

DIALOGIC DISLOCATION: ALTERNATIVE STRATEGIES FOR CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14712/2571452X.2022.64.4>

Abstract: In the environment of rapidly changing technological background that facilitates the effects of globalization and the ever-decreasing distance between cultural heritage of different ethnic and national origins, it is an essential task to find and implement innovative strategies that would ensure inclusive dialogic spaces of fast reaction, spaces sensitive to local cultural developments as well as environments free from the domineering tendencies of identification in its traditional and practically dated definition. The present article attempts to form a foundation for an alternative approach to cultural communication. By means of shifting the focus from textual and semantic interpretations of cultural interactions as well as cultural environments, this article sets the direction for communication based on information instead of meaning. The suggested approach, therefore, stems from Claude Shannon's information theory and its development associated with Fred I. Dretske (theoretical-informational approach). The spaces of cultural interaction are understood as dialogic spaces that in accordance with the mentioned approach will be dislocated in order to gain advantage in the sphere of cultural communication in such a way that would allow synergetic functioning alongside the ideas of posthumanist, (post)digital era, as well as conscious utilisation of the specificities of technogenesis.

Keywords: cultural communication, dialogic dislocation, meaning, theoretical-informational approach, posthumanism, postdigital temporality

Introduction

Dialogues are primarily grasped as an effort for meaningful communication, an exchange – or at least an attempt thereat – of meaningful ideas. Cultural actors, and the cultural world in general, are highly dependent on both semantic and textual interpretations of cultural interactions; this approach, however, cannot be viewed as the most efficient in the present conditions of (post)digital environment,

as neither (post)digital temporality, nor the current level of globalization create a suitable background for active exchange of cultural heritage (be it traditional, national cultures, or smaller newly-emergent, but at that no less important, avant-garde or underground developments) through dialogues that prioritize meaning.

The spaces of cultural dialogues, as currently represented, need the possibility of swiftly created platforms devoid of existing practices of 'meaningful' communication: that is, they have to minimize the narrativization of cultural experiences (individual or collective), the pre-definition of identities and cultures, the pre-conditioning of ideological components, and institutional/canonical favouritism. These requirements are far from constituting an exhaustive list of transformations that the spaces of cultural dialogues need to adhere to in order to awake cultural communication from its sleep and to reflect the rapid developments of cultures. However, this is an illustration of what can be changed, if the focus of cultural dialogues and the guidelines for the creation of dialogic spaces gets shifted from 'meaning' to 'information.'¹ This shift has been called dialogic dislocation.

This theoretical step cannot be underestimated, as it limits the influence of text (reading and interpretation) in cultural dialogues, and supports the topical issue of intermediality as well as technologization of dialogic spaces. Most importantly, theoretical-informational orientation of dialogic dislocation pursues two practical achievements: the encoding of dialogic spaces and active interaction aimed at creation and cultural development, instead of traditionally accepted explanatory practices that initiate and maintain cultural stagnation.

It is important to add that the suggested theoretical vision possesses the potential of being seen as more than just an experiment, or an exercise, as it is constructed with current posthuman and (post)digital realities/tendencies in mind. Despite this fact, the following text does not pretend to coordinate 'real' activities within the spaces of cultural dialogue, rather it deals with somewhat 'ideal' situations.

Focus: Identity, Technology, Tradition/Innovation

In order to commence the present investigation of the nature of dialogue and its location (as well as potential dislocation), it is necessary to outline three directions that despite staying somewhat in the shadow of the current theoretical discussion, will nevertheless serve as important orientation points. These directions include identity, technology, and tradition versus innovation, all in the environment of a

¹ To be specified later in relation to Fred I. Dretske's definitions of meaning and information.

rapidly changing globalised world, where the main form of communication is being shifted from the classical understandings of meaning and its abstractness to more technologically and quantitatively concrete material – information. As the world of humanity is traversing the temporal border between postmodernism and the following (arguably still uncertain) theoretically (un)defined developments of cultural evolution, we can witness the parallel evolvement of the posthuman discourse (with accentuated technogenesis among its specificities) that is to be taken into consideration if one is to suggest tactics for effective cultural communication within the volatile conditions of the present.

Questions concerning the flux of definitions that surround the term “identity,” questions that problematize the relationship of the traditional and the innovative in the cultural domain, as well as questions that strive to adapt the human being to the realities of technological land – and mindscapes are among those that inform this discussion. This is not to say we will be attempting to solve the associated problems, or at least give definitions to such complicated concepts as “identity” – as they have been shaping and re-shaping what can generally be called semantic vertigo for decades – our main goal will be to ground these as important elements of dialogic spaces, and define their *theoretical* location, all in order to conceptualize the alternative strategies that can protect us from cultural stasis in said dialogues.

