self-realisation and Experientialism" in: Cohn, R. C., Farau, A. [1984] (2008), Gelebte Geschichte der Psychotherapie. Zwei Perspektiven, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, pp. 433-436 and the account of Humanistic Psychology that follows in it.

[...] Ordinary life means participation in the earth community in the universe. Humanity comprises of the community of all human beings and their universal transcendence. Man is an autonomous being in interdependent embeddedness in his human, earthly and universal environment.

The human being has the capacity for consciousness. This ranges from the animal-like sensitiveness to the spiritual thinking-feeling-faith realms; from the concealed, integrated or pushed away unconscious to the widely awake available. [...] Man is the only known living being who can consciously contribute to his evolution and further creation or complete annihilation. [...] The quantum leap of knowledge in this century can promote the evolution of the sense of ethical - personal and communal values. [...] Personal life is participation in the Earth community in the universe. [...] The sciences of the last decades - such as physics, biology, anthropology, psychology, etc., find in the 20th century a unity that makes them "human and natural" sciences and brings us back and forward on a path that Eastern and Western mystics and meditators, as well as the great religions of the last millennia, have walked before us. They all had the conviction that the universe is one, with its laws of the communality of all life and the uniqueness and enduring quality of the spirit with its mysteries and demands on the human being (who, for example, in biblical terms, cannot make an image of God, yet is his image and who, in the Buddhist sense, enters into the All-One Divine by living through various stages in a formative and formless way). [...] In my search for my own value development, I found that a disproportionate amount of memory from the totality of all MY early memory is value-related. [...] Thus I came to the hypothesis that all human beings may be endowed with a sense of value, the potential of which we have as yet not considered and developed.

(Cohn 1982, From Experientialism to Humanistic-Holistic Psychotherapy, HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 185, pp. 229; 230; 232-233; 235-236 in extracts).

2. The (much abridged) manuscript from 1981 is part of an early preliminary draft of: Cohn, R. C., Farau, A. [1984] (2008), Gelebte Geschichte der Psychotherapie. Zwei Perspektiven, Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta.

In trying to trace my lived history of psychotherapy, I became aware that my ethical convictions have had a great influence on the emergence and development of TCI. Consciously, I only developed and passed on a method of group leadership that had good educational and political potential. The ethical axiomatic on which it is based was unconscious to me and I only discovered it afterwards. The fact that the chairman

postulate was often understood as a call for ruthlessness, made it imperative to make the implicit ethics inherent in TCI explicit as well; without ties to the value axiomatics, structural and process techniques such as group division, topic setting, auxiliary rules can also take on a technocratic life of their own. [...] Suddenly a thought occurred to me: could it not be that to the philosophical theories about ethics - be they rational social or religious transcendental, causal or final - there must be added a psychological complement: The possibility that we bring a sense of values, a "sense of values" with us into the world as a potential? And that this sense, like all senses, needs to be exercised. Could it be that our inner sense of values, like other senses, has been so neglected in our culture that we do not feel it? [...] Is it not only causal or final identification with the educators, but also a sense of values given along and nourished by contemporary history that paves the way for humanisation?

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 174, pp. 644–645)

3. The notes were written after a conversation between Ruth C. Cohn and N.N., Basel (the handwritten name is not legible). The text is dated 28.4./1.5.o.J. The highlight given in the text is by the author.

Notes on questions of absolute values

For me, in the background is that there are absolute values, and I align them, now comes the axioms, specifically that life is worth living and that, the humane is more important than the inhumane. And from this it follows that I orientate the humanity.

I align the humanity in me with the values of life, but I also include my own humanity, i.e. my personality, which cannot be determined by the consideration of these values alone, but also by my entire, holistic constitution, and that includes the ancestral past, my immediate past and my qualities. This is humanity, that I accept myself in relation to the values I believe in and that I constantly align with. I constantly align what I am with these values and do not seek an absolute image of man. [...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 174, p. 222)

4. The (abbreviated) text is a transcript from a dictated text by Ruth C. Cohn, which was included in several publications. Only 25.1. (dictation or transcript date) is noted on the original, but no year is given. "Only 1/3" presumably refers to the size of the transcript in relation to the volume under discussion.

[...] Thus - after almost thirty years of lived experience and therapeutic experience - the image of the triangle in the sphere came into my consciousness. It was a simple scheme. It said: I am important (because I am alive and only I can tell you what it is like inside me). You are as important as I am, each and every one of you (because you too are living and experiencing, each and every one of you, and only each and every one of you can say how

you experience your own life). And because we are alive and living in this world, we have equal weight and must respect each other as equal and dedicate ourselves together to the tasks of life; each in his own way and with his abilities.

I and you and we live in the universe (in the Globe), which is home to us all and which we at the same time co-create, within us and around us.

And when I recognise myself and you and our world as equal, and everyone takes responsibility for themselves and their subjectivity in this sense, they protect and promote the humanum - humanity.

(Bändli: 25.1. "only 1/3", HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 75, pp. 236–237)

5. Published text, also found in the legacy: Cohn, R. C. (1980). What do I think of when I say "humanistic psychology"? Festschrift für Ruth C. Cohn, in: Zeitschrift für Humanistische Psychologie Jg. 3, H. 4, 23–25 (in excerpts).

[...] Experience and cognition are not intrapsychic islands. **Every I lives in You's, We's and the universe** [emphasis by the author]; we are parts of and have a share in all and in everything. The science of the human being, of the soul-mind-human being, humanistic psychology, can not only uncover intrapsychic maps of the inner life, but examine connections between the human being and the human being, the human being and the group and community, the human being and society, the human being and the world, the human being and transcendence. [...]

