



Thought transfer

Description

Creative people need to be given the tools to express themselves, to vent what's inside to the outside world. They also need to develop communication skills appropriate to their inner talents. We are all creatives in a sense. Thoughts arise in my mind and get communicated to others, to be unpacked in such a way that others think what I think and feel as I feel.

The debunking of this outdated model of communication has exercised key philosophers, linguists and media theorists for some time. It assumes thoughts get *conducted* from one mind to another. Here are some propositions that run counter to the conduit model of thought.

- I sometimes don't know what I think until I've said it.
- Thoughts and ideas seem to emerge from conversations, not premeditated thoughts.
- Thought has a strong social dimension. Communities think.
- An architect probably doesn't know what she wants the building to be like until she starts sketching.
- My design comes out differently when I draw on paper, play around with cardboard or use a CAD system.
- The medium is the message (Marshall McLuhan).



What the mind generates is sometimes presented as a

meaning. According to the conduit metaphor we package these meanings as words, drawings or actions, ready for other people to unpack and translate into meanings in their minds. The test for accuracy in communication is whether other people “get my meaning.” • **Noise** often gets in the way to distort the signal. Contrary to the conduit metaphor, the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein asserted.

When I think in language, there aren’t “meanings” going through my mind in addition to the verbal expressions: the language itself is the vehicle of thought (p.107)

the meaning of a word is its use in the language (p.20).

The danger of the conduit metaphor is that it draws attention to concepts of the individual as the source of genius and diminishes the role of the social, of histories, legacies and cultures. It is also the first step towards [Ayn Rand](#)’s selfish universe of supposedly creative and misunderstood heroes.

Whether for good or ill the conduit metaphor engenders confidence in technologies for direct communication between minds and machines ([link](#)).

Returning to noise “the signal between a sender and a receiver can become distorted; the flow gets interrupted; impurities enter the conduit. This shows the inevitable influence of the medium of passage on the message, and the crucial role of context. In fact according to certain readings communication is all context. If *conduit* is to be the metaphor then let’s focus on the [noise](#).

References

- Reddy, Michael. 1979. The conduit metaphor: A case of frame conflict in our language about language. In A. Ortony (ed.), *Metaphor and Thought*. 284-324. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1953. *Philosophical Investigations*. Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe. Oxford: Blackwell.

Category

1. Voice and text

Tags

1. language
2. meaning
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