

Is Now the Time for a Generative Journalism Learning Space?



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Friday, September 22, 2017 -- Michelle Strutzenberger

It stands out as a bright and proud moment. I was a newly minted “professional” mingling with the accomplished-yet-astoundingly-generous front-runners of the Appreciative Inquiry community; David Cooperrider, Ada-Jo Mann, Diana Whitney, Jen Hetzel-Silbert, to name a few. As I offered my business card, I will never forget the brightened eyes and genuine exclamations of delight and curiosity at the sight of my title, “Generative Journalist.”

Though I’m certain much of the reaction rose from the warm-heartedness of that

group, there is no doubt they also, like I, had glimpsed and been stirred by a sense of possibility that title ignited. In fact, I was so new to the role that while I could utter “Generative Journalist” without a stutter, I had to memorize and practice how I would speak about what the role actually entailed.

Ever since, I and others who’ve been exploring this new realm have experienced what entwining with this notion – this thing we’ve come to call Generative Journalism – can spark:

- Bright eyes
- New blogs (See NeighboringMovement.org for a great one posted earlier this year)
- New organizations. (Sarah Arthurs of NewScoopYYC in Calgary is one of those dedicated trail-blazers).

Over time, we’ve also been able to see and speak more clearly to what possibility it is that Generative Journalism holds.

Here’s a handful of my current favourite ways to talk about that possibility. Be forewarned, these points are intentionally brief and impressionistic. But we’ll be exploring what Generative Journalism can do at a more concrete and detailed level in future work – ideally in conversation with others who are curious about, have been inspired by and/or those who are “doing” Generative Journalism already.

Strengthening a System’s Positive Potential

Sometimes those who are less immersed in the work and conversation of a field can offer the most useful and energizing insights.

I like how [this article](#) from an intriguing initiative, Project Censored: The News that Didn’t Make the News, describes Generative Journalism:

“It involves asking questions that strengthen a system’s capacity to explore and actualize positive potential.”

Generative Journalism is a promising design for surfacing a system’s existing strengths. It can also be part of a larger ecology of practices that focus on how those strengths might be combined and then turned into fresh visions and actions that

“establish the new and eclipse the old.”

Shaping a Community

World-renowned author, consultant and community builder Peter Block has been a strong encourager of Generative Journalism.

“Generative Journalism’s goal is to build communities, not simply report on their wounds,” Peter says in a [NewScoopYYC interview](#).

“All transformation is linguistic. Change occurs out of our speaking it into being... When you report on citizens coming together, that act in itself widens the circle of connected citizens.”

Adam Barlow-Thompson, the lead for a neighboring initiative in Wichita, Kansas was inspired by this possibility of Generative Journalism as a shaper of community earlier this year.

Adam writes that he understands this shaping happens both through “choosing which stories to tell and in the way those stories are discovered and shared.”

Discovering a Soul

Generative Journalism wades into deeper waters with its invitation to also be a “soul discovery experience.”

Not that it has to be so, or is all the time, but that its possibility also includes this, especially if the time and the trust are there.

“Generative Journalism is an act of total rebellion, because we’re seeking people in their sacred selves and what they’re deeply connected to, not their function as units of production in a socio-economic system built for repetition and control,” Peter Pula, Generative Journalism thought leader, says in a dialogue.

Incidentally, it was fascinating to see the uptake that quote of his sparked when shared on social media. It seemed many were saying “yes” to something about it. Perhaps it was speaking to some deeply-felt yearning?

Transforming How We Relate

More than one person has spoken of the possibility they see in Generative Journalism to be more than a professional field of practice, but a way to shift how we relate to people around us: our neighbours, strangers, families, friends.

Adam, mentioned above, concludes his blog with this invitation to readers: “How might you, in your own way, serve as a Generative Journalist, looking for what new life is emerging in your own community? Even if you only tell your spouse, a friend, or one neighbor, that type of storytelling can have an important impact.”

“I think this is applicable in day-to-day life, with family and where we work,” a NewScoopYYC team member said in [an interview](#). “Instead of focusing on problems, you focus on what works and you build things up. ‘Never ask a question that invites people to blame and complain’ was a quote on the deck of cards we got (during a Generative Journalism workshop hosted by Axiom News) and that sums it up for me.”

Is Now the Time?

There’s something sexy about a newly emerging field, with infinite possibilities swirling and little- to- none of that “capturing” and “nailing down” happening yet. None of the “hierarchy” of experts to novices has been set up. There are few to none “do’s” and “don’ts,” tools, lists and boxes to check. Nobody’s really an outsider, because there are really no insiders.

Is it possible for a field of practice to stay in emergence? Is it preferable?

And if the answer is yes to both of those questions, then how do we shape a learning space/hub/institute/school for a particular field?

How do we create the space such that:

- people always have clear pathways for engaging, growing, “playing” and sharing
- the practice builds on past rich and valuable stories, experiences and understandings

- while weaving in fresh stories, experiences and understandings
- the willingness to “shut down” the space is always there if it’s sensed that it is no longer offering or gleaning a meaningful contribution.

For years now, right alongside the evolution of Generative Journalism, the notion of a Generative Journalism learning space has been bubbling. (Other names have included institute, school, hub, playground, sandbox).

Among the possible learning circles and guides:

- Generative Journalism co-ops (Sarah Arthurs, NewScoopYYC)
- Generative Journalism and the Narrative Arts (Jocasta Boone, Resonance Centre and Yvonne Hollandy, Axiom News)
- Generative Journalism transforming schools (Chuck Peters, Folience, formerly CEO of The Gazette Company)
- Generative Journalism in a European context (Griet Bouwen, Nieuwmakers)
- Generative Journalism and community building (Peter Block, Restore Commons)
- Generative Journalism and organizational development (David Cooperrider, Appreciative Inquiry)
- Generative Journalism, its emergence, surprises, possibilities, what’s next, etc. (Peter Pula, Generative Journalism thought leader, Resonance Centre, Axiom News)

The Best Next Step

On Oct. 22-24, the Resonance Centre for Social Evolution is hosting a gathering centred on this calling question: What if We Usher in a New Epoch by Weaving Resonant Communities Together?

The Resonance Centre offers the compelling view that resonant communities (another one of those terms that sparks) spring out of two community patterns – convening and narrating.

“Many communities get convening right, while neglecting the potential of narrative,” the centre states on its website. “Narratives of all kinds – personal stories, films, poetry, music and more – weave an understanding of what a community is, and what is possible.”

What if a Generative Journalism Learning Space could be created to support the springing up and weaving together of resonant communities?

That's a question to be explored in hopefully some depth at the in-person gathering, Resonate!2017 A Transformation Festival.

A dream would be to see many who've been sparked by the possibility in Generative Journalism to join that gathering and the specific conversation on the Learning Space.

To learn more about the Resonance Centre and the festival, [click here](#).

Unanswered Questions

Leaving ample room for doubts, reservations, suspicions and genuine lack of understanding may be one of the best ways to shape the most effective "new thing." If anyone wants to do a good deed and offer their unanswered questions around this notion of a Generative Journalism Learning Space, that would be fantabulous. You can do so publicly, below, or e-mail [peter\(at\)resonancecentre.com](mailto:peter(at)resonancecentre.com).