

**Bakhtin's Dialogism:
A Communication Theory of Complexity
and the Possibility of Organizational Change
Through Holonic Entanglement**

Abstract

This essay contends that Bakhtin's theory of dialogism is a communication theory that embodies complexity in its essence, and squares dialogism in complexity concepts of consciousness, dynamic interaction, emergence, indeterminacy and dissipation. Additionally, I picture Bakhtin's dialogism as holonic entanglement that is designed to seek novel experience. I suggest some implications for organizations from this outlook, but specifically offer an altered form of mentoring for its complex practice in organizations and organizational change.

"We need to ground the reality of "we" in a new conceptual structure."
Zohar (1990)

From the popular inception of complexity thinking, there has always been significance attached to the notion of human communication in the organization understood as complex. Complexity theorists have struggled with how the issues of quantum thinking apply to everyday matters of human interaction in organization. Most of this, indeed worthy, struggle, has come in the form of concepts that indicate what such interaction might "be" like. McMaster (1996) recognizes this early on, arguing that "a language of meaning must eventually replace a language of business, referring to such a process as 'engagement' – a level of interaction in which one party allows for the full participation of the other in the creation of possibility" (p.168). Youngblood (1997), promoted the dialogic nature of communication as a crucial element in the creation of a "quantum" organization. Stacey (2001) often reflects an intriguing sense of the irreducible interdependence of interaction, indicating that we seem to be overlooking the irreducibility of the interdependence - perhaps unwittingly in favor of ideologically

constrained linear and fragmented communication concepts and theories. Danah Zohar (1990), highlights this oversight more explicitly in comparing the structure for interpersonal relations to the tensions of the wave-particle duality: “. . . '[W]e' can be both a compound of 'I' and 'you' and a new thing in itself with its own qualities”(p.131).

“Dialogue” may in fact be the concept that captures “communication complexity” most usefully for the moment. Many have contended however, that despite the multitude of books and articles about “dialogue”, it is a phenomenon still very much misunderstood, misplaced, and mis-taken (e.g. Stacey, 2001; Bokeno, 2007; Bokeno & Gantt, 2000).

We must go further in both our understanding of dialogue and its integration into complexity thinking in organizational contexts. What is needed, and I think desperately sought in the past two decades, is a theory or philosophy of communication that actually *embodies* complexity thinking and vision; ideally, without weaving together bits and pieces of theoretical construal that make complexity less than what it is. We need a theory that illustrates communication as fundamental to the operation of the human world as complexity is assumed to be. In other words, we need a theory of *dialogic existence* rather than more theories of dialogic activity.

Specifically, what is needed is a theory, philosophy or set of assumptions that shows :

- the patent irreducibility of at minimum, dyadic interaction or interdependence
- how that patent irreducibility works via self and others
- how language-use is the shaping and constant force in this irreducibility

- how the combination of language use and the self-other relation actually produces self-organization, indeterminacy, emergence, adaptiveness and dissipation, and
- how all this might work together for some torque in actual organizational practice.

Acknowledging both the potential merits and the difficulties of this (and other approaches like it, (eg. Hammond & Sanders, 2002) I hearken, necessarily and fondly, back to very early issues of *Emergence*. Of necessity, I had to determine what constitutes “complexity” anymore¹, given how far the study has come in about two decades. But fondly, I recalled (and found!) the statement by Coleman (1999) that anchored my thinking then, and reminded me of the reason I initiated this manuscript several years ago: “[S]elf organization is the natural default behavior, and that behavior is self-organizing when people are *free* to network with others and pursue their own objectives” (p. 34).

This gets me thinking that the relation of communication and complexity is both theoretical and praxical, naturally, but also emancipatory: theoretical in the ways that scholars from one field can inform the other, praxical in the ways that individuals and groups in organizations can begin to understand emergence as constitutive of their professional and personal activities.

But I believe there is a more profound attraction underpinning both the theoretical and praxical enterprises: an anthropologically deep-seated human desire to be free from

unnecessary constraint. If self-organization is the natural default behavior, and human interaction is the way self organization happens, then why do we choose to remain encumbered by the myriad of institutional, social and organizational constraints in everyday work and life? For me, being “free” does not mean the occasional dialogue episode, no matter how great the intersubjective resources employed; for me, it is a dialogic existence.

