

## IV-6 Taming Memes and Sound Bites

Duality evokes cognition and comprehension of uncertainty. Polarity of dialectic and rhetoric divides elevates issues towards unsustainable absolutes that do not survive even in the Platonic universe.

Use of organized words is a power to be controlled. As precursor to shifts in perception and paradigm, words evolve into concepts to be nursed to bring out meanings seeded in facts. Consequences of such flares influence individual and social behaviors by shifting focus between form, content, and context. Metaphors and rhetorical phrases grab attention.

Untended or unattended tends to be claimed by others. The same conception is also intrinsic in many of the common practices designed to make the audience wallow in the non-nutritious and unhealthy packaged-relevance that gives appearance of order, and therefore of knowledge and wisdom for the moment. Scrutiny is exercised to the extent that ultimately *media is the message*. Although standardization of language is prerequisite for communication, by making words a commodity for authority and propaganda, such controls create a culture of uniformity of thought. In this co-evolution all victories are pyrrhic.

Perception of clarity, and not necessarily the clarity of perception, is the name of the game. In substituting product with the process, slogan and rhetoric flare evoke images through causality of implied generalizations. Sound bites are experimentation by trial and error. At best they are stale old messages that substitute thought and understanding by vigilance. In this war dance one

cannot deal cursorily with dense, forbidding or unyielding barrage of sound bites. Who pays for it? When does it lose its relevance? When do people become resistant or immune to it? What is the cost of sound bites in terms of perpetuating ignorance and myth? Against such barrages how can one maintain sanity for freedom of choice and decision-making?

Innate potential of expressed intentions does not take hold as mind constantly deals with chatter from wide ranging inputs from sound bites, humor, anecdotes, bantering, propaganda, memes, buzzwords, political pronouncements, and marketing. For an appreciation of the flow consider the rise and fall in the public domain of pithy words to buzzwords to euphemisms: human-right, commies, food, smart-alecs, sharp-wits, pertinence, encouragement, credit, rewards, god, science, sales-pitch, believe-us, weapons, crank, crackpots, quack, cool, and intelligent-life.

It is not clear how one grows out of the fascination for the contradictory, conflicting, augmented, and virtual. Dominated by ego, sex, mimicry and peers, trivia can play a role of cohesion. Such devices of pop-culture exploit the flicker of the proverbial five-second-attention-span. It is a moot issue whether the media and politicians prey on it, or cater to such behaviors.

Disconnect of words from thoughts and behaviors exaggerate the inability to listen or to focus beyond sound bites. As the emphasis shifts from process to product, allusions of singular thoughts evolve into faith with built-in contradictions. In dealing with such communication assaults it is good thing if one does not have to take sides. Even then words take prisoners, and change our identities. Do such words take us where we want to be? Or do they take us where we do not want to be? Or would they take us somewhere we would not even know - like a memeland?

**Do animals wallow in memes?** We do not know, unless of course memes have something to do with the herd instinct. In the absence of elaborate means of communication memes in animals may not be as evolved as in humans. In analogy to the genes, a large and diverse but controllable behavior potential can be unleashed through interactions with a limited set of options. We pass on memes through social interactions where they have momentum that comes in the way of our desires and efforts to accomplish something original or tangible.

Without an understanding of the underlying experience we are prisoners of words without ability to comeback from the world *behind the looking glass*. Animals may not have elaborate ways to pass on their collective experience, yet the young do learn and test boundaries of experience through playful interactions. It is clear that restrained, planned, and deliberate actions of the self-motivated humans often reduce social chatter enough for them to see the inconsistencies in the herd behaviors. Such insights are precursors to decision-making and choosing the alternatives.

#### **Uses of History for Life**

In an essay of this title Frederich Nietzsche created an interesting scenario for contemplation. *Animals may not know what it means by yesterday or today, yet they do learn from experience. With some poetic liberty a human may well ask: Why do you not speak to me of your feelings? Is a silent gaze unfettered to the moment because the animal does not wish to respond or forgets what it was going to say, or is it because it knows that humans do not understand!*

**Survival value of memes.** Dawkins coined the term *meme* for a unit of cultural information. The idea of memes is attractive and seductive. The list of memes is long and impressive: They

dominate tunes, ideas, fashions, sound-bites, catch-phrases, ways of making pottery and arches, as well as ways of philosophizing and doing science. Some memes have staying power even without any evidence: Ideas of heaven and hell have served to propagate diverse experiences and psychological needs in appropriate personal and cultural contexts. At a more practical level, the technologies of fire, wheel and agriculture probably evolved the same way - adapting to local conditions and choices through deliberate trials. Something analogous can be said for the emergence of the ideas of the Egyptian surveyors into the theory of relativity over a period of 4000 years.

Idea of *meme of memes* is useful in describing and understanding the stages, trends, and concepts through which the cultural changes take hold. As a measure of human progress memes become the trial and error means for transferring and transforming ideas into innovation. To be shared, a vaguely defined meme takes root in collective conscience only when critical mass of related ideas is shared on a base for existence. **Mememes emerge as schemes for variations on themes.** Memes offer the convenience of describing an isolated part of the shared experience as a category. Unfortunately, like buzz words, mememes are seductive generalizations without a tangible basis. Such messages lose vigor, passion, and relevance necessary to transcend the past experience to the present. At some stage the mememes we acquire begin to color our experience: As an afterthought one learns to rationalize in terms of mememes. A loss of spontaneity from the experience signals a need to break away: Without insights into the underlying experience one can not understand meaning or limitations of words.

One creates new boundary conditions by forgetting about mememes as an end of experience. Our inherited and nurtured

memes, if there are any, mutate and evolve through reflex behaviors.

**Striking phrases whose Truth or Falsity is irrelevant.**

- Media is message
- Lake Erie is dead
- Buying is being
- Tree-huggers
- You are what you eat
- The whole is greater than its parts (*Euclid*).
- In Athens, we think that silent men are useless (*Pericles*).
- Some people speak when they have to speak, while others speak when they have something to say.
- The way one talks about the work determines the nature of the work.
- Structure is implicit in Art, but not detachable sort of unbounded space.
- Pregnant in matter, in expression brief; let every sentence stand with bold relief.
- What signs fail to express their applications show.
- "The horror of that moment" the King went on, "I shall never, never, never forget!" "You will though," The Queen said, "if you don't make a memorandum of it" (*Lewis Carroll*)
- What we see, is not what we see, but what we are (*Soares*)
- Ultimately we will probably know everything. What we may discern is the man.
- While words of learned length and thundering sound  
Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around.  
And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew  
That a small head could carry all he knew.

A meme is not cognized, does not create sense awareness, break mental habits, or shift perception. Such a shift is necessary to get away from the weight of restrictions built into conventions and precedents. Only cognized experiences become vehicles for conscious choice for transformation.

Contemplation is not about utter and total absorption in the present that comes to athletes, writers, artists and others lost in the moment. Nor is it about mystical *moment that looses the baggage of existence and history*. In the scheme of things larger structures or systems are supported, if not generated, by self-reference as one cognized motif refers to another that is perceived to play a role.

# Room for Doubt

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