

## **Non-local eventality and dialogism: a transcultural challenge?**

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This paper proposes to examine and discuss the possibility of theory of evental meeting points that are non-local or extend the term of local causality in time, matter, action, and space. Such a concept of the evental meeting would have several advantages, to which I shall return.

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No one will find true knowledge of the nature of things by seeking explanations in “either/or”. The real situation will have to be sought in “both/and or “neither/nor”. Ambiguity does not grow up simply from our ignorance: it is an ontological fact, inherent in the nature of the cosmos.

(Chittick, 1989: *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, p: 112)

### **Dialogism and cultural complexity**

When Julia Kristeva introduced Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism and interdiscursive semiotics to the Western audience towards the end of the 1960’s, she began a move that has not been pursued in great extent in Western theory and philosophy. This is the idea of the interlocking of meaning across texts, utterances, languages, social realities, praxis, or worlds. How can I say this, when we consider the development of discourse theory and analysis that followed (and preceded) the 1960’s? This has to do with an aspect that is of greater importance in the history of ideas and the understanding of the world we live in, an idea which has been explored in physics and in metaphysics, but has been left behind by empirical social or cultural studies. This is the idea of non-local causality. It is not really that the idea of non-local causality has been rejected as such; it has just been surpassed, overlooked, or maybe even consciously ignored. I will discuss

some possible routes of access to this concept in the light of an improved understanding what we might so far call “meetings”. The first step will be a return to Bakhtin and some of the concepts that were central to his cultural and literary theory.

Where Kristeva’s ideas of voices intersecting one another across time and space could be taken further than the written word, there have been radical problems with adopting this line of thought in Western theories of culture, philosophy, or discourse theory/analysis. What Kristeva introduced to the Western world, having been cut largely off from its influence due to the iron curtain drawn through Europe and the world, was the line of theory expressed mainly by Mikhail M. Bakhtin’s works. I will deal briefly with a few of Bakhtin’s concepts, as they display a way of thinking cultural dynamics and eventual meeting points, that contain a richness in conceptuality and an great openness towards complexity and lack of reductionism. A passage into Bakhtin’s conceptual world will lead us back to the matter and further ahead in my considerations.

Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters, are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [raznorecie] can enter the novel; each of them permits a multiplicity of social voices and a wide variety of their links and interrelationships (always more or less dialogized). These distinctive links and interrelationships between utterances and languages, this movement of the theme through different languages and speech types, its dispersion into the rivulets and droplets of social heteroglossia, its dialogization – this is the basic distinguishing feature of the stylistics of the novel. (Bakhtin, 1981: 263)

I will not deal too much here with Bakhtin’s fascinating accounts of the novel in history – arguably the most complete theory of the connections between literature and its surroundings still written. I will mainly deal with a few aspects of this which will serve my discussion. One is the condition that Bakhtin never worked from the outside and in, in spite of what one may think when reading the way that he describes the relation between *heteroglossia / raznorecie* and the stylistics of the novel. This is not a theory of society or historical dynamics inverted into a reading of the novel. Everything is developed in (or maybe into) a dialogistic relation between reading novels and understanding them in their context of space and time. So, he does not build causality the other way around, either: from the novel and out. Or rather, he does, as in the long essay on the chronotope in the novel (Bakhtin, 1981: 85-258).

This is due to the point that the chronotope is a concept coined by Bakhtin to describe the way that the relations between time, action, and space are articulated (dialogized) in the novel genres of various times. This is an aspect that makes the chronotope a valuable path of access to concepts in general: are they not, quite often, about precisely these matters? Not only, of course. But chronotopic matters are in many cases central to ontological concepts; viz. concepts that attempt to explain the constitution of the world: they have to deal with time, space, action, and matter. Explain them, discard

them, disregard them, but deal with them. Ontological concepts are (almost?) always chronotopic, even in Bakhtin's full sense. They do not only point at the world, they do not only have an indexical aspect, as Pierce would say. They are truly chronotopic, in the sense that they may construe whole worlds inside of them, just like the chronotopes examined by Bakhtin in literature. The point here is not to express a connection between literature and philosophy, I will leave that to the work by Derrida and his followers, and there are far too many examples of this to have to prove such a connection or familiarity. The interesting aspect here is the potentiality of the concept as chronotope: in ontological chronotopes, we make worlds. These worlds may express connections and relation between time, space, matter, and action, that are out of time (untimely, cf. Nietzsche) – but they may, in their turn, recreate our relation to the dimensions mentioned, and reposition the way we understand time, matter, space, and action. A brief example from Bakhtin may illustrate what I mean.

The concept of the chronotope naturally points from the inside out, yet the novel itself does not, e.g. in the adventurous novels, follow the socially accepted laws of external time and space. Rather, the adventurous novel depicts a chronotope where all action takes place in space, a space extended without time ever given any significant part. In order to understand this and other similar examples of non-realist writing, Bakhtin brings in the concept of heteroglossia to describe how the novel is constantly imbued with conditions of 'dialogising'. Dialogising indicates the process in which the novel gives direction to cultural reality as a whole which is being broken down and redirected in the novel. This may of course be applied to other forms of expression, say film or music. Any narrativisation creates chronotopes, not only novels. And there are two interesting questions in this, which will serve to the purpose of this paper. The first question is in which way we may say that the chronotopes are really made in the novel or through the novel. There seems to be no doubt that something is created and that the specific form of the chronotope in, e.g., the adventurous novel or a film like "The Matrix", expresses an individual entity of a kind. The chronotope works