Is there a theory of dialogic communication that actually reflects this natural default behavior, that features nonlinearity or emergence as a praxical and paradoxical telos, that emphasizes indeterminacy and novelty as the essence of human interaction? And that would reflect the “freedom” that is our natural default behavior? And thus, might alter or find appreciable understanding in organizational life?

In the remainder of the essay, I focus on a theory that is very relevant but hardly squared in complexity terms: the dialogism of Russian literary theorist Mikail Bakhtin (1981, 1986, 1993; Holquist, 1990). Broadly, I contend that Bakhtin’s dialogism is in fact a theory of complexity – one that illustrates complexity in human interaction in the way that complexity is discussed in this journal and discussions like it. By way of preview, I first overview Bakhtin’s dialogism as an intriguing post-Newtonian literary theory, although I translate his literary theory into communication theory. Second, I articulate fundamental themes in Bakhtin’s work *as* complexity thinking, specifically in terms of consciousness, interaction, indeterminacy, emergence and dissipation. Finally, I draw some implications from Bakhtin’s theory for organizations in general, and illustrate a

hypothetical site in organizational contexts where such relational complexity might play out for organizational change.

Dialogism and the Quantum Vision

Comparatively recent excavation and translation of Bakhtin's work reveals a treatment of dialogic human interaction that resonates highly with current expositions of complexity. It is intriguing to note, even if anecdotally, that Bakhtin was writing at precisely the same time as relativity and indeterminacy were emerging as viable alternatives to Newtonian mechanics in the early 20th century; Bakhtin himself (e.g. 1981, p. 84) as well as translator Holquist (1990) suggests that such influence was unquestionable, Bakhtin's "dialogism" a version of relativity (pp. 19-23). It may be useful then, to understand Bakhtin as operating, much like complexity theory does, in the realms of cosmology, ontology, epistemology and social theory simultaneously; Bakhtin's "dialogism" offers both a post-Newtonian sense of the nature of the "world," self and others, emphasizes the fundamental importance of the relationship and connection among them, as well as how self, others, world and their connections are continually (re)made through dialogic interaction.

Dynamic Interaction: Language , Speaking and Relation

For Bakhtin, the importance of communication rests in the way that language use constitutes an infinite relation with other voices and thus permits for not the representation of a world, but the construction of a world, as well as a place for self in

that world. That is, contrary to virtually all mainstream philosophical and theoretical treatments of language, language itself, for Bakhtin, is dialogical. First of all because there is no such thing as an unvarnished or pure word.; that is, words or language that do not already carry dialogic reverberations from the past and future:

The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language . . . but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions . . . (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 293-294)

Second, Bakhtin isn't talking necessarily about language as a formal system, but rather language as it eventuates in an "utterance"- the fundamental unit of speech. Invoking Saussure's distinction between langue and parole, Bakhtin's emphasis on the latter grounds a conception of meaning through discourse as an indeterminate and emergent accomplishment of the relationships of dialogic "selves" in interaction. Equally important, the "selves" in interaction only become conscious of themselves as "selves" through the dialogic nature of utterances that underwrite their "addressivity" as subjects – or 'respons-ability as communicators. To be a human subject, for Bakhtin, is to be addressable by other subjects. And to be addressable by other subjects involves an eternal cognizance and anticipation of "other's" responses to speakers utterances. Thus, as language is dialogic, existence is dialogic as well. As Holquist (1990) writes, "there is an intimate connection between the project of language and the project of selfhood; they

both exist in order to mean.” (p. 23). Thus, self and other are intrinsically in unbroken interaction.

Broadly, such a conception shares with other treatments of dialogue a featuring of the ‘other’ in communicative interaction, but the assumption of “dialogic existence” separates itself from conceptions that construct dialogue as a therapeutic or spiritual exercise or episode of transcendence. Initially and by way of surface comparison, Bakhtin’s conception comes closest to the kind of relationship or connection implied in Buber’s (1970) “communion”, but without the necessity of the mutual giving in or giving over or being-for the “other” in interaction for the achievement of communion, and thus without either the apparent psycho-emotional struggle and spiritual overtones. Bakhtin’s dialogism also parallels that of Bohm’s exposition of the quantum features of human experience, yet finds the essential connectivity of human experience historically constituted by speaking and listening subjects rather than thought.

