



Elegy for Mediated Dialogue: Shiva the Destroyer and Reclaiming Our First Principles

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The field of public relations has embraced dialogic theory as a valuable theory and paradigm for almost two decades. More recently, scholars have used dialogue as a framework to study mediated communication via the Internet and social media. However, many studies of mediated dialogue have concluded that the communicator/organization failed to be dialogic, or that various social media tools such as Twitter had failed to deliver on their “potential” for dialogue. In this essay, we argue that much of the dialogic scholarship has largely been dialogue in name only, failing to examine most aspects of dialogic communication, and at best having only “dialogic potential.” We conduct a critique of dialogic theory providing suggestions for moving forward.

Keywords: dialogue, elegy, theory, public relations, metaphor, critique

Elegy: "A form of poetry natural to the reflective mind. It may treat of any subject, but it must treat of no subject for itself; but always and exclusively with reference to the poet. As he will feel regret for the past or desire for the future, so sorrow and love became the principal themes of the elegy."

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1835)

The use of metaphors to explain difficult concepts or provide a context for seemingly disconnected phenomena is well established in the literature. Ortony (1979), Lakoff and Johnson (1980), and others have described the power of the metaphor as rhetorical, informational, and persuasive, enabling communicators to draw on concepts and relationships from one realm and apply them in another. Recently, for example, Theunissen (2015) used quantum theory as a metaphor for talking about the complexity of dialogue and persuasion in social media. Similarly, in the early days of the Internet, Kent (2001) used Sproule’s (1988) concept of managerial rhetoric to talk about the World Wide Web and the value of metaphors for understanding difficult communication concepts.

We believe that the issue undertaken by Kent (2001) over a decade ago to help explain the logic of the Internet and its power remains unresolved as it relates to dialogue and social media. In light of the power of the metaphor to help explain difficult concepts, we believe that dialogic theory would benefit from a metaphor as a means of illustrating the complexity and multiplicity of dialogic principles. For this task, Shiva the Destroyer (or Transformer) will be our metaphorical tool. Shiva is an Indian deity, part of the Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva trinity that represents the circle of creation. Life proceeds through birth, maturity, and death. All change involves destruction of something, and Shiva represents a fundamental part of that process. For this reason, we chose Shiva to help explain dialogue and as a motivation for the critical elegy that follows.

As eloquently explained by Coleridge, an elegy represents regret for the past and desire for a better future. To advance our understanding of dialogue, this article is divided into three sections: The first section provides an overview of dialogue and how dialogue has been used in social media contexts. The second section addresses several theoretical issues such as the appropriation of dialogic concepts for nondialogic purposes. The third section introduces a metaphor to talk about dialogue based on Shiva, the Indian god of regeneration and destruction, and to talk about the complexity of dialogue and its power to serve as a relationship and cocreative tool. The importance of appreciating metaphor as a tool for extending dialogue is discussed, as well as how Shiva can extend our understanding of public relations and dialogue.

An Overview of Dialogic Theory

Over the past three decades, a number of scholars have provided overviews and summaries of dialogue, notably Pearson (1989a, 1989b), Johannesen (1990), Anderson, Cissna, and Arnett (1994), and others. Each of these scholars has suggested that dialogue is complicated and more than just unstructured talk. Of course, dialogue does not have to be difficult to enact, but it is more than idle chit-chat, and more than a process that resembles customer service, that is, simply providing assistance and advice for people who use a company's products and services. As Freire (1970) explained, the dialogic orientation is one of humility, where one sets aside personal agendas (pp. 78ff.). Freire's ideas, however, beg the question of how two-way venues, such as organizational social media sites, can "set aside their personal agendas" when they were developed for purely self-serving business purposes?

Although one of the central features of dialogue is a relationship of trust, dialogue shares many similarities with the Socratic method, dialectic, and interpersonal relationships and friendship (cf. Rawlins, 1992). One can imagine two friends having a spirited discussion about almost any topic, both with an interest in persuading the other, and both willing to admit when s/he is wrong and willing to be changed in the interaction; a central tenet of dialogue may not be friendship, but it is certainly respect and affinity.

