

## Language and Power

Language is primarily a means of representation. It is the means by which we represent reality to ourselves and to others. It is important to understand this because in any final analysis, language is power.

What power really comes down to is the power of representation--which is to say, the power to control the widest frame, to create the broadest space of social meaning. The struggle a political party faces, for example, is over the elaboration of a discourse, a broad narrative, within which lives receive meaning--which is why the media is so important. History will show, I believe, that one of the most significant events of our time was the creation of the 24-hour TV news cycle.

Ideally, one wants to be able to control the movement of contexts, for the stories of our lives are enclosed within those contexts. It is important, therefore, to learn to contain the container, to learn to reconceptualize and recontextualize--to grind up an inhibiting context so that it is subsumed into current reality. Then, against current reality it becomes possible to envision a different 'reality,' to recognize that a structural tension obtains between the two, and to make choices to bring the former into existence. It is important to remember that what becomes reality shows up in language before it shows up anywhere else. In that sense mentioned above, language is the physical link with the spiritual, which then manifests in reality--gets made, is built, created.

Language is not just physical things--like this table and these chairs--and abstract things, like problems and concepts. Language also constitutes "the great and noble instrument of our traditional life"--which itself has a recognizable coherency that alters with the times.

Aristotle held the view that language referred to an external world, and in a number of ways this view strikes one as intuitively satisfying. On the other hand, current scientific thinking has it that language refers primarily itself and that we live in a word-built world. From this latter point of view it can be argued that the fundamental distinction of importance is that between **nature** and **human nature**: everything not the latter is the former. The point here is that the intersection between language and reality can never be crossed. No human being has ever experienced an objective world, or even a world at all. You are, at this moment, having a visionary experience. The world that you see and hear is nothing more than a modification of your consciousness, the physical status of which remains a mystery--which I'll come back to. Your nervous system sections the undifferentiated buzz of the universe into separate channels *of* sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. From the point of view of consciousness, we are merely aware of sights, sounds, sensations, moods, and thoughts.

The operational definition of consciousness is *reportability*. Our experience *of* brains, as objects in the world, leaves us perfectly insensible to the reality of consciousness, while our experience *as* brains grants us knowledge of nothing else.

All communication breakdowns have understanding--or case in point, *non*-understanding--at their core. What this means is that there has been (or is) an 'absence of clarity' going on--for which you would be well advised to take responsibility, for that's where insight and power reside. Misunderstanding (or non-understanding, willful or non-willful) results from--

- Not being clear in your own mind,
- Not being clear about reality, or
- Not being clear to another.