[...] (there are also a-religious and anti-religious humanistic psychologists. For myself, being human and thus humanistic psychology also includes the awareness of transcendental questions of meaning and ethos). [...]

[...] Humanistic psychology: **courage to evaluate** [emphasis by the author]. Not "value-neutral", not "value-abstinent", not without a desire to influence - (what a fiction neutrality is!), - but evaluating and pronouncing values, not dictatorial, but clear and transparent: [...]

6. The (abridged) text on "Conscience and Religion" from 1982 comes from an unpublished manuscript by Ruth C. Cohn, which is not specified.

[...] I am concerned with the question of a sustaining conscience; a conscience that does not forget reverence for life even when we are frightened or offended or frustrated - whether it is a matter of personal concerns or so-called 'lenses', actually moralising fossilised norms: e.g. national honour, religious, racial and class issues. - I am concerned with a conscience that is capable of action, that ethically feels, judges and acts in a living way. [...] Short-term economic gain seems to be the limitation of our horizon beyond which our conscience fails. Both humanistic and religious ethics lack the power of conscience and prayer to realise what is revealed and revelatory.

At the time of writing, my doubting and sometimes despairing mental state and felt thoughts emerged powerful. Argentines are burning and drowning and thousands of violent criminals and vengeful believers are murdering and dying out of decades of stoked fears because the entire conscience of East-West and North-South does not have the power of faith to want to negotiate as any kindergarten teacher would - would want to - teach her children. Because - and this is my "Joan question": how can we learn for ourselves and as educators "teach" our children a conscience that gives them a vital body of life? Perhaps this word "teach" is the most pointless in our attempts at education? Can a conscience be taught, a conscience that really serves the individual and the community, that gives itself and others, freedom and space to live, as far as it can be possible in the compromised circumstances of reality? [...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 67, pp. 101–121; here: 104f.)

4 Ruth Cohn and her view of being a woman

Compared to other issues, Ruth Cohn devoted relatively fewer entries to the topic of being a woman, emancipation or feminism in her legacy. She only became aware of the significance and relevance of the gender issue in the course of her later life and therefore only expressed her views on it relatively late.

For her, there was no doubt that the biological differences between men and women extended far beyond purely sexual functions. Nevertheless, it was open to her as to what the consequences of this difference would be. What was decisive, however, despite all the differences, was that the two sexes had to have equal rights. She therefore attributed great importance to the women's movement. She speaks very openly about her own self-image as a woman - also with regard to appearance and its importance.

Suggested theme:

Ruth Cohn's view of being a woman - what of it is still relevant today, what is outdated?

Selected texts on: Ruth Cohn and her view of being a woman

1. Excerpts from handwritten and typewritten notes by Ruth Cohn in her examination of the legacy and memoirs of Alfred Farau (Hernfeld) (1904–1972), an Austrian-American psychotherapist and writer, student of Alfred Adler, with whom she had a long friendship (1980).

[...] Today I am considered one of the few women who had an influence, at least partially, somewhere. And yet it was only in later middle age, that is, when I was over 50, that I stepped into the public eye. It wasn't until I was over 55 that I was really able to have an influence. And therefore didn't know history, didn't read it.

This not having time, this being afraid of always being inferior to discussion partners, and then wanting to learn, at my age, so late, is important. And I read the books of these men, almost all of them men, and envied them. But maybe we women today contribute something different. Maybe this painstakingly written "Lived History" [Ruth Cohn had edited Farau's legacy and published "Lived History of Psychotherapy" based on his notes and her own additions and reflections] is worth something after all. A different perspective, a perspective without the books or the keeping is important.

[...] The woman has not had the right that every individual has - an inviolable right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness, inalienable right on life, freedom and pursuit of happiness. And why does it not prevail?

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 175, p. 231)

2. Being a woman - as a psychotherapist and humanistic psychologist - excerpts from an unpublished manuscript by Ruth Cohn from 1982

We are born not only as human beings but as men and women. The attention to the equalities and differences and their significance in our living together belongs to the expansion of consciousness and the emancipation efforts of our century.

[...]

I consider biological and thus also emotional and intellectual differences between men and women to be existentially given. It is inconceivable to me that organs and hormone systems could relate only to partial functions of the human being. Every organ, every cell, every nerve, every feeling belongs to a wholeness that must express itself in psychic differentiation. However, we are still very much in the dark about the how of this differentiation.

[...]

Our culture is politically based on values of strong muscles and their extension into weapons from clubs to bombs and rays; and whose human value of the Judeo-Christian faith has manifested itself little in the socio-political.

This strong muscle status society is obviously essentially male (although women have had to give their consent - at least in the upbringing of boys).

While this violence-status-criticism seems to have reached its peak of destructive cynicism and objectification of persons at the moment, we are simultaneously experiencing the world movement for humane values, which I find just as inspiring and uplifting as the horror about torture, terror, the delusion of making oneself secure through armament balance - which is already being paid for by millions of dying people whose livelihood cannot be denied because of armament [sic].

The question of the biological difference between men and women is open. More clearly recognisable, on the other hand, are the observable facts of the differences in activities and their economic reward. [...]

(HU, UA, NL Cohn, no. 185, pp. 80–81)

3. Jesus, 1983 - Unpublished note from 16 May 1983, which initially deals with consciousness-raising self-help groups for women and men, from which reflections develop on Jesus, who left his loving mother because he had to follow the "spirit".