Dialogic Spaces: Genesis

To trace the steps toward dialogic dislocation and concomitant strategies, we will start with the understanding of how dialogic spaces are created and what are their practical roles in the cultural environment of the present times. First and foremost, dialogic spaces are understood through social spaces in accordance with Henri Lefebvre’s definition in *The Production of Space*. There, he contrasts two types of spaces, those that are “real,” meaning social and interactive, and those that are “ideal,” the ones that deal with “mental categories.”² Social spaces include both types and thus simultaneously reflect immediate social experiences and virtual constructions. Lefebvre’s following statement calls for further investigation: “the notions of message, code, information and so on cannot help us trace the genesis of a space; the fact remains, however, that an already produced space can be decoded, *can be read*.”³ We will attempt to argue that if one were to substitute the central element of dialogue and communication – meaning – with a significantly

² Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) 14.

³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 17.

distant and, in the current conditions, much more efficient term – information – there will eventually appear a possibility to interfere in the process of initial encoding.

From Meaning to Information

To support this claim, we will address Fred Dretske's usage of Claude Shannon's theory of information for a discussion of information-theoretical approaches to epistemology. In *Knowledge and the Flow of Information*, Dretske warns about the critical difference between the understanding of meaning and information. The terms are frequently used indiscriminately, which complicates, if not obstructs, the comprehension of mechanisms of function of both elements within the chains of communication. It seems that for Dretske, meaning differs from information in that it is usually accompanied by intention that interferes with the signal. He explains it with the help of the following example:

[a]ssuming it to be a law of nature that water expands upon freezing, no signal can carry the information that some body of water is freezing without carrying the information that this body of water is expanding. But the statement, 'This body of water is freezing' can mean that this body of water is freezing without *meaning* that this body of water is expanding.⁴

This is an essential change on the level of focus, since concentration on information rather than meaning allows us to reassess the 'content' of social space, namely the dialogic space, and, instead of imagining the latter as a formal platform that treats each and every representation of cultural voices in an equally estranged manner, to create spaces, to (contrary to Lefebvre's words) *code* them and adapt according to the desired result, and to gain more in two important spheres that pertain to information and define its value – quantity and speed.

This is the approach that gravitates towards Katharine Hayles's definition of posthumanism, which, according to her book *How We Became Posthuman*, "appears when computation rather than possessive individualism is taken as the ground of being."⁵ In a preceding passage, Hayles writes that human tradition is that of liberal humanism, which, it can be argued, is highly ineffectual in its obsession

⁴ Fred I. Dretske, *Knowledge and the Flow of Information* (Stanford, CA: CSLI Publications, 1999) 73.

⁵ N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman: Virtual Bodies in Cybernetics, Literature, and Informatics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999) 33-4.

with hopelessly anthropocentric points of view and in its certainty as to human identity (its static nature and exceptional value) as well as in its understanding of meaning (the insistence on it being under full control of the human consciousness). Computational approach within the frames of posthumanism, instead of obsessive individualism, achieves radical results in the changing of the very foundation of the understanding of the human position in the world. In such conditions, identity is reimagined as an eclectic constellation of traditions, both within the layered heritage of the past and the ever-developing flows of the cultural present. This change in the view of identity and cultural belonging is primarily conditioned by the change in the understanding of the role of information in the world that has previously relied on meaning. It is through this change that a dialogue between cultures and identities can be repositioned and reimagined as posthuman, informational, and technological – that is to say, it is a qualitative shift to faster, more efficient dialogues, equipped to react to fluctuations of the present fast-moving world, globally. Instead of ‘meaningful’ narratives, presupposed and pre-coded, the dialogic space of informational origin will support the sources of cultural expression with their raw authentic nature without framing them with ‘comfortable’ cultural narratives of the dominant world-views.