Language, Speaking, Relation - Consciousness

Embedded in the above broad and brief preview are a host of assumptions that when unpacked appear to share fundamental affinity with the precepts of complexity. First, is a conception of *consciousness* as primary, a complexity characteristic captured by Cramer(1993) and others (eg. Leichte, 2000) working in emergence theory. Cilliers (1998, pp 7-8), writes that

“[A] complex system has memory/history captured at both micro- (e.g. personal experiences, personal opinions, worldviews) and macroscopic (e.g. culture, ritual,

value system) levels. Therefore, system history plays an important role in defining the state of the system as well as affecting system evolution.”

Bakhtin assumes the Kantian distinction between mind and matter, but matter is never anything in and of itself and consciousness is never an individual property. Rather, for Bakhtin, *consciousness is social*. As such, the “sociality” of consciousness, its history, for Bakhtin, is crucial. Things and events in the world, to have meaning, are always experienced as something, a ‘something’ determined by cognitive linguistic categories particularly appropriate to a specific time/space. The particular cognitive-linguistic processes by which meaning of experience is apprehended are also constructed historically – throughout a lifetime – such that it becomes futile to speak of an individual consciousness, that is, something not the product of continual interaction with, and reciprocal influence of, “others.” So while things and events may exist in the world, they do not mean (or, they have infinite meaning) until they are symbolically constituted by a consciousness in a particular time/space circumstance, (much as Schrodinger’s cat is both dead and alive as quantum wave potential). For example, in organizations the fiscal “bottom line” is an entity or event assumed to exist and have unitary meaning. Yet, it is symbolically constituted and constituted differently – means different things to all relevant organizational stakeholders.

For Bakhtin, the very capacity of consciousness is based on “otherness.” Otherness is both an ontological assumption about the nature of the world and a quasi-anthropological assumption. Ontologically, the assumption of otherness speaks to the inherent unbroken

connected nature of the universe; quasi-anthropologically, it speaks to the inherently relational nature of human qua being-in-the-world, or better, human as be-coming-through-the-world. Stacy (2001, p. 5) echoes this: “Human agency is not located anywhere because it is not an ‘it’ Instead . . . human agency is a process of interaction between human bodies and those processes perpetually construct themselves as continuity and potential transformation.”

Consequently, Bakhtin articulates a conception of consciousness which also entails the complexity precept of connection, relation, interdependence or *interaction*: “self” and “other” for Bakhtin, while equally important parts of the triad of experienced meaning, are nevertheless rather backgrounded to the third part of the triad which is the *relation* between them; as consciousness is social, the self is fundamentally a relation (Holquist, 1990, pp. 18-19).

The conception of self-as-relation is both similar to and distinct from current postmodern or social constructionist conceptions of self as saturated or intersected by the infinite range of historically embedded images, experiences and meanings. On the postmodernist view, the self is “merely” a composite of the myriad images and meanings absorbed in human life-world experience; moreover, a composite more or less sutured together such that agency disappears. Bakhtin accepts the eternal historicity of experience as linguistically embedded and ever present and available, such that the theoretical notion of a unitary self is a chimera, yet asserts that the self is continually made and remade via symbolic – i.e. dialogic experiences all of which are unique due to time/space

circumstance. In essence, the “I” of “me” continually reasserts and remakes itself because always dialogically situated, that is, *in relation to an other* that is also continually reasserting and remaking itself- therefore always unique (1993). The quantum wave potential of the knowledge represented in human interaction, then, is never clear or certain until collapsed in a certain way for unique subjects constituted by particular linguistic-historical circumstances in relation to other subjects similarly constituted.

Indeterminacy

Thus, we begin to get a sense of how Bakhtin’s dialogism offers a quantum, complex understanding of human interaction. Consciousness is primary as connectivity, it’s eternal relationship to “other” phenomena. Not only in its necessity to pop the QWF of experience to gain meaning or knowledge, { Note to ed: Chaos terminology here? OK or not?} but because it will always do so with regard to a particular meaning in particular circumstances for particular subjects. That is, *indeterminately*. As the behavior of matter as either particle or wave is fundamentally dependent upon the active participation of the perceiver, so too the meaning of any human experience is wholly dependent upon the particular linguistic-cognitive processes activated by and articulated through utterances in interaction.

