

Brief Encounter with the Taos Institute

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Covid, Communication and Creativity



By Mary Gergen, Taos co-founder and Board Member

For most of us, the corona virus has brought about radical changes in our life-ways. Among the most striking changes is the way we have been cut away from our social worlds. Families are often split apart, with work places, schools, places of worship all locked down. Common gathering places - restaurants, cafes, playing fields, parks, and beaches have not permitted our gathering. From a social constructionist perspective, however, the situation is quite fascinating. If together we create the meaning of our worlds, what happens when the process of meaning making is eroding?

Most of us have experienced one major effect, that is, to find each other again. Many have commented on the lengths they have gone to restore communication. Without others, what are we to make of our world, what is happening, what does it mean? Most interesting for me has been the way in which many of us have found ourselves restoring relations submerged in the past. Old friends and acquaintances suddenly enter our lives again. My feeling is that this phenomenon represents an emerging consciousness of the significance of our relational life. As many on the Taos networks have mentioned, there is even reason to hope for a new movement toward global community.

On the lighter side, I have also been struck by the challenges to creativity. So many of our daily habits, rituals, and activities have been curtailed. We spend enormous amounts of time, day after day, living a delimited spaces. Our constructions of the world are closely tied to these ways of life. So, if these ways of life and their supporting constructions are disrupted, what happens next? To gain some insight, I sent emails to friends asking about their creative solutions. These are some slightly edited responses to what they come up with:

- We realized that we have the perfect quarantine room – our sunroom which is sealed off from our dining room by a glass door. The sunroom also has a separate entrance from outside. So we purchased a special table and set of chairs and arranged microphones and speakers so we could sit at our dining room table and friends (singles or couples only!) could sit in the sunroom and we could dine together, have a drink, talk.....We have named it the Quarantine Cafe.





- Greta (8 years old) is very involved with baking and watches bake-off shows on TV. On Saturday she came up with the idea that she would have a bake-off competition with her father. The challenge was to make a cupcake with filling and a different topping and a cookie to go with it. She spent a whole day reading cookbooks and online recipes in preparation. The contest was on Sunday and Greta was declared the winner!

- My husband uses my mascara on his eyebrows any time he goes on Zoom.

- We have had several patio happy hours sitting at a safe distance. One evening it went from 5pm to 10pm on a 30 degree night. We had the fire pit going and blankets on our laps. Both couples had their own bottles, snacks and wine glasses.



- I realized I've done something terrible only my wife knows about: This week I stole delicious lilac blossoms from a nearby arboretum. The horticultural police would put my head on a pike if they'd caught me, but I was an artful robber. Now my wife's home office smells divine. And she loves it.



My hope is that these will inspire others to find creative new ways of relating, now and in the future.