Dialogic Spaces as Worlds

Let us return to the creation of dialogic spaces. Apart from finding similarities in the concept of Lefebvre’s social spaces, one may notice that each dialogic space constitutes a separate unique environment, that is to say – a world. In Nelson Goodman’s *Ways of Worldmaking*, one of the main conditions for worldmaking is that it is formed “from worlds already at hand; the making,” according to him, “is a remaking.”⁶ Goodman describes several actions that are associated with the process of worldmaking: composition and decomposition, weighting, ordering, deletion and supplementation, and finally deformation (7-17). This is an understanding of worlds, and by extrapolation here, dialogic spaces, as spaces of action, spaces to be built and structured, not just interpreted, but actively encoded in order to perform in concordance with both the cultural context of dialogic space and its informational level of efficiency. This transformation of dialogic spaces is designed to draw more attention to the movement of information as opposed to sticking to textual practices and constructions/readings of identities and cultural narratives cannot but navigate exclusively in the past. The idea stems from the

⁶ Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2013) 6. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text.

combination of informational theoretical background and practical worldmaking – information as readily available material, which requires swift reaction and precise implementation by means of cooperative activity within dialogic spaces. The dislocation of such world-spaces means not only their spatial relocation (along the axes of land- and mindscape), but also metamorphoses in the temporal comprehension of dialogic space as well as its movement towards activity with information at hand, instead of inaction in the artificial environment of narrativized pre-conditions.

One of the most interesting examples of such activity included in the category of Goodman's supplementation is the so-called phi-phenomenon (15-16). It is a perceptual peculiarity that enables us to see continuous movement between two or more static elements that appear and disappear one after another (one can imagine a downloading sign on one's computer screen with dots or bars circling around while we wait). Considering that "[m]otley entities cutting across each other in complicated patterns may belong to the same world" (8), it is possible to say that a combination of a variety of identities, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, as well as different modes of expression within one dialogic space, has the potential to lead to a new understanding of said varieties as well as to encourage their free, unlimited cooperation. Just as the phi-phenomenon is a demonstration of supplementation in the formation of worlds, decreasing cultural, political, and economic distances between peoples in creative environments will result in a similar 'movement' – and consequently in a similar surplus. In such a way, active construction of dialogic spaces leads to not only exchange, but production as well.

The Advisability of the Dichotomy of 'Fictional' and 'Natural' Dialogic Spaces

It would be logical to pose the following questions: to what extent can such dialogic spaces (social spaces, worlds) be comprehended as 'fictional'? Is the created surplus, amplified by speed and quantity of information, only an illusion of intercultural communication – is the process artificial? To answer these questions, we will have to imagine what is considered to be a 'natural' development of cultures and what are the dialogues that take place on native terrain, within the worlds that were formed, so to speak, 'in the wild.' As the 'natural' collision of cultures is coordinated by means of economic, political, as well as geographically conditioned routes, it can be assumed that it is highly possible that there is no such thing as a naturally formed dialogic environment. What we would like to call 'natural' is subjected to numerous ideological flows, infected by political interests, and formed by centuries of intended cultural aberrations, which in one way or another rest on the pillars of global economy. In

such a way, if cultural developments based on the aforementioned conditions are 'natural,' and in reality they act as artificial, the spaces of dialogic dislocation are not 'fictional,' but rather spontaneous and by extension able to contain more authentic features of all participants of cultural communication than the 'native' terrain. In other words, this comparison was intended to demonstrate that cultural dialogues based on meaning, and the spaces of dialogic dislocation, operate on different levels, precisely because the first conditions the starting position, fixes it in the past, while the latter attempts to activate and accelerate cultural interaction at the point of simultaneous worldmaking.

Additionally, Goodman notes that worldmaking ties together conception and perception as they constitute two parts of the whole (6). Do such worlds possess any 'true,' as opposed to 'fictional,' qualities? Speaking of cultural phenomena, one can cite Adam Berg, who claims that "[t]he worldmaking involved in artworks is often self-proclaimedly 'fictional' or 'imaginary' even though it is grounded in perception, facticity and immanence."⁷ Therefore, if by truth we mean functional information channels that depend on perceptive potentialities, we have to, once again, return to Dretske, who writes:

[e]ven if one agrees with Hume that: "The mind never has anything present to it, but the perceptions, and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connection with objects. The supposition of such a connection is, therefore without foundation in reasoning," one cannot conclude [...] that according to Hume's theory one cannot regard the senses as information channels because "we have no independent access to input data and their probabilities, and hence no conditional probabilities." The most that follows from Hume's theory is that we can never *determine* the conditional probabilities – hence, never determine whether our perceptions *do* contain information about our surroundings. [...] For the amount of information contained in the signal depends, *not* on the conditional probabilities that *we can independently verify*, but on the conditional probabilities themselves. [...] Neither is the information contained in a signal dependent on the receiver's actually learning something from that signal.⁸

Dretske's reflection on Hume illustrates that information exists independently of the receiver's ability to grasp it, and, therefore, information does not necessarily

⁷ Adam Berg, "Uses and Abuses of Probability: Perception and Induction," *Construction Site for Possible Worlds*, ed. Amanda Beech, Robin Mackay and James Wiltgen (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2020) 53.