In genuine friendship, claims made by one party are subject to scrutiny and skepticism by the other. In terms of what dialogue is or does, dialogic communication can still be strategic and goal oriented—or persuasive (Theunissen, 2015)—but unless the purpose of dialogue is, as Noddings (1984) suggests, "Apprehending the other's reality, feeling what he feels as nearly as possible" (p. 16), then we have conversation rather than dialogue.

What Is Not Dialogue?

The scope of dialogic visions has varied greatly. Although there is agreement about what dialogue is, there seems to be less understanding about what dialogue is *not*. If we take a fairly straightforward summary, say Kent and Taylor's (2002) five features of dialogue—mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk, and commitment—we are told that dialogue is a serious process, as suggested by the presence of mutuality, risk, and commitment.

But Kent and Taylor (1998) also suggested that dialogic communication "refers to any *negotiated* exchange of ideas and opinions" (p. 325, emphasis added). Many dialogic researchers leave out the negotiated part and treat "any exchange of ideas and opinions" as dialogue. However, calling all two-way communication dialogue is inaccurate. As Freire (1970) has summarized eloquently,

Dialogue, as the encounter of [wo]men addressed to the common task of learning and acting, is broken if the parties (or one of them) lack humility. How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? (p. 71)

Dialogue is not an exercise of power but of humility and learning. Long-lasting relationships are nurtured, sought, and undertaken with humility and an understanding that the purpose of the conversation is not to get one's way, but to truly understand and gain deeper knowledge. A further look at the definitions of dialogue should illustrate this point more fully.

To speak of "mere talk" or "mere conversation" is not meant to be pejorative, but only to suggest that dialogue is more than what happens while waiting in line at the checkout counter or during a faculty meeting. To create the "right" conditions for dialogue, there needs to be a relationship of some kind, and as relationship theory tells us, standing in a checkout line and talking to a customer does not constitute a relationship. Therefore, dialogue cannot take place in such situations. In informal public situations, the parties will exchange phatic communication, a form of public communication that fulfills an important social role (cf. Hopkins, 2014; Malinowski, 1923) but does not constitute dialogue.

Dialogue is both an antecedent and an outcome of a relationship that is based on mutual respect and understanding. Dialogic skills are commonly associated with relational competence, contributing to the legitimacy of a relationship, relational empathy, unreserved respect, "presentness," and the idea of parity in a relationship, rather than simply polite interaction. Therefore, dialogue has become for many scholars an archetype for ideal interaction (cf. Spitzberg & Cupach, 2014). But the same skills that contribute to relational competency also lead to the "dark" side of relationships because having compassion, empathy, and being genuine often prevent participants from ending an unhealthy relationship. "Most existing theory and research on relational and interpersonal competence propose skills such as message management, co-orientation, and adaptability for the purpose of engendering mutual respect and sustenance of ongoing dialogue" (Spitzberg & Cupach, 2014, p. 238) but ignore the darker or destructive side of dialogue.

Discourse is a powerful tool, whether it involves a low-order activity such as networking, or something more empirical such as an information-gathering interview. The same is true of research on

social media, which many scholars have operationalized as dialogic communication any time an organization responds to someone online (cf. Sanderson, Barnes, Williamson, & Kian, 2016). But, just as these responses do not suggest the presence of a relationship, neither do they constitute dialogue. Online talk and conversations should lead to trust and commitment; they allow organizations to rhetorically situate themselves in the worldview of particular stakeholders and publics.

Typically, the same tired arguments are offered for why dialogue is not practical for organizations: too much risk, too time consuming, too difficult, and so on. But the fact is that dialogue is hard and does take work. Simplistic definitions of dialogue are just that, simplistic, and are rarely adequate. The power of dialogue lies in "trust," "unanticipated consequences," and "recognition of strange otherness" (Buber, 1970; Freire, 1970; Kent & Taylor, 2002). Many problematic areas such as groupthink and problem solving are avoided by taking a dialogic approach that does not assume to hold the keys to truth but instead acknowledges that truth is contingent and no one owns it. Dialogue and dialogic conditions allow the "truth" to be codiscovered and multiple consequences to be highlighted, and in doing so, identify potential risks and solutions to problems that may not have been identified had the parties remained focused on solely advocating their own views.

