

CONVERSATION AND CREATIVITY

Creativity and conversation are directly linked. Indeed, conversation, as a generative process, is the prerequisite for all creativity. This becomes immediately obvious if we distinguish between conversation and communication. Derived from the Latin *communare*, a shared space, communication means interaction in a common context or domain of consensus that makes communication possible and determines the meaning of all that's said. The control of context is the control of meaning is the control of reality.

To create new realities, we must create new contexts, new domains of consensus. That can't be done through communication. You can't step out of the context that defines communication by communicating; it will only lead to trivial permutations within the same consensus, repeatedly validating the same reality. Instead we need a creative conversation (from the Latin "to turn around together") that might lead to new consensus and hence to new realities, but which is not itself a process of communication. I say some thing you don't understand and we begin turning around together: "Do you mean this or this?" "No, I mean thus and such. During this nontrivial process we gradually approximate the possibility of communication, which will follow as a trivial necessary consequence once we've constructed a new consensus and woven together a new context.

Communication, as a domain of stabilized, noncreative relations, can occur only after the creative (but non-communicative) conversation that makes it possible: communication is always noncreative and creativity is always non-communicative. Conversation, the paradigm of all generative phenomena, the prerequisite for all creativity, requires a two-way channel of interaction. That doesn't guarantee creativity, but without it there will be no conversation at all, and creativity will be diminished accordingly.

The worse thing we can say about the mass media is that they can only communicate. At a time when creative conversations are essential on a massive scale for human dignity and survival, our society is dominated by a centralized, one-way, mass audience communication system. The mass media system can only speak a world that is already understood to be the world. It can only address problems already understood to be problems. It can only furnish models of behavior that are compatible with the world as it is already perceived by most people most of the time.

Conversations are closed generative processes through which we create the realities we talk about by talking about them and thereby constitute autonomous reality-communities. The observer as autonomous individual is a myth: there is only the observer-community or reality-community whose constituents can talk about things (like art, science, religion) because they create the things they talk about by talking about them. Every reality community is autonomous -- self-governing, self-organizing, self-constituting. And every autonomous system is organizationally closed: realized through recursive, reciprocal, circular relations that may be characterized as conversations. Indeed, communities are indistinguishable from the conversations that generate them.

Telecommunication makes possible communities independent of geography, but satellites and telephone wires are merely conduits that operate only in real time with no stored time, no memory; the virtual communities realized through them exist only during transmission with no archival or historical perpetuity, unless the transmission is continuous and pervasive. But when the computer is introduced as a component of a conversational network (the Internet) the power of social organizing is entered. A perpetual universe is created, independent of transmission, and a new class of political entity becomes possible. Autonomous reality-communities that are historically continuous and environmentally pervasive, accessible through any computer terminal anywhere in the world are possible. This is the profound significance of computer networks.

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