⁸ Dretske, *Knowledge and the Flow of Information* 56-7.

create meaning. Identically, the informational space of dialogue in dislocation supposes that information and informational patterns will be made available for further practices of worldmaking – specifically, both the possibility of action that would involve informational flows at hand and the already-mentioned production of a result of cultural interaction (as the “surplus” generated in dialogic spaces).

Technogenesis, Cognition and Cultural Interaction

Having briefly considered the theoretical conditions and prerequisites for dialogic dislocation, we are now moving towards the consideration of the technological aspect of the newly-formed space. Under the influence of technogenesis, identities are just as much dependent on technology, as technology is on humanity – it is a question of perpetual co-evolution. This mutual influence is preserved in the conditions of cultural communication and it will not be an overstatement to say that technology governs cultural environments and gives impetus to the initiation of cultural dialogues. The suggestion of dialogic dislocation should include a strategy that not only understands the importance of this interdependence, but can, through analysis of most current developments, incorporate technological elements to the advantage of cultural dialogue.

In *How We Think*, Hayles stresses that we live in a form of embodied cognition that is extended to the functionality of the body and is further extended to the exterior that is represented by technology. She follows Andy Clark’s footsteps (retrieved from *Genius: The Life and Times of Richard Feynman*) and explores the example based on the story of Richard Feynman’s meeting with Charles Weiner as the latter discuss the immediacy of production through cooperation between cognition and exterior tools. Clark develops the model of extended cognition that is juxtaposed to what he calls brainbound cognition – the difference between the two consists in the cognitive involvement with the environment: in the first case the processes of cognition are extended to the exterior, while in the other, the limits of cognition are defined by the limits of the brain. In other words, the first uses technological tools in the environment, whereas the other represents processes solely confined within the mind. Clark states that extended cognition is the preferable type when it comes to neurological and experimental evidence.⁹ Traditionally, identities that participate in cultural dialogues remain surprisingly inactive as they are adjusted to the constructed narratives; simultaneously they are given no chance for extension and, subsequently, to expression and effective cooperation. One of the aims of dialogic dislocation would be an interplay between participating cultures and technological, particularly digital, tools that

⁹ Hayles, *How We Think* 93.

not only facilitate the process of cultural interaction, but function on the fundamental level of cognition by initiating an active extension of identity that results in creative management of the flows of information made available.

Bodies in Dialogic Spaces

In line with Hayles's posthumanism project, cognition is indivisible from the body. The space of dialogic dislocation is no exception as it invites both expressive and perceptual activities as well as communicative and cooperative practices that cannot be realised without the body, be it the actual physical body, or it's virtual equivalent. As Lefebvre justly notices, "social practice presupposes the use of the body;"¹⁰ he suggests that "in seeking to understand [...] social space, it may help to consider the body."¹¹ Any body that evolves within the space of cultural dialogue is bound to connect through the extensions of embodied cognition both to technological elements of dislocated dialogic space and to other bodies that participate in the dialogue. It is important to note that this body, 1) is not the only body available to the participant, 2) is by no means 'assigned' to the participant, 3) can be transformed (even completely destroyed and reconstructed) in the process of interaction, and, 4) is not dependent on the dialogic space; on the contrary, it is the dialogic space that is adjusted in accordance to the bodies in communication.

Considering technological encounters in the present exploration, Lefebvre's words can be rephrased and thus understood alternatively: "social practices presuppose the use of *interface*." Indeed, the body serves as an interface – subjected to incessant metamorphoses, it reacts by adaptation to the needs of dialogic space and its interactive possibilities. This strategy of adapting the body-as-interface leads to 'organic' interaction by providing the participants of cultural exchange with a space free from the constraints of definition (e.g., those that can be observed in institutionalised spaces with formal proceedings). The suggested harmonised interaction corresponds with what can be called the "clearing of the channel," discussed in more detail below.

Neutral Channels of Communication

In line with the information-theoretical suggestion of Dretske, the channel of communication will "either (1) generate no (relevant) information, or (2) generate

¹⁰ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 40.