In his discussion of the role of ambiguity and uncertainty in decision making, Carroll (2015) points out that many organizations receive "weak" or ambiguous signals that something is not working. Managers are often reluctant to admit that their perspective is only one of many (cf. Lane, 2014). Although Carroll does not delve into dialogue per se, he does explore the processes around dialogue and the conditions that might make dialogue possible, such as respect for diverse opinions, which is a key requirement in public relations dialogue. Carroll adds that our natural inclination is to avoid ambiguity and uncertainty, pointing toward collective efforts to reduce ambiguity and uncertainty by jointly constructing meaning, even if that meaning is inaccurate. Dialogue is therefore not only complex, serving a purpose of *finding* truth, but also of *constructing* it, regardless of how representative or accurate this truth might be.

A final issue has to do with the characterization of dialogue as symmetrical communication.

Isn't Dialogue Just a Form of Symmetrical Communication?

Some scholars who study public relations and social media might ask, what is the harm in calling two-way communication or symmetrical communication dialogic? Isn't it? Conversely, do we not have to pay more attention to the process and product variables rather than just the medium or manifestations of talk to have dialogue? If no relationship exists, can there ever be dialogue? Without trust, can there be dialogue? Without risk, can there be any dialogue? And without sustained communication over time, can there be dialogue? Or is it sufficient to simply say "dialogic potential" or "dialogical interactions"? Does it even matter?

The answer is that how we talk about dialogue does matter. Understanding the form or mode of communication enables us to have some sense of the state of the relationship. For example, Theunissen (2015) argues that it is feasible that dialogue may not occur in the early stages of the relationship because of the need for a certain level of trust to be present before participants are prepared to "risk

themselves" through self-disclosure. But, this does not mean that dialogue is, or should be, the preferred mode of communication.

What is important, however, is to recognize various modes of communication and to be fluent in them. The fact remains that two-way symmetrical communication is simply not dialogue because of underlying philosophical differences between the two (cf. Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). Insisting that they are the same prevents the development of a robust dialogic theory that is uniquely applicable to public relations and, more specifically, social media.

So, on the one hand, the purpose of this elegy is to argue that considerable research that has been conducted on dialogue has been what we call D-I-N-O, or Dialogue-In-Name-Only. And on the other hand, the purpose of the essay is to apply a definition of dialogue to social media use in public relations, to describe where we might be taking our dialogic research.

But like Shiva who is sometimes depicted as having four arms, there are more than two hands. On the third hand, a dialogic meta-analysis could offer new dialogic models such as international and intercultural perspectives, as well as drawing on insights from underrepresented or not yet represented dialogic scholars. And on a fourth hand, a metacritique of dialogue might provide another opportunity to extend and clarify existing definitions of dialogue.

The Shivic elegy needs to both destroy and rebuild. Dialogue needs to be seen for what it is, both process and product, rather than as just a substitute for discourse or discussion. But discourse and discussion are the basis of all dialogue. Without them, there is no dialogue.

The principles of dialogue are often oversimplified purely as talk or civil conversation, when in fact dialogue represents a unique interpersonal relational state. Dialogue is not mere talk or message exchange but something much more akin to Socratic dialogue in which the interlocutors engage in a conversation or discussion to find truth. Or, perhaps somewhat more interesting, they construct a collective "truth" by using dialogue as sense-making activity. But the fact remains that every faculty meeting is not dialogic, every conversation over coffee in a café is not dialogic, and every social media exchange is not a dialogue. In practice, most of these exchanges are two-way. If not, they would remain monologues of rather eccentric "others." But all two-way communication is not dialogue. The exchange of phatic communication (cf. Hopkins, 2014), for example, is necessary in maintaining relationships but serves no dialogic purpose.

In our opinion, the big mistake that is made with dialogue is the assumption that dialogue is something simple that just happens rather than a process of repeated exchanges and interactions that culminate in a product that is called dialogue. Every sharing of ideas and opinions is not dialogic, and principles such as risk and trust go hand-in-hand with mutuality and commitment.

So, if dialogue is more complicated than we see in much of the research (cf. Bruning, Dials, & Shirka, 2008; Haigh, 2014; Luo & Jiang, 2012; Romenti, Murtarelli, & Valentini, 2014), if dialogue is something different from just symmetrically engaging, is dialogue even possible via social media? This is

an important point and one that deserves greater attention. Too often, scholars uncritically accept that dialogue is indeed taking place on social media, confusing automatic responses such as copying and pasting answers or retweeting content as having engaged in dialogue.