Of specific importance is the way that Bakhtin seems to address the nature of this indeterminacy with remarkable quantum vision. [Cf Zohar, 1990, pp. 131-132). Bakhtin isn’t talking simply about the tired fact that people have different meanings for things. Rather, he is saying that “things” can only be constituted via the limitless potential of

linguisticity, and those particular constitutions will always be unique in light of the specific dialogic situatedness of participants in interaction. Thus, participants will never "have" the same meaning; any coincidence of interpretation is simply that, a coincidence. Thus, meaning is always "unfolding" (Cf. Bohm, 1995, 1996) through interactions, never fixed, final or certain.

Self-Organization and Emergence

Moreover, those fleeting coincidences of meaning (where the collapse of wave potential into particle appears to stabilize things temporarily), are not the most important or most desirable features of human experience. While the whole of western society for several hundred years has depended upon such fleeting stability and thus generalized it into an ontological requirement and epistemological responsibility- such that stability is a logical requirement for progress conceived linearly – Bakhtin, like complexity theorists, has completely different conception of both stability and progress. Bakhtin accepts the thesis-antithesis part of Hegel's philosophy; but where Hegel would envision a telos in the form of synthesis – a better sameness - Bakhtin prefers the eternal tension of the thesis-antithesis contradiction. Bakhtin assumes epistemologically that "knowledge" is never a unitary event defined by or located in a specific form of consciousness, but rather an *emergent* property of consciousness conceived as relational or social, a moment-to-moment construction of dialogically situated individuals in interaction.

Boundaries: Seeking the Novel - Freedom

The dialogic situatedness of participants in interaction is captured most convincingly through Bakhtin's specific concepts of "voices/boundaries," "chronotope" and the interplay of centrifugal - centripetal dynamics. Starting with the latter concept, Bakhtin conceives of all social life as a dialectical opposition between centrifugal forces- forces of difference, and centripetal forces, or forces of sameness. That it is a dialectical opposition indicates for Bakhtin an eternal, irreconcilable ("embattled") contradictory tension between these forces (e.g. 1981, pp. 271-273). In many ways, the dynamic is the essence of dialogue for Bakhtin, as all experience is simultaneously fusion and separation, order and disorder. Thus, it is not difficult to infer that Bakhtin understands that experience can naturally evolve into self-organized criticality, in which behavior lies at the border of order and disorder – the edge of chaos.

This dialectic is as much social-psychological and socio-political for Bakhtin as it is a critical mechanism for distinguishing literary work and literary genre. Every aspect of life is characterized by opposed dynamics that "pull" experience toward "sameness" (established institutional forms, acceptable practices, normative expectations routinized patterns, etc.) and those that "push" experience toward difference or against the grain of sameness. Those that "pull" represent the range of reifications and ideologies present in any given socio-historical context such that interaction is constrained from permitting the natural *emergence* of innovation or the "novel." Those that push represent forces that cultivate and facilitate the emergence or transcendence of participants and interaction from those constraints and thus genuine dialogically constructed meaning.

Boundaries and Adaptiveness

This dynamic takes shape or is given concrete form in the everyday interaction practices of participants. In every interaction, participants are influenced by and may enact any of the infinite potential of historically embedded meanings available to them (also see Stacey, 2002, p.168ff). This potential, these historically embedded and available meanings, arrive for the speaker's employment in utterance as a composite of the already spoken and the to-be spoken, or as "voices" from: (1) the speakers distal past; (2) the speakers proximal past or the immediate conversation; (3) anticipation of "addressee's (specific immediate other) response, and (4) anticipation of the response of the "superaddressee" or generalized other (Cf. Mead, 1934) . Any single utterance, then, is a link in and to this seamless flow of meaning, but critically positioned *at the boundaries* of these voices such that dialogic reverberations are realized in every communicative act; that is contradiction in the form of multivocality (rather than a binary contradiction) is given life. If we add to these voices the centrifugal-centripetal dynamic, we get a "disorderly" picture of interaction partners as dialogue partners continually adjudicating/negotiating proximal and distal meanings from the perspective of each other from whence will emerge depth, growth in the form of continued disorder or a temporary stability or sameness. Yet this temporary sameness will only be revealed "chronotopically" that is, in the unique fleeting context of time/space in which it unfolds.