¹¹ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* 40.

only redundant information (from the point of view of the receiver). This is why signal, though depending on conditions both at the source and on the channel, carries information about only the source.”¹² Technologically advanced dialogic spaces possess the opportunity to create a variety of choices when it comes to the creation of neutral channels of communication. This is not to say that neutrality means the duplication of formal settings and proceedings, which turn dialogic spaces into what can be compared to non-spaces (in parallel with Marc Augé’s non-places). On the contrary, it involves significant flexibility that would allow for the creation of, speaking in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, “lines of flight” with subsequent free movement between the processes of deterritorialization and inevitable reterritorializations. Further movement of newly emergent cultural actors and communication agents on the scene of dislocated dialogues will ensure the creation of new lines of flight that would support new deterritorializations that would continue the process, presumably *ad infinitum*. What would be a characteristic feature of dialogic dislocation is the perpetuation of this circular proceeding and preservation of its continuous flow.

The Technological Element

Pragmatically speaking, it is with the use of technology and digitalization that the speed and quantity of information is increased. And it is by means of technological advancement that reaction to current cultural, political, or economic developments can be obtained and communicated immediately. More specifically, technology at work within the space of dialogic dislocation should also reflect the tendency towards intermediality, which is especially valuable in such places that still prefer the exclusivity of verbal communication and textual reading/interpretation. Dialogic dislocation should take the direction of the erasure of borders between disciplines. As the technological element in dialogic dislocation is responsible for the acceleration of communication initiation as well as its immediacy and the overall quantity of dialogues, simultaneously, technology facilitates the processes of mutualistic symbiosis between traditional cultures and innovative, newly conceived smaller cultures – the technological element both protects the tradition from losing its acuteness (by storing information and providing materials for the re-imagination of the past) and helps to assimilate avant-garde and underground cultures to the point of the possibility of mutual communication between the cultural past and present, anticipating new versions of the future.

¹² Dretske, *Knowledge and the Flow of Information* 115.

A Glance at the Future

As the current suggestion of dialogic dislocation concentrates on the displacement of the common theoretical discourse that surrounds cultural communication, that is to say, it substitutes the preference of solely verbal and textual interpretation based on meaning with a pragmatic theory, corresponding to the contemporary communicative tendency that deals with information, we open a new dimension of both theoretical and practical possibilities that are in direct contact with the latest informational, technological and cultural developments. McLuhan wrote, “[c]oncern with *effect* rather than *meaning* is a basic change of our electric time,”¹³ while it is the function of information transfer that should occupy the leading role of our (post)digital time. We reimagine the spaces of cultural communication, explore the effects of fast reaction by means of digitalization, as well as approach the possibilities of active interaction with dialogic spaces to the point of their initial coding. And finally, we may be on the verge of understanding that the increase in the amount of information, including that in the cultural sphere, meaning both traditional and currently developing cultural traits as well as the synergetic effects of their communication, cannot and should not be stopped, but, instead, it should be explored and proliferated in order to advance in parallel with the continuous processes of technogenesis.

Conclusion: Remaining Concerns

There exists an opinion that “the revolutionary period of the digital information age has surely passed, [...] the medium is no longer the message; rather, specific tools themselves have become the message.”¹⁴ They do not evoke any particularly emotional responses, they do not surprise us anymore, they are ordinary or even boring. As this opinion gains stronger support by the day, there is, unfortunately, a lack of implementation of what the digital and the informational mean for cultural communication, or how they can be utilised in the creation of dialogic spaces conceived to discuss culture. The digital aspect of academic and institutional cultural communication remains either ignored or forced, while the areas of digital development stay distant, paradoxically isolated from the environments that still need to accept the irrevocable metamorphoses brought by

¹³ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1994) 26.

¹⁴ Kim Cascone, “The Aesthetics of Failure: ‘Post-Digital’ Tendencies in Contemporary Computer Music,” *Computer Music Journal* 24, no. 4 (2000): 12.

technological, particularly digital, advancement. The change in the sphere of dialogic spaces can be initiated by the dislocation of such spaces, namely, by a considerable restatement of the importance of meaning, which is getting (so far tentatively) replaced by information. Grounded in the corresponding tendencies of posthuman and (post)digital realities, the informational-theoretical dislocation of cultural dialogues aims at the erasure of the dominance of text with the practices of interpretation and meaning seeking.

The idea behind dialogic dislocation supposes freer, more authentic interactions that highlight the flows of information, which will be transmitted and received in accordance with the cultural and social realities that never cease to change, fluctuate, and disappear as vestiges and/or elements of redundancy. The anticipated result of such a shift in the understanding of cultural communication will be primarily the possibility of initial encoding of dialogic spaces along with the opportunity to obtain 'palpable' consequences of cultural dialogues — cooperative outcomes and new smaller cultures, which will support perpetual cultural development (from deterritorializations to reterritorializations).

Indeed, informational and digital revolutions are old hat; however, it remains to be seen what the real potentialities of the direct application of their effects for alternative strategies of cultural communication are.

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