Dialogue requires the presence of a relationship. What this relationship may look like—particularly on social media—is still a matter of debate, but it must have reached a sufficient level of mutuality that reciprocal self-disclosure can take place. Do social media channels such as YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram allow for such self-disclosure? Is there a sense of mutual regard and respect for diversity? This begs the question of whether dialogue on social media really exists.

Theoretical Considerations

Dialogue is a theory that most closely correlates with an interpersonal approach. Indeed, when scholars such as Buber (1970) wrote about dialogue in the early 1920s, and others such as Bakhtin (1981) in the 1940s, Rogers (1956/1992) in the 1950s, and so forth, the field of communication was nascent and interpersonal communication as a field was yet to emerge for decades. So, to say dialogue is an outgrowth of interpersonal communication would not be accurate. Dialogue preceded interpersonal communication and informed it—indeed, *dialogic* competence may be seen as a prerequisite for *interpersonal* competence—and up until probably the late 1990s, dialogue had nothing at all to say about organizational relationships or organization–public relationships.

Dialogic theory comes from a time when people communicated with each other in a face-to-face fashion. The dialogic scholars assumed that a relationship of some kind existed because dialogue was not even possible without the other person being physically present. With the exception of the telephone, a face-to-face meeting was the only way that dialogue was enacted. Thus, the many studies and approaches that take as a given that dialogue is simply another way of describing symmetrical communication (Grunig, 2011), and the implication by some scholars who have used the word *dialogue* in relation to two-way communication is misguided (cf. Browning, 2015; Stoker & Tusinski, 2006).

Dialogue is an interpersonal process that until the recent past had not been applied to mediated or mass contexts; that is, until scholars began calling social media such as Twitter or Facebook “dialogic” simply because there was a semblance of two-way communication taking place. However, calling social media exchanges dialogue is akin to calling a classroom a public setting because there are many people in the room. Although both venues (mediated communication and the classroom) exhibit some of the

trappings of each theory (dialogic and public), these venues are decidedly not dialogic or public in any theoretical, practical, or legal sense, and it is easy to be misled by such facile comparisons.

If dialogue is not appropriate for automatically applying to the study of social media and other public relations contexts, two questions are raised: (1) How can we make it appropriate (as implied above)? (2) What would be appropriate? Both questions are taken up next.

Dialogic Appropriation

Many years ago, Schiappa (1990) wrote on historical appropriation in regard to sophistic texts, arguing that calling something rhetorical before the word *rhetoric* even existed was problematic. The same argument could be applied to the use of dialogue by many public relations scholars as a way of describing social media responsiveness by organizations. In fact, what many scholars call dialogue should more accurately be called "customer service." And as some public relations scholars have already argued, when one examines more than one or two of the features of dialogue, calling social media (a tool that often exhibits anonymity rather than relational transparency) dialogic becomes problematic.

As active public relations reviewers, we are often asked to review articles on dialogic public relations. Many times over the years, we have told author(s) that what they were studying was not dialogue. For example, counting the number of tweets that an organization writes in response to tweets by its followers is no example of a dialogic relationship. Often, the research that has been conducted is still useful, but requires a different theoretical framework than dialogue. More often, however, the assumptions made by the scholars about what they are studying are just not consistent with the actual theory applied.

Dialogue is not possible via anonymous exchanges on micro blogging sites because, for dialogue to take place, there must in the first instance be a relationship. In other words, there must be "a connection, association, or involvement" (Berko, Rosenfeld, & Samovar, 1997, p. 254), which requires propinquity. Social media enables some aspects of propinquity such as communicative proximity where opportunities to connect are presented. However, to have a relationship of some kind—whether personal or work-related—three conditions must be fulfilled: (1) The participants must have mutual regard, (2) they must have some degree of influence over each other, and (3) they must agree about the nature of that relationship (Adler, Rosenfeld, & Proctor, 2007; Berko et al., 1997). It is worth remembering that just as we cannot own or possess dialogue, we cannot own or possess a relationship because the latter is a process, not a thing (cf. Adler et al., 2007). Relationships are "things we *do*" (Jackson-Dwyer, 2014, p. 13), and dialogue is achieved when, for example, linguistic behavior is synchronized (cf. Fusarolia, Rączaszek-Leonardic, & Tylén, 2014).