Boundaries, Freedom and the Chronotope²

The temporary sameness of shared meaning is, for Bakhtin a "genre" – a precarious but stabilizing boundary force that tends to constrain divergent or innovative

interpretations, or rather “pull” them into recognizable form. (In fact, the most commonly accepted understanding of “chronotope” in literary terms functions as sort of an “attractor” for the novel as literary product.) But forms are made recognizable through the “secondary” genres of official literary discourse; therefore, the very “recognizeableness” of a certain form is always from a specific, unitary, and therefore privileged, perspective. Bakhtin’s concern is rather for the “primary” genres of natural speech. Hence, Bakhtin’s focus is upon the “novel” (adjectivally), because the novel displays or reveals the variety of discourses, the dialogues and natural dialogic character of life that knowledge of other genres seeks to suppress³. The novel is that “genre” for Bakhtin which is non-generic, that peculiar form that opens a window in discourse “from which the extraordinary variety of social languages can be perceived. The novel is able to create a work space in which that variety is not only displayed, but in which it can become an active force in shaping cultural history. . . . the novel’s relation to everyday talk is particularly significant, because it is the very variety of language, the constant reminders of otherness in speech, that constitute the novel’s characteristic subject . . .” (Holquist, 1990, pp. 72-76ff).

Dissipative

Consequently, Bakhtin’s pursuit is that of “the novel” in that it is a continually emerging index of social consciousness as a culture learns from the display of difference and contradiction in the natural dialogues of life, or what happens (far) away from the generic equilibrium of “normalized” life. For Bakhtin, such a measure or index is of course not an indication of what or how much a culture “knows,” but rather reflects the

degree to which it is conscious of and encompasses the multiplicity of “other” voices – i.e. in common parlance, how much it can learn in a generative way. On Bakhtin’s view neither relationships nor cultures develop by accumulating wisdom in the form of a deterministic linear progress. Rather, they are *dissipative* structures requiring increasing dialogic contradictory energy to sustain and further transform. As Holquist writes, “ the criteria by which higher degrees of consciousness can be judged are not singularity and unity . . . but multiplicity and variety” (1990, p.75).

Dialogism as Holonic Entanglement: Relational Complexity

A picture of “holonic entanglement” (Koestler, 1978; Fitzgerald, 2002) emerges from the preceding discussion. More specifically, Bakhtin offers a way of seeing how holonic entanglement can be captured in human interaction terms. First, the primacy of the social nature of consciousness suggests that an individual consciousness is always both whole and simultaneously part of a larger consciousness. Second, to the extent that consciousness is shaped symbolically and historically, it always manifests the part of the present as made available by the historical whole (in the form of the voices of the proximal and distal past) as well as the anticipation of the future whole (as in the eternal addressivity” of human subjects or the anticipation of the responses of “other” and “superaddressee” in the formation of the speakers utterances). Third, and perhaps most inviting from a theoretical point of view, is that Bakhtin’s dialogic relationship shares the functional properties of the holon in its centrifugal (self-assertive)-centripetal (integrative) tendencies (Cf. Koestler, 1978).⁴

As praxis, holonic entanglement grounds an enticing alternative picture of human interaction and relationships in organizational contexts, one radically different from extant mainstream and especially instrumentalizing views. Bakhtin's dialogism, conceived as relational complexity would have dramatic implications for the kind of relational interaction necessary to enable the complex "form".⁵

Relational Complexity

First, such relationships celebrate contradiction and difference, rather than resolve, reconcile, prevent or otherwise "manage" it. Indeed, while organizations, managers and traditional superior-subordinate relationships operate within the parameters of task-specific effectiveness or political appropriateness, few if any question the value and /or validity of those parameters; behaviors are effective or ineffective, appropriate or inappropriate and there is little space to explore. Argyris (1982; Argyris & Schon, 1978) has shown that exploration within closed parameters requires an explicit intervention to get the leverage needed to expose contradictions and make productive use of them. Dialogic relationships understand simply that there are better things to do with contradictions than resolve them; that there is much more to explore in the opposition of contradictory views than in the collapse of one or compromise of both (eg. Bouwen & Fry, 1991).