[...] The expansion of consciousness, the increase of consciousness is actually called consciousness elevation, consciousness awakening, and the feminine consciousness awakening is the female consciousness awakening. Consciousness awakening is what it is but we don't know what feminine is because we only know it in the cultural context of what a woman is, just as we couldn't and still can't quite know what masturbation actually does, because we only know it in the context of prohibition and we only know femininity from the stories of other peoples and from our own culture. It is about the woman who has a major role which undoubtedly fulfils one of her functions, namely childbearing, and in recent years also the role of sexuality, which was, and in part still is, subordinated to the male. It is therefore important to expand the awareness that women are different, equal, have equal rights and must have the freedom to find themselves in an emancipated culture and to find the cooperation of the stronger ones who let them find themselves. And when I thought about these thoughts [...], I became increasingly aware that the Jesus story comes from a patriarchal culture, where women were granted the role of bringing up children, little boys, and were also allowed to be strong in the household, but they were not even allowed to practise religion ritually and are not allowed to do so even today in the Jewish religion.

[...]

And so Jesus was born with his mission, which he felt in himself, [...] but grew up in a society where women were loved in the household which included children, and love was the most important and the best thing they had, but otherwise the spiritual movement was a men's movement [...]. And the spirit was only given to men. [...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 68, pp. 22–23)

4. *Excerpts from an offprint: Cohn, R. C., Frühmann, R. (1985). Women and therapy. An epistolary dialogue. In R. Frühmann (ed.). Women and therapy. Paderborn: Junfermann-Verlag, 9-25. The Salzburg psychotherapist Renate Frühmann had an epistolary conversation with Ruth Cohn in 1983 and later published it.*

[...] I see today that I carried the parental image as a model within me, that I subordinated myself as a woman and that I accepted the distribution of roles, even when this became a caricature; I embrace all this with the image of women within me, which only changed later through the women's movement. For me, the man came first for a long time, the children second, the job was a "luxury" that was not a luxury for me only because as a refugee I got into economic situations that erased the "normal" relationship between man and woman. I was blind to the economic and social difficulties of women for a very long time, until I was confronted with them from the outside. I find the women's movement a necessity as well as the civil rights - the black movement, the old people's movement. [...] It is about human justice and dignity; but wherever the women's movement begins to show traits of the anti-male movement, I reject it, just as I reject anti-Semitism by black people or terrorism by young people.

[...]

I dyed my hair since I was about 30 years old with my own colour, namely a nut brown (not henna), because I was grey very early and never liked the grey in my mother's hair before it turned white. I had resolved to stop when I turned 60. I stopped when I was 62! It's true that until the early or mid-sixties I did feel erotic and attractive and wanted to express that in clothes. This, by the way, was in complete contrast to my youth up to about the age of 35, when I thought I was downright ugly and preferred to hide rather than show myself.[...] It is a welcome historical event that women have been given the opportunity by the women's movement to show solidarity and to free themselves from prejudices against themselves. In the process, they have also given men the opportunity to become independent of their boyish dependencies, to get away from the woman-mother. And so both sexes can experience a freedom that brings about true interdependent consciousness instead of mutual infantile dependence. I believe that life should be beautiful and could be beautiful even if it is temporarily without a partner. [...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 16, pp. 112–122; here: 116–117)

5 Ruth C. Cohn and her Jewishness

Ruth C. Cohn's Jewishness and the emigration that was necessary for her survival are decisive for her life and her thoughts, actions, and work in the world. Without this biographical background, which is reflected not least in "Living Learning" as a countermovement to an "ongoing Hitlerization" that goes beyond the National Socialist dictatorship, TCI would not exist.

Ruth Cohn was born into what we would today call a secular German-Jewish family. The liberal attitude towards her religion of origin made her free to relate to the Christian tradition and to other religious traditions, especially the Eastern ones. Ruth C. Cohn also repeatedly drew attention to the inseparability of the Christian-Jewish heritage.

Suggested theme:

Ruth C. Cohn, how she lived her Jewishness - what that means "for me, for you for our world" (Ruth C. Cohn) today.

Editing: Hansfried Nickel

1. Ingrid Wiltmann (1949 - 2015) had a conversation with Ruth Cohn in September 1995. She was an author and published interviews with Jewish people. That was the occasion for the conversation with Ruth Cohn. Unfortunately, Ms Wiltmann passed away and this conversation remained unpublished.

[...] Our relationship to Judaism was what is now called the Three Day Jews. I only learned that word now, I didn't know it before. That is, on the two days of Rosh Hashana ["Head of the Year"; Jewish New Year] and Yom Kippur ["Day of Atonement", Day of Reconciliation] and that's when we went to synagogue.

[...]

Otherwise, we celebrated all the holidays, be it Christian, Jewish, national. My mother was decisive in everyday life, my father didn't care. Christmas was the best, of course, because we got presents. Hanukkah [the festival commemorating the rededication of the Second Temple in Jerusalem in 164 BC] was also celebrated. We didn't celebrate Friday night [Shabbat eve celebration]. I got to know that in the children's home of the Zion Lodge in Norderney for two months when I was ill again. There I got to know everything that I hadn't known before, Friday evenings and a bit of Judaism in general. I got to know Zionism when I was fifteen. I went to the Zionist students once, and I found them impossible. [...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 195, pp. 445–458; here: 448–449)

2. From a correspondence with an author of a programme from the ARD series "Das Wort zum Sonntag" in 1989. She thanks Ruth Cohn for her feedback, to which she replies.

