

Bakhtinian Dialogue and Kantian Classrooms:

Towards a Philosophy of Interdisciplinary Studies

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In *The Conflicts of the Faculties*, Immanuel Kant presented a tiered model for higher education. Two centuries later, we are still living with Kant's blueprint because it helped to carve disciplines into divisions and divisions into departments, leaving a legacy of fragmentation that has served the nation state better than it has students. Interdisciplinarity has established itself as fragmentation's permanent opposition. In the process, multiple definitions and applications proliferated, prompting William H. Newell to turn to complexity theory in order to provide "a long overdue theoretical rationale for interdisciplinary study" in "A Theory of Interdisciplinary Studies."

The strong responses from scholars in the 2001 issue of *Issues in Integrative Studies* suggest that an adequate rationale did not arrive. Can complexity theory alone rationalize interdisciplinarity? In this presentation, I reveal how dialogic philosophy (Mikhail Bakhtin) offers the key principle to (re)think interdisciplinarity first through language and systems thinking and then through complexity theory. Only then can the dialogic theories that resonate in the Humanities speak to the various systems theories used in the Natural Sciences and Social Sciences.

Kant's Division of Faculties

The faculties are divided into three higher faculties and one lower faculty.

Theology

Law

Medicine

Philosophy Faculty

Historical Knowledge



Dialogue



Pure Rational Knowledge

"And it [philosophy faculty] also studies the relation of these two divisions of learning to each other. It therefore extends to all parts of human knowledge" (Kant, 1979, p. 45)

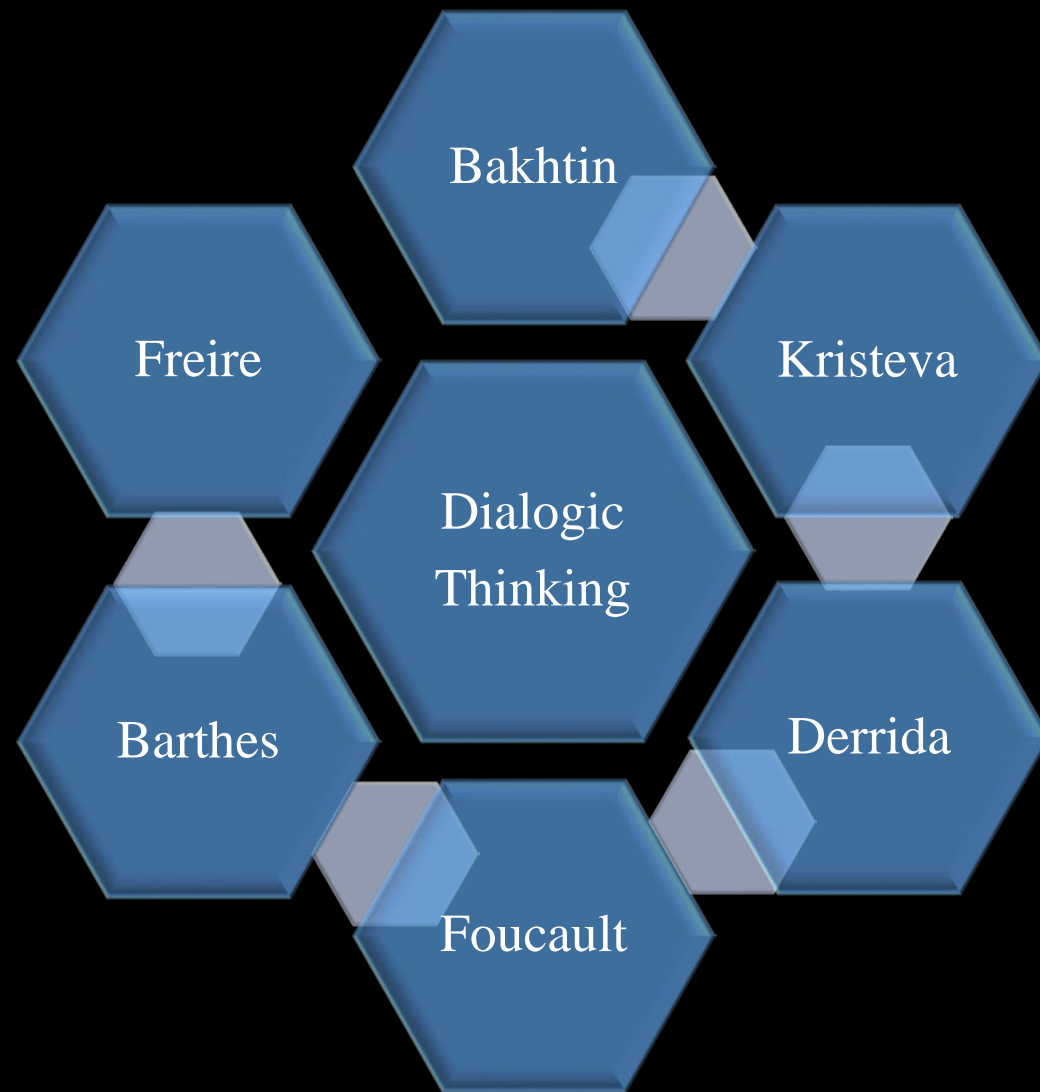
Is Interdisciplinarity Really Dialogic Philosophy?