Second, complementary to the cultivation of contradiction is the focused pursuit of "openness," in the sense of ongoing unfinalizable communication. In opposition to the emphasis of traditional relationships upon linear developmental progress toward some

idealized outcome and the products of its achievement, “openness” seeks actively to, “keep the conversation going;” the products and progress here are measured only by the ability to generate more questions than answers, and a mutual “going there” to “places” where more questions can be asked.

Third, relational complexity celebrates multivocality. While this may be assumed naturally from the cultivation of contradiction and the pursuit of openness, multivocality means not so much that there are equal opportunities for communication, but (1) an appreciation of the infinite potential of the voices or symbolic influences that converge in an utterance, and thus perhaps of the ways that multiple roles are shaped by these influences, and also that (2) the talk of one carries no special privilege; except, perhaps the experienced ability to frame more intriguing questions.

Finally, relational complexity continually refreshes cognitive, affective and linguistic *possibility* in interaction, and therefore makes a place for interpretive “play” (Stewart, 1983). This featuring of possibility provides a place for: (1) *creativity* and capability for interactional improvisation; (2) *mindfulness* (eg. Langer & Piper, 1987) or “active distinction making and differentiation . . . engaging in the process of creating new categories, of making finer and finer distinctions” (p. 280), and (3) *process* thinking (Weinberg, 1958), a way of “carrying” thoughts and ideas without assumptions of their certainty or stability, of being anchored in facts, data or consensually validated belief; an ability to accommodate a sense of meaning as continually in flux.

Dialogism at Work?

Bakhtin's literary theory is indeed, a little heady for immediate appreciation or application. But as a complexity theory it suggests a different way in which complexity thinking might inform communication, as well as a way in which communication might enable a "practice" of complexity for creativity, innovation and exploring the novel in organizations seeking to do so. At minimum, it enables a way to think about interaction in organization *as something to think about!*

If human interaction is aptly described in this complex way, then it tells us something simple but profound right off – it's not easy or simple. I'm not interested here in reiterating the tired critique of linear, transmissional models of human interaction, which have indoctrinated us to BELIEVE it is easy, and when not, there is a PROBLEM. Rather, my interest is that it may help both theorists and practitioners to understand the importance of dialogic communication as part of a dialogic existence and, indeed, "a certain slowness" (Cilliers, 2006) in the way we go about understanding each other. I think this is at least the implicit point of almost all dialogue theorists, it lurks in the discursive arduousness of Habermas' ideal discourse, the emotional-spiritual struggle of Buber's "communion, and is acutely the point of Argyris' (1994) skilled dismantling of the communication that blocks learning.

But, how do we get this sort of understanding, this relational/communicative complexity, into a place where historically there's no room for it, i.e. not an official genre of organizational discourse? If we look a little harder, that site suddenly emerges – far from equilibrium and way out on the edge – where complexity meets chaos in theory and practice.

In many organizations, both apparently stable and intentionally transforming there is a “site” that accommodates relational development. That site is the mentoring relationship. Although traditionally mentoring has been a formal relationship that seeks instrumentally to develop (clone) organizational members, recent literature attests to a changed understanding of that site as one that develops relationships, and perhaps as an internal holonic change agency by virtue of the deep, dialogic relationships discussed above (Bokeno & Gantt, 2000).

Three processes would be involved with this. First, mentoring dyads would have to be assembled according to a perceived ability to cultivate contradiction, creativity, openness and multivocality. That is, according to their dialogic competence or capacity for relational complexity. Interestingly, there is mounting empirical evidence that mentoring dyads can and do function like this (Ellinger & Bostrom, 1999; Dymock, 1999; Murphy, 1995; Flaherty, 1999). The dyad seems a doubly attractive holon because of its demonstrated capacity to utilize centrifugal and centripetal forces to deviate from extant norms, and therefore seek and explore difference (dyads behave in “riskier” ways than do individuals; see the extensive review of this literature in Allen, 1975). It is in the sense of both the holonic entanglement of the dyad as well as its ability to deviate from extant

norms while nevertheless formally ensconced in those norms that I will refer to these mentoring pairs as “deep dyads.” In deference to Shaw’s noteworthy work (1997, 2002), as well as the work of some scholars in the critical tradition I could also call them “shadow dyads”

Second, these deep dyads would have to be “injected” into extant organizational life and practice. In effect, this would be simulated annealing (Guastello, 1995): deliberately introducing noise into a system to see what happens. Adding noise to the system allows the attractor to expand to its fullest possible range. Allowing the attractor to expand to its fullest possible range means that the deviation maintained by the deep dyad should/will precipitate a blurring of formal or extant organizational norms, boundaries and practices such that these must undergo some transformation to accommodate, or co-adapt with, the deviation.