[...] Sometimes when I see and hear a programme like "Das Wort zum Sonntag", I write to the person concerned when I find it very beautiful and courageous. And that was the case this Saturday, 2 September. I do this because it makes me feel so good that there are still courageous pastors and sometimes other persons who creatively and wisely say the things that are important today. [...]

[After a digression on sacrificial rituals to the Sermon on the Mount.]

[...] But this is only historically essential, and perhaps also an important thought in terms of the caution that is needed, not to separate the Old Testament and the New Testament in such a way as to encourage anti-Semitism. And this very often happens quite unconsciously, and no doubt with the best pastors and teachers exactly the opposite is meant compared to when the message of love is exclusively attributed to Christ. Whereby I do not doubt that he was by far the most revolutionary and progressive of the preachers. [...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 151, pp. 176–178; here: 177–178)

3. *From a correspondence also concerning a radio contribution in 1989:*

[...] I would also like to add something that has long preoccupied me and, frankly, also torments me: this is an omission in ecumenism. Although I have worked in ecumenical circles, also recognized and befriended Catholic and Protestant theologians and pastors, I remain a stranger and an omission in the way ecumenism is juggled is to be mentioned. Even where the Old Testament is mentioned, in speeches such as yours, it is not elaborated upon, for example, laws such as the firing of slaves [...] is not told as part of the process of Judeo-Christian history, but belongs within the framework that consistently says, "We Christians, we Christians, we Christians.... are called to, have the responsibility for, etc."

[...]

And yet these omissions, which seem quite unimportant to a theologian, are not unimportant in a political sense. As long as less knowledgeable and less thoughtful Christians hear such speeches or read books, anti-Semitism is subliminally reawakened with these omissions. If all these positive things are said in many sentences about Christians, then the non-Christians are something else, and the other in the European-American cultural sphere is not so much all other religions, but precisely the Jewish one.

[...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 151, pp. 140–143; here: 142)

4. *"Bread for All" - before 1990 "Bread for Brothers" - is an organ of the Protestant Church of Switzerland for development services, which annually solicited donations by advertising a calendar, and continues to do so today. Ruth Cohn responded to an appeal for donations in March 1982, writing to several pastors:*

[...] I have received the "Bread for Brothers" calendar just as I did last year and would like to tell you how very beautifully right and good I think it is.

At the same time, there is a sadness for me in reading it. Just like last year and almost every year I receive payment slips or other communication, Christians are addressed and not people. For example, your letter encloses a small bag for the Catholics and a payment slip for the Reformed.

I am Jewish by birth, religious in my heart with a Jewish history and pan-religious attitude, or rather faith. Both as a Jew and as a seeker non - denominationally bound, I feel discriminated against by you and almost all Christian Organisations. I have nevertheless made deposits wherever I wanted to. But I would like to draw your attention to the fact that through your letters and mostly also the exclusion of Jews from your conversations and addresses - you are the epitome of ever smouldering anti-Semitism. For nothing, in my opinion, has enabled anti-Semitism over millennia than the accusation that the Jews

murdered Jesus, or in a more civilised way, simply excluding them from salutations as if they did not exist. "You Jews murdered Christ" is still the uttered or implied behavior of almost all children and all anti-Semites.

[...]

I hope that your next letters and other communications will find a way to appeal to all people, and that you will also, in your sermons, not only justly concede what the Sermon on the Mount says to a Jewish speaker but realise its intention to put an end to discrimination in the religious sense. [...]

Ruth Cohn's response to a reply from the organisation's central secretary included the following remark:

[...] "All men become brothers" - especially if one does not always speak of "Christian neighbourly love" but of charity. Charity is neither Christian nor Jewish nor Mohammedan. Hunger is also not based on religion. That is why it is to be satisfied, and I wish you too would consider whether Christian-elitist letters that speak of "Christian charity" would have been drawn by the man Jesus, who entered history as Christ. [...]

(Both letters under the same signature: HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 151, pp. 150–156; here: 150; 154–155)

5. In this correspondence Ruth Cohn describes herself as a citizen of the world. The occasion for this reply of 12.9.1972 was a letter of condolence from German friends on the Olympic assassination in Munich.

[...] I myself am hardly conscious any more of a national feeling - be it as a German, a Jew, a Swiss, an American - or perhaps it is better to say I have a dull consciousness of all these as a basis for the consciousness, much more painful in me, of an insufficient world citizenship. I would like to say, therefore, that a condolence from me to you would be as appropriate as vice versa. I, for one, cannot and would not subscribe to [name]'s phrase about the "heavy legacy of a past burdened by guilt". The question is only what we do or refrain from doing today - each and every one of us - to replace violence with understanding and organisation.

In this sense, I am particularly moved by your hope that WILL could contribute something to achieve what religions - including Christianity - have tried again and again to achieve, and which to doubt or despair of would make life hopeless and meaningless. [...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 171, pp. 63–67; 82–87; here: 63).

6. In 1998 Ruth Cohn responded to an appeal for donations from an industrial foundation for the new synagogue in Dresden, sent to her by acquaintances:

[...] I think it is very nice that people want to build a synagogue in Dresden. At the moment I am so negative against my historical, religious and folk community people that with all the many things I have sent money for today, I don't feel like it. [...]