For a relationship to develop and be maintained, there must be a willingness and desire to communicate openly and freely (Berko et al., 1997). Open and free flow of communication is achieved through dialogue; therefore, dialogue is integral in the process of building and maintaining relationships. Through the presence of dialogue, participants feel accepted, acknowledged, and understood (empathy). Confirmation is achieved through supportive language, which comprises descriptive, spontaneous, empathetic, and provisional messages as opposed to nonsupportive language, which is evaluative, manipulative, and indifferent (cf. Berko et al., 1997).

To maintain a relationship and ensure that dialogue can take place, a certain level of *self*-disclosure is required. Not knowing who the other person is, and whether the identity is exaggerated or fabricated, is a deterrent to relationship formation and maintenance.

So to the first question of how to make dialogue appropriate, a better question might be “What is appropriate?” There are dozens of valuable interpersonal theories that have not been drawn on in public relations, as well as a few that have, such as attribution theory. Attribution theory would arguably be a more useful way of describing meaning making via social media than dialogue, just as other theories such as coordinated management of meaning (Pearce & Cronen, 1980) and Byrne’s law of attraction might find new life in cyberspace. Of particular interest might be the reciprocity effect (cf. Jackson-Dwyer, 2014), which suggests that we like those who like us, leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy. Online, the reciprocity effect may take on a different shape through the process of “liking” other people’s communication. But although they might open the way for developing relationships, such actions still do not equate with dialogue.

Conversely, a body of theory like rhetoric might also be applied. Principles like ideographs (McGee, 1980), ideology (Nothstine, Blair, & Copeland, 1994), identification (Burke, 1969), narrative (Kent, 2015), and other concepts have great resonance in social media contexts because the messages are often clearly mass rather than interpersonal.

Rather than trying to force such a theory as dialogue into a public space such as social media, why not actively look for theories of relevance that apply to social media, or develop one that takes into account social media’s uniqueness? The second question, “What *would* be an appropriate application of dialogue in public relations?” becomes more relevant here.

First, an appropriate application of dialogue in public relations would need to do two things: (1) actually use dialogue (all parts of dialogic theory), and (2) focus on interpersonal contexts rather than quasi-interpersonal or mass contexts such as social media and the Internet. And second, a dialogic approach to public relations needs to acknowledge that dialogue is a sophisticated skill rather than a passive experiential tool. Dialogue requires transparency, reflexivity, and an awareness that dialogue is taking place and is not something one-way that an organization can simply implement to improve its relationships with stakeholders and publics. The last section of this essay takes up that challenge.

Theories Guide Practice

In spite of the fear of theory that many industry professionals have, theory informs practice in every aspect of the world: climate science, criminal justice, agriculture, engineering, historiography, medicine, physics, politics, professional writing, public communication, typography, and so on. Just as astrophysicists use what they know about physics and the cosmos to design spacecraft and plan missions to distant objects and places, professional communicators should use what they know about communication—intercultural, interpersonal, group, mass, mediated, rhetorical, organizational, and public—to design effective communication campaigns and improve organization–public communication. The strength of dialogue as a public relations tool is not in its ability to inform social media, but in facilitating interpersonal exchanges, research, and maintaining relationships.

Instead of trying to force dialogue into every two-way social media communication context, identifying contexts in which dialogue actually fits makes more sense. Ideally, however, scholars study

phenomena and bring to bear the theories that are needed to answer their research questions. Just as often, however, scholars believe that a particular theory or idea will help shed light on a process or practice—thus the rationale for the many studies of dialogic public relations.

We believe that perhaps the time has come for us to make one of two choices: Either we study dialogue in actual practice—try to find organizations that use dialogue effectively and study how the process develops—or we find a way to create actual communicative spaces (which might be possible in social media) around the principles of dialogue. The second option might not represent the type of dialogic interaction that the mothers and fathers of dialogue envisioned, but it might be a useful and realistic tradeoff, delivering on the call of “informed practice” and thereby converting theory into actual practice. To achieve this more realistic notion of dialogic interaction requires us to do away with the idea that every two-way interaction necessarily equates to dialogue, that dialogue is somehow even needed to make sense of customer service or crisis type messaging on social media, or that every form of communication on social media constitutes dialogue.