Thus, third, the deep dyads would have to be turned loose or left alone to explore the volatility of the myriad forces of sameness and difference in the organization, aggressively traverse, blur, and ultimately dissolve extant boundaries. Indeed, almost by definition traditional mentoring relationships traverse vertical or hierarchical organizational boundaries, in that they are typically comprised of a senior and a junior organizational member. Constituted as dialogic “deep dyads,” however, such relationships also generate ideas across time boundaries and to the extent that such relationships represent diverse functional areas in an organization, across horizontal boundaries as well (Cf. Ulrich, *et al* 1993). Deep dyads are designed to “ignore” organizational constraints and take steps in the “wrong” way, both increasing energy and thus help organizations avoid being trapped on “poor local optima,” or a place where

(re)generative activity is difficult (Cf. Kaufmann, 1993, as in Lissack,1999)

Theoretically, potential range of influence inside the organization for such deep dyads would be tremendous. As they violently explore back and forth, up and down, continually influencing and being influenced by extant organizational conditions as well as each other, the internal dynamic of an organization begins to change. Or perhaps begins to “pull itself into an order” that Wheatley (1992, pp. 133-134) calls a “search for meaning,” and other similarly aligned theorists refer to as the highest organizational mission.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have offered M. M. Bakhtin’s view of dialogism as a praxical equivalent of complexity principles and precepts. In the form of dialogism, it is suggested that complexity finds a little of the torque it needs to effect the sort of organizational transformation it envisions. Dialogically situated relational partners, in the form of deep dyadic mentoring relationships, can enact this alternative conception through a celebration of contradiction, openness, multivocality and novelty. When turned loose in an organization seeking chaordic transformation, deep dyads can instigate alternative modes of interaction as well as an appreciation for those alternatives that will clarify complexity as a viable basis for “organized” worklife.

I close with an especially relevant, but perhaps forgotten, observation from George Bernard Shaw: *The problem with communication . . . is the illusion that it has been accomplished.*

Notes

¹ Especially as both popular and academic receptions of complexity and chaos tend to use concepts interchangeably. I may fall prey to that myself. However, my list of complexity characteristics is drawn from: Cilliers, P. (2000). What can we learn from a theory of complexity? *Emergence* ISSN 1521-3250, 2(1), pp. 23-33, and Richardson, K., Cilliers, P, and Lissack, M. (2001). Complexity science: A “gray” science for the stuff in between. *Emergence* ISSN 1521-3250, 3(2), pp. 6-18.

² The “chronotope” is understood in different ways, partially because Bakhtin is talking about those places in the literary novel where meanings “come together; that is, for Bakhtin, the chronotope is what gives “meat” or meaning to all of the outstanding ambiguities in the literary novel. As applied to interpersonal interaction, (e.g Baxter and Montgomery, 1996), it could also be what gives meaning – even if temporarily- to the dialogically situated participants.

³ My read of Bakhtin here seems directly *contra* that of Hammond and Sanders (2002), who appear to assert that Bakhtin seeks the monovocality of the institutional genre: “ Bakhtin said that a monologism, or single voice privileged over multiple voices is needed to clarify the human condition” (p. 18). The statement seems radically out of context, perhaps contradictory of the whole of Bakhtin’s thought.

⁴ Although, and this is not unimportant, Bakhtin prioritizes the eternal tension of the polarity between self-assertive and integrative tendencies, Koestler understands the polarity as more of a necessary standoff between the forces that maintains equilibrium in a “healthy” system.

⁵ Baxter and Montgomery (1996) have provided to date the most viable explication of Bakhtin’s dialogism in the context of actual human beings functioning in relational contexts. I will stay close to their innovative line of analysis in the succeeding paragraphs, but will extend their analysis from personal/romantic relationships to professional relationships in organizations in the form of mentoring.

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