If I needed any reason to react negatively, it is that women still have to sit upstairs in the gallery and not together with the men. At some point it really is time for religious traditions not to be abused either. [...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 195, pp. 307–310)

7. In a draft dated 30.4.1981 Ruth Cohn reflects on her experience at a congress in Lindau entitled "Between the United States and Europe" she writes about an encounter with a student whose father forbade him to put a bust of Hitler on his desk, as the teacher wanted:

[Father:] "I do not allow a Hitler statue in my house; and if you tell the teacher this they will come and get me and kill me". The young man told me this quite casually. For me it was a shattering experience. I could not have done this to a child, and yet what tremendous courage and conviction it took for a father to dare to do this! To put himself in such a position and to trust a small child like that. As if by magic, a bridge began to build in me between the suffering of the Jews and the suffering of the Germans who had not "belonged". "The whole of humanity's misery took hold of me".

[...]

Almost all the participants in my groups had lost loved ones in the war or on the run. The fears of the bombings experienced as a child remained everywhere in the room. A passionate longing grew in me to learn to overcome unconquered hostilities and prejudices within myself and also to help others to do so. [...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 174, pp. 241–243; here: 241–242)

6 Ruth C. Cohn and her ageing process

At the age of 65, in 1977, Ruth C. Cohn says she began to make notes about her ageing process from time to time. She found it an "age-appropriate task". Presumably, she initially wanted to write a book on ageing. A document on Helga Herrmann mentions a joint book project. Later she probably abandoned this intention. She wanted to hand over the texts (especially those on religion, spirituality, ageing) to Helga Herrmann and Matthias Kroeger - obviously for further editing and possible publication.

Suggested theme:

Ageing consciously, alive and with dignity - Notes, thoughts and impulses of Ruth Cohn as a woman in the 7th and 8th decade of life - What speaks to me? Where do I feel resistance? What expands my view of my own process of ageing?

1. In 1977 Ruth Cohn received a request from the *Süddeutscher Rundfunk* to speak on the subject of "Fear in Ageing". She declines a lecture and instead gives an interview for broadcast. She writes the following article afterwards.

[...] Old people as seers: blind seers: looking inside to see. Only inside can one see the possible and contrast it with the real. - We see reality with our eyes turned to the outside world, possibility is only within. If we believe in this possibility and act on it, it can become a reality. Is peace on earth and love of nature perhaps a belief that can become reality?

[...]

When I was seventy, I could follow my heart's stirrings. - (Konfuzius)

[...]

The elderly are perhaps predestined to seek and walk new paths because they can integrate past experiences and events, and daily life does not stress them as much as it does younger people.

The path of emancipation cannot mean man over woman or woman over man, or old over young, or young over old. It is about the difficult task of not confusing independence, one's own standing, with defeating others, but rather understanding that everything is connected with everyone and everything.

[...]

Being able to let go is an existential necessity from childhood to death, from birth to childbirth, from life to death. Letting go is necessary in old age, in the awareness of the decline of sensory acuity in hearing and seeing, or the loss of abilities such as speed and endurance. Life also dictates letting go of untenable relationships or the deceased through mourning. It is necessary to notice when it is time to hold on in loyalty to people and institutions, or to work against all obstacles, also to the possibility of fighting diseases and defending values. It is important not to miss the time for letting go or holding on. Finding the balance between grief and loss and surrender to what is to come is a lifelong task - also in growing old, also in the event of dying.

[...]

The development of children includes growth. The development of the elderly involves using one's strength sparingly in order to slowly and with dignity do what is still possible and to learn to say goodbye.

[...]

I interpret my forgetfulness: my energy often only has room for one subject at a time, so that a second subject does not always stick. I can certainly concentrate on one task, one patient, one group, but not on two at the same time. I could drive a car "like a Hun sits on a horse in his sleep." I could never understand why some people can't talk about difficult

things at the same time while driving. I stopped driving when I realised I needed to concentrate on the steering. Since then, I don't drive because I'm afraid of causing mischief.

[...]

Albert Schweitzer: I am old, but not benighted.

[...]

I find it embarrassing when people say to me: "You are still quite young." I am neither young nor middle-aged, I am old and alive. I think it's age discrimination when the word 'alive' is equated with the word 'young'. Do women like it when people say to them: "You are quite masculine" or men: "You are quite womanly"? There are energetic women, soft-hearted men and lively old people.

[...]

Age changes. It changes my outside; it changes my inside. I am no longer the one I knew. I am someone else. I have to learn to know myself anew. That is very difficult at a time when new things are hard to learn. The word "yet" takes on an eerie meaning. What will I lose? Old friends, skills, importance to others, physical well-being? What I have to learn more and more is to become a "master in shaping my dependency in old age" [says my friend [Leony Renk-Peine].

[...]

For children and the elderly, the here-and-now has a special glamour. It opens doors for children to the adventures of life and for old people to piece together what they have lived and to the door of "their own death" (Rilke).

[...]

Fear in growing old - inevitable; avoidable - denying this fear; I want to keep learning to say yes to ageing, again and again. Living in fears, being paralysed, and rising to go on. It helps me to put my fears into words; to name them is to disempower them. Rise up, you who are growing older, perhaps you still have a long journey ahead of you! [...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 114a, pp. 430–436; here: 440)

2. Age notes with Leonore, 1988 - These notes were probably written in collaboration with Leony Renk (1938 - 2022). Leony Renk was a TCI graduate, feminist and anti-Semitic theologian who was a friend of Ruth C. Cohn.

[...] The 'having to' seems much less to me now, I don't have the feeling "I still have to write", or "I still have to pass on", but I want to.

[...]

