

‘Heat Maps’ & Good Controversy - The Art of Gathering, Parker, P. (2018)

“In so many gatherings, **we are so afraid of getting burned that we avoid heat altogether.** There is always risk inherent in **controversy**, because things can go very wrong very quickly. But in avoiding it, we waste countless opportunities to truly connect with others about the things they care about. The responsible harnessing of good controversy – handling with structure and care what we normally avoid – is one of the most difficult, complicated, and important duties for a gatherer. When it is done well, it is also one of the most transformative.” (p233)

‘In almost any group of people – including strangers – certain areas of conversation will generate more **heat** than others. ***This heat can arise from conflict, taboos, transgression, power differences, hypocrisy, identity clashes, etc...***

Issues have **heat** when they affect or threaten **people’s fears, needs, and sense of self. And when they poke at a source of power.** Touching on these elements with care can produce transformative gatherings, because you can dig below the typical conversation into the bedrock of values.

You can make a heat map by asking yourself and others:

- What are people avoiding that they don’t think they’re avoiding?
- What are the off-limits topics, here?
- What goes unsaid?
- What are we trying to protect?
- And why?
- How might surface conflicts be ‘proxy wars’ for deeper / more implicit divisions?

Ground Rules / ‘pop-up’ rules

- What do you need to feel safe here?
- What do you need from this group to be willing to take a risk in this conversation today?