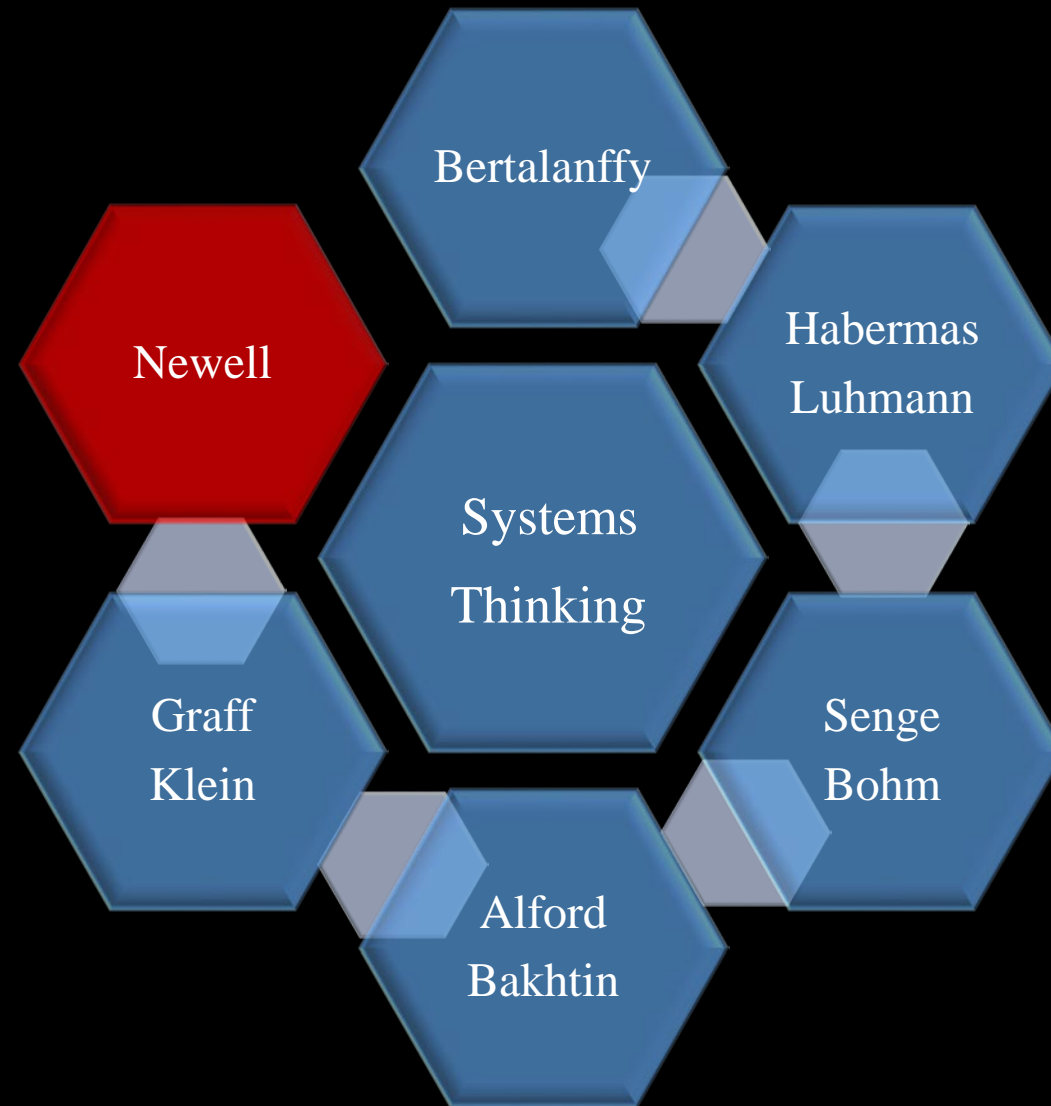
"...I take interdisciplinarity to mean any form of dialogue or interactions between two or more disciplines..." (Moran, 2002, p. 14).

"It [language] is inseparable from the meanings, hierarchies, relationships, locations, and organization of disciplinarity and interdisciplinarity" (Graff, 2015, pp. 53-54).

"All words have the 'taste' of a profession, a genre, a tendency, a party, a particular work.... The word in language is half someone else's" (Bakhtin, 1998, p. 293).



“But no one I have talked to or read...has been able to explain clearly how to integrate disciplinary insights into a comprehensive understanding” (Newell, 2001, p. 18).



"I contend that all interdisciplinarity is, at root, concerned with the behavior of complex systems" (Newell, 2001, p. 4).

"A complex system is composed of components actively connected through predominantly nonlinear relationships" (Newell, 2001, p. 9).

Implications for Praxis

- With complexity and language at the core of poststructuralism, how will an investigation of the similarities between its major theorists establish interdisciplinarity as an essential epistemology for (digital) pedagogy?
- How does poststructuralism support the *matrix* as the structure, metaphor, and guide for a new set of best practices in interdisciplinary studies (teaching)?

“‘Matrix’ is both structure and metaphor” (Klein, 1996, p. 23).

“What has to be investigated and described is a vast network or matrix of interlocking message material” (Bateson, 1979, p. 20).

Implications for Research

- What is the nature of the relationship between intertextuality and interdisciplinarity in dialogism, and why does this relationship provide a better epistemological rationale for interdisciplinary studies?
- How does dialogic philosophy change our understanding of complexity, integration, and the modes of interdisciplinarity (conceptual and instrumental)?
- What has been the consequence of the disproportionate influence of science on the conceptualization and practice of interdisciplinarity?

“Even though we have barely started to get serious about interdisciplinary process, much less interdisciplinary theory, we now need to re-evaluate and perhaps expand our understanding of interdisciplinary process and theory...” (Newell, 2013, p. 35).

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