So, these emotional things: children and age, that would perhaps be mentioned together, because ageing has so many similarities with children and then also the differences. Certainly the decrease of new greed, greed for something new, I miss that very much, if at all it would have to be an old greed, to experience the old again, you can always see that, the old melodies, the old places where you were, the people you knew, they become

more important, because there was just more drive at that time and the fear of losing dear people, that is certainly also very big. [...]
(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 161, pp. 46–56, here: 50; 54)

3. Notes on old age, 1989 - These notes are taken from the transcript of a text dictated by Ruth C. Cohn in her 77th year.

[...] Old age as a possibility of freedom. Nothing to lose for the future. Greater openness since it is very easy if one wants nothing. The freedom of old age is the approaching end.
[...]

What's new is: my desire, which is becoming strong, and therefore also the possibility of tracing my own psyche and what it wants or would like at the moment. Putting myself in the centre of my life, me, who I am now, disabled and very knowledgeable of the essentials, thinking and feeling. More one-sided, coping with only one issue, not x. Allowing the wanting, the wanting as the theme through sensing in everyday life. The permanent game of I want to do what I want. Behind this is the trust in myself that my wanting is already so deeply anchored in the reality of the whole that I can rely on the wanting of the essential. The ethical-religious, (the taking part and sharing) is in me as faith, so that if I can surrender to the taking part, as now in these notes, and that the meaning of the wanting will be fulfilled in the belonging. I am I whose wanting will now (I don't know for how long) prove itself in the doing as the will to reality. This belief has grown from the ship on my 75th birthday to the Berlin farewell from the 'doing of passing on' to the 'being of the essential'.

[...]

The peace of mind that comes now more than ever when I aimlessly seek what I want at any given time. [...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 161, pp. 58–60; here: 50; 54; 59f.)

4. The Age, 1990 - Ruth C. Cohn's notes of 14/15.2 1990 (age 88, 10 years before her death) are a transcript of a dictation. It is possible that the intention (documented in the legacy) to publish a book on old age together with Helga Herrmann is still behind these "notes on old age". However, this never came to pass.

[...] And for old age this means that you have the permission and the creative ability to think with your heart. The heart encompasses feelings that you have now, but also your whole life. And the feelings, at least for me, are clearer as a compass than they were, that's true, because I'm less dependent on making an impression, making money and so on. The heart becomes stronger and it has to stick to its last.

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 161, pp. 86–89; here: 88)

5. Renate Frühmann, a psychotherapist from Salzburg, had a letter dialogue with Ruth C. Cohn in 1983 and published it in 1985.

[...] I dyed my hair since I was about 30 years old with my own colour, namely a nut brown (not henna), because I was grey very early and never liked the grey in my mother's hair before it turned white. I had resolved to stop when I turned 60. I stopped when I was 62! It's true that until the early or mid-sixties I did feel erotic and attractive and wanted to express that in clothes. This, incidentally, was in complete contrast to my youth up to about the age of 35, when I thought I was downright ugly and preferred to hide rather than show myself. I am not aware that "your boyishness got in my way".

[...]

By this I also mean that I know both very attractive, very young women and attractive middle-aged women, and very rarely really old ones. The diminishing of attractiveness in the physical, especially the sexual, has hurt me much less than I would have suspected. I felt that my sexuality and eroticism belonged to me so definitively that I could never have imagined that I would ever be able to "be me" without strong erotic-sexual feelings, which I felt were at the core of my being. The fact is that I almost don't have these feelings anymore, that a change has taken place in my relationships with men as a result, which both lack a formerly very beautiful experience and have added a new, less monogamous and more spiritualised element. What pleases me about my life in this relationship is that the biological change, including the withering (about which "one" generally does not speak, but always only of growth!) seems to be taking place quite harmoniously. This can no more astonish you than it has astonished and continues to astonish me. [...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 16, p. 116)

6. A relatively late work is the following text, which was written on 04.10.2003. Ruth was 91 years old. She was no longer writing herself at this time but was using a dictaphone. In this case, Annemarie Maag made the recording.

Silence without expectation for what

*Silence without expectation for what,
perhaps hope
that there is a door
that one could open
and find out
that the magic behind the door
seems to be the same
as the one on my side.*

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 181, p. 63)

7 Ruth C. Cohn and her idea of the spread of TCI

Ruth C. Cohn was already working in institutions and organisations in America and especially after her return from exile. However, she also wanted to have her own organisation dedicated to teaching, researching and practising group leadership according to TCI. That is why she founded the Workshop Institute for Living Learning (W.I.L.L.) with colleagues from supervision groups in New York as early as 1966, which also spread to Florida and Toronto. Even before it settled in Switzerland (1974), WILL-Europe was founded in 1972. The leadership of this organisation was to be more independent of her person than was the case in the USA.

Nevertheless, the orientation of the organisation remained a central concern for Ruth C. Cohn throughout her life. The name "WILL", which she still advocated even when it was suggested that it be renamed "Ruth Cohn Institute - international", was a programme for Ruth C. Cohn. The "WILL-approach", the term that most aptly described her approach, expressed a programme: The "Living Learning", which is shown, among other things, in a thriving interaction of people with each other in accomplishing a task in small groups and organisations, will have positive effects on the whole. The organisation should embody the "spirit" of TCI within itself and to the outside world. It is part of the history of the spread of TCI that it has not always been able to assert its ideas on all points.

Suggested theme:

The dissemination of Theme-Centred Interaction as Ruth Cohn envisioned it and today: What comes to mind? What do I notice?