The concept of dialogue has attracted considerable attention in public relations over the past 17 years, but much of that attention has been spent trying to do “mop up” style research rather than theory building (Kuhn, 1962, p. 24). The state of dialogic public relations theory has not reached a point of mop up. As Kuhn (1962) has suggested, revolutionary, paradigm-changing research often bears no allegiance to what has come before. In public relations terms, this may mean that dialogic theory may bear little resemblance to, for example, the ingrained idea of “excellence” or appealing notions of “symmetry.” As Kuhn argued,

Almost always the [wo]men who achieve these fundamental inventions of a new paradigm have been either very young or very new to the field whose paradigm they change. And perhaps that point need not have been made explicit, for obviously these are the [wo]men who, being little committed by prior practice to the traditional rules of normal science, are particularly likely to see that those rules no longer define a playable game and to conceive another set that can replace them. (p. 90)

The persistent desire among some to cast dialogue as merely a two-way tool in service of the excellence theory does violence to dialogic theory and does little to help theories of dialogic public relations flourish. Our hope is that the readers of this special issue will take up the challenge and use dialogue to advance public relations theory farther—in the spirit of the Shivic elegy.

A Return to Shiva and Dialogic Complexity

Shiva, as one of three key deities in Hindu religion, is best seen as the “god of becoming” (Adler & Pouwels, 2006, p. 213), preparing the way for renewal through destruction. Sometimes, s/he (Shiva can be either male or female) is the bringer of joy; at other times, s/he is a ruthless destroyer, “making way for new life to come” (Adler & Pouwels, 2006, p. 213). Dialogue can, and should be, seen in the same way. At times, it can be used to resolve problems and bring people closer together; at other times, it can lead to conflict and uncertainty. Dialogue is neither good nor bad, and always works in harmony with the

other deities or forms of communication.

Not unlike followers of Shiva, who believe that the utterance of his/her name will eliminate “any and all bad vibrations” (Srinivasan, 2011, p. 113) in the immediate area of the worship, so do followers of dialogue often believe that by calling something “dialogue” or “dialogic communication” they have removed any negative associations with public relations and are, by implication, building relationships. Unlike worshippers of Shiva, however, the faux dialogic scholars fail to study the true meaning of dialogue and remain focused on the superficial. Many mistakenly depict only one side of dialogue: as a bringer of joy, the panacea of all problems in the world, and its darker, destructive side is ignored.

Dialogue by its very nature is *regenerative*, meaning that destruction must happen for new understandings to flourish. Dialogue can, and indeed does, break down preconceived ideas, open pathways for achieving understanding, and provide the possibility of new growth, new meanings, and new directions in relationships. But before that is achieved, we must disclose of ourselves, and by doing so, make ourselves vulnerable, potentially risking the destruction of some of our beliefs and understandings. Dialogue represents change and growth or, using the Shiva metaphor, *regeneration*.

Change is part of the cycle of life; change is natural, and yet often resisted—perhaps because it contributes to uncertainty and ambiguity. Our normal inclination is toward maintaining or achieving certainty and our unwillingness to accept change is often the cause of failed relationships (cf. Berko et al., 1997) and aborted dialogue.

As in life, there will always be tension between conserving, creating, and destruction. Just as Shiva the Destroyer works in concert with Vishnu, the Preserver, and Brahma, the Creator, dialogue works with other forms of communication, such as rhetoric, conversation, and persuasion. We engage in dialogue for as long as it is necessary (Fusarolia et al., 2014).

The Shivic elegy itself needs to both destroy and rebuild. Dialogue needs to be seen for what it is, both process and product, rather than as just a substitute for discourse or discussion. But discourse and discussion are the basis of all dialogue. Within dialogue, information must be shared and disclosure must take place. Without these requirements, there is no dialogue.

Returning to the image of Shiva, his/her most identifiable feature is perhaps the third eye, which is usually kept closed (Srinivasan, 2011), and thus “hidden.” It is this eye—when opened—that incinerates

everything in its path. Dialogue is similarly powerful, potentially incinerating preconceived ideas. But like Shiva, dialogue seldom unleashes its hidden power, spending most of its time in quiet reflection.