1. After the founding of the "Werkstatt Institut für Lebendiges Lernen" in Europe in 1972, the organising committee intended to produce an information book to draw attention to W.I.L.L.-Europe and TCI. Ruth Cohn took on the task of drafting a preamble to this. This draft from autumn 1973, which aptly reflects Ruth Cohn's ideas, can be found here in the original text.

Preamble to the Information Book of the Workshop Institute for Living Learning,
Autumn 1973

Ruth C. Cohn

Preface: I hope to speak from the soul of W.I.L.L. and not just my own
and so I speak by "we".

We see in W.I.L.L. one of the many partners who are trying not to let us and our Earth dissipate in space. We see in W.I.L.L. a possibility to make social-scientific, especially psychodynamic findings of the last decades educationally usable. We see the possibility of allowing people to live in situations where they do not have to deny their feelings, their bodies and their mental attitudes and learn to deal responsibly with negative feelings and their own conflicting interests.

We see the possibility of building and shaping schools of Living Learning; schools where people learn what is important to them in their hearts and in their experienced reality and are allowed to learn how each individual can learn best - be it with the eyes, the hands, the hearing, the heart, the mind - or whatever. We see the possibility of teachers being allowed to develop their souls and minds freely with their students, instead of being condemned to criticise and number.

We see the possibility of organisations where people learn to represent themselves - with their feelings, thoughts, demands; and where they practise listening respectfully to others and considering what is said and how it is meant, in order to be open to other people and realities and allow for compromise and consensus. We believe this is likely to happen when children grow up with the experience that they themselves and their thoughts and feelings are important - as important as all other people. We believe in a dialectical process between such more real people and their more real organisations that learn to meet the material and cultural needs of all people. We believe that it is not enough to regroup the chessboard of power into families, groups and nations, but to make the existential and ethical preliminary decision that power over others must give way to cooperation with others.

We believe that the continuation of social and personal power politics as we know and have lived with them is utopian, i.e. unrealisable in the future, as it exposes people and the earth to destruction. We are working to make the so-called utopia, that cooperation and respect for everyone and everything is possible, a reality, because we are convinced that the preservation and promotion of life can only be made possible in this way.

We know that we are in the initial stage of an epoch where man can recognise and change man down to his depths - through loving education or brainwashing, through operations, through chemicals, through constructive and destructive interventions. The transformation of the human species is less utopian today than his journey to the moon was in the last century.

We wish that W.I.L.L., together with many other people, groups, organisations, takes part in the realisation of hopeful approaches in our time, so that we can learn to play, to love, to think and to work and feel freer and safer, because we shut ourselves off from nobody and nothing - except from our own apathy and the support of destructive powers.

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 262, pp. 233–234)

2. In a conversation Ruth Cohn learns how the draft was handled and writes a letter to the organising committee in 1974.

[...] In the process he told me that you had given a lot of thought to whether you should throw out my preamble and then agreed that you would send it as an enclosure on extra sheets to some of the people and not to others. My first reaction to this was pain (that you feel this way) and anger (that you could act in this way: namely, either dictatorially destroy the preamble I asked for or hide it as opportune); and my intense reaction: I resign from this organisation. [...]

I also explained to him why I stand so fiercely on the inclusion of this preamble as the cornerstone of my personal involvement in WILL: in short, that in the face of the same arguments from my friends and colleagues in 1966, I withdrew my WILL draft for broadcast and conformed to their (moderate and socially acceptable) proposal. And that to this day - successively increased - I experience that WILL, NY, [WILL New York] suffers from the fact that these words were never said the way I wanted to say them. That now, for example, when I met with new students, it became quite clear to me and to them that they felt the difference between WILL and other group leadership schools but had not quite realised it and felt insecure because they were looking for something that pointed[s] beyond the practical into the essential - and that was no longer apparent from WILL's catalogues. They asked me to express these thoughts and feelings loud and clear again and again - as I do in this German preamble. [...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 262; pp. 538–541; here: 538f.)

3. This is not the first time that Ruth Cohn has complained about the way her ideas and visions were handled, as is clear from the text before. In 1977, in a correspondence with a graduate student, she comments on a deletion "from the prospectus" when WILL was founded in New York.

[...] I cried like a banshee when WILL was founded in New York because my colleagues wanted to delete the philosophical and transcendental approach from the prospectus for which I invented TCI. I let it happen and felt at the time that I had sold out. That is still the case today. Basically, for me, TCI is the possibility to influence masses. And I still see it today as a political concept and a political method. [...] Somehow, I don't know how to write what I really mean. [...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 117, p. 23.)

4. In a draft of a letter to a TCI journal or a TCI info sheet, the following note on the "planetary organisation" is found with no year mentioned.

[...] The earthly problems of human history today depend on the fact that autonomy and interdependence of small organisations must be seen in connection with the planetary organisation. This applies to material as well as spiritual goods. This must be reflected in the small organisations that have and must have their autonomy according to place, time circumstances etc. but also according to belonging to the whole. This is more acute today than ever before. I have to let this play out in the WILL organisation. That has always been my concern' that a humanist organisation does not yet exist but must be created. The laws of democratic elections are inadequate. The majority wins over the minority and the minority is out to win over the majority. The importance of the minority is thus very easily lost or becomes an enemy game. This needs to be reconsidered. The system of such democratic organisations is a system of winning and losing and not of cooperation. [...]

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 279, pp. 214—16; here: 214)

5. On the occasion of the approval of the statutes in 1973, Ruth Cohn wrote a circular letter to all those interested in WILLEuropa.