Shiva is depicted in four main forms: as the destroyer of worlds, as an ascetic where s/he spends eons undisturbed in deep meditation, as a herdsman where s/he roams the jungle to heal the animals, and as a fearful being haunting burial grounds (Srinivasan, 2011). Dialogue, too, has been depicted in various forms. Scholars have questioned the value of and focus on dialogue in public relations, suggesting that it would force us into mediocrity or that it is not a representation of reality (cf. Stoker & Tusinski,

2006). Others, such as Buber (1970), see dialogue as a philosophical, almost meditative, meeting of minds: "a meeting of one whole being with another whole being" (Gordon, 2011, p. 208).

But dialogue also has been seen as a solution to problems, healing broken relationships as well as a process that should be avoided as the outcome may be risky and uncontrolled, thus causing fear in the hearts of managers who aim to reduce uncertainty in their environment. As a tool in public relations, dialogue has many faces and many depictions, and is therefore complex and multifaceted. As Fusarolia et al. (2014) point out in their sociolinguistic discussion of dialogue, "dialog seems dauntingly complex, comprising an almost endless number of dimensions from eyebrow movements and gesture to syntax and topicality structure" (p. 150), but this dialogic precision, this complexity, is what makes synergy both possible and necessary.

Dialogic Complexity Should Be Embraced

Dialogue is often treated as overly complex, and other communication theories, such as information subsidy, narrative, or persuasion, are portrayed as simple tools. Indeed, building relationships and networks of contacts or engaging in persuasion is quite difficult, the study of which goes back thousands of years. And yet, dialogue is depicted as too difficult for educated professionals to understand.

That dialogue is a sophisticated concept is actually a good thing. Far too many communication theories, including agenda setting, diffusion of innovations, narrative/storytelling, and others, are portrayed simplistically in introductory textbooks and on the Web, often suggesting that little or no understanding of theory is even necessary to use the concepts (cf. Kent, 2015). Dialogue, by contrast, is a powerful, sophisticated tool that can be used to build relationships and increase understanding. To use dialogue effectively requires more than the existence of a two-way communication channel and feedback, as many contemporary dialogue and social media studies have done (cf. Adams & McCorkindale, 2013; Bürger, 2015; Watkins & Lewis, 2014).

Part of what makes dialogue such a powerful tool is that in the process of preparing to use dialogue, a number of assumptions about internal and external organizational communication, stakeholders and publics, and ethical practices have to be examined. Few communicative activities short of preparing crisis or issues management plans require such careful thought. Indeed, the simplistic two-way communicative "dialogue" spoken of by scholars studying social media is quite obviously not the same as the genuine dialogue described here. Just the process of preparing to use dialogue opens a network of opportunities for organizations to reassess their ethical communication practices, transparency, willingness to share information, willingness to commit to the process of dialogue, and so forth.

Using dialogue effectively requires training and commitment by the party interested in utilizing dialogue—training both for oneself and one's interlocutors. And using dialogue effectively is not nearly as difficult a process as some have suggested. The fear by organizations of using dialogue revolves around the issue of transparency and having to abandon existing paternalistic practices. To return to our metaphor, dialogue begins with destruction but ends in rebirth.

Conclusion

Although this essay is about dialogue, ultimately what we describe are metaphors of practice, or new ways of envisioning an old practice. As Samuel Taylor Coleridge noted of the elegy in the introduction to this essay, the poet, or author, "will feel regret for the past or desire for the future, so sorrow and love became the principal themes of the elegy." Our sorrow comes from knowing that so many scholars have studied dialogue but ultimately were just looking for an easy heuristic or set of steps. But the love that so many have for dialogue is obvious from the International Communication Association's preconference panel that spawned this essay.

We believe that by seeing the potential for dialogue through our Shivic analysis as a transformative, organizational tool and process, sorrow can be transformed to love. For organizations to begin to really entertain genuine dialogue as a communicative model would be extraordinary. As professional communicators, and the people who train the professional communicators of the future, instilling dialogic values in our students and colleagues has the power to change the world. Organizations can, and should, still use social media for the one- and two-way communication that they do now, but hopefully as scholars move forward, they will begin to study ways of making genuine dialogue possible as a replacement. The social media tools might still bear fruit as dialogic tools if they are used properly, but knowing how to do that is still a question to be answered. Dialogue has multiple uses, multiple forms, and multiple outcomes. Dialogic predictability only exists in terms of knowing that change is a given and that control is futile.

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