[...] I see WILL as an experimental organisation that practices thoughtful division of functions instead of a status hierarchy:

- avoidance of minority-producing votes - and in disciplined striving for satisfaction of own needs, in alertness and recognition of communal necessities.
- in striving not to overpower or be overpowered - whether by internal or external forces, and in constant search for internal and external consensus and compromise.

A living organisation dedicated to living learning, even towards its own ways of life, claims that we do not neglect ourselves or others, that we work out trust and know that no organisation of volunteer workers beyond a room ma[a]ss can function flawlessly. We need each other's trust, perseverance, work, and money. We don't need resignation and "us-and-them" philosophy. [...]

(HU, UA, NL Cohn, no. 262, p. 509)

8 Ruth C. Cohn as a Poet

Ruth C. Cohn saw herself as a poet. At times she even wanted to make a profession out of it. But because, in the opinion of those around her, it was not possible to make a living from it, she refrained. However, poetry accompanied her all her life, from childhood to old age.

She wrote poetry in High German, Swiss German and – while in American exile from 1941 - in English. The two volumes of poetry "...inmitten aller Sterne.... Gedichte Ruth C. Cohn", New York [1949] 1952 and "zu wissen dass wir zählen. Gedichte/Poems mit Scherenschnitten von A. Maag-Büttner", Bern 1990, contain most of Ruth C. Cohn's published poems. In addition, she published poems in English under her pseudonym "Eve Amat" in Wisconsin Poetry Magazine (1966). A number of poems were embellished with linoleum cuts by her second husband, Gustav Adolf Woltmann (GUS) .

According to the research of Michaela and Matthias Scharer, R. C. Cohn left 92 published and 129 unpublished poems. Michaela Scharer compiled an index of all existing poems, which also includes the places of publication. The scans also show the numerous text variants and translations into other languages.

Ruth Cohn wrote English poems mainly between 1962 and the end of the 1970s. In one unpublished document (Cohn, R.C., without year, "Zum mehrfachen Sprachwechsel") she describes that in face of the unimaginable and indescribable events of the Holocaust she had lost her words for a long time. Only when she was in a difficult emotional situation and felt the need of writing poetry to cope with it, she found a way to write again - in English.

Suggested theme:

„Poetry is me to you in tunes of words“ – Lyrical texts by Ruth C. Cohn. What attracts my attention? What do the texts trigger in me? What impression do I gain of the person Ruth C. Cohn?

1. From 1948 to 1951, Ruth C. Cohn was trained in group therapy in the United States of America. The following text was written in 1951, one of very few poems of this time. She writes her poems either by hand or with a typewriter as the example below shows.

May 2, 1951

Para-psychology

There was a meeting of "Paras",
They stemmed from the tribe of the "Ahas",
They had rushingly come
To call someone a "bum"
Who did not believe
In this tribe and its chief.
And so be negations
Found para-relations
Between unconscious drives and desires
Of the Smiths and the Browns and the Meiers.
(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 202, p. 83)

2. This poem expresses Ruth C. Cohn's thoughts and observations on societal phenomena, which is a topic that we find in her lyrical work during all phases of life.

Selfbetrayal

Selfbetrayal is a lifelong game
Played everywhere - bars, schools, and city boards,
From dawn to dusk
And through the night
In company or solitude.
(Dreams don't interrupt it-
Yet lower winning chances) -
Children play as well as priests and salesmen,
Actors, lovers, psychoanalysts.
Addiction- promoted by law-
Is quite expensive-
Payable with the death of living life.
Those who refuse the game
Live it in the earnest
And cannot laugh.

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 200, p. 8)

August 4, 1968

5. Regarding the Gestalt prayer, Ruth C. Cohn herself noted: "Fritz Perls' Gestaltprayer was a popular poem for the followers of the Encounter movement and for psychotherapists of the modern directions, and it was not only pinned to the wall in students' rooms. As a visiting professor at Clark University Worcester, Mass, I wrote a counter-poem for the enthusiastic worshippers of this prayer. I prefer my English version and add the German translation only to the notes." Her version, which is also handwritten, was written in 1983.

Variation on Fritz Perl's Gestalt Prayer

I am I
And you are you
And if we really dare
with all our heart, with all our soul
and with all our strength
Can
in the we
the beautiful world arise...
(instead of none)

But I am not quite me
and you are not quite you
and our hearts, our souls
and our strength
dare not be whole
so that the we of the world of peace
in the womb of being
still waits.

(HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 196, p. 412)

WILL

I want to do My thing;
I am I.
You want to do Your thing;
You are You.
The world is Our Thing.
It does not meet Our expectations.
Yet I believe that if we care enough
-and not by chance-
It will be beautiful;
If not; It will not Be.

Ruth Cohn

Dedicated to
Fritz Perls
my students
at Clark
1983

HU UA, NL Cohn, no. 258, p. 326

Afterword to the Indian edition of the Reader

RCI-India has invited me to conduct parts of the International Berlin Symposium "Life and work of a courageous woman" held at the Humboldt University of Berlin (October 2022) in India in January 2024. The main invitees are TCI-Graduates, TCI-Diploma holders and other TCI-trained persons.

For this symposium I have edited the Reader again and translated it into English with the help of the Deepl program. Dr Swapna Gopinath, Prof. of English, who was in the preparation team for the Indian Symposium, checked the translations. Prof. Dr Thomas Abraham translated some texts into Malayalam.

In addition to the Reader, I produced also an Indian version of "Peepholes into the legacy of Ruth C. Cohn".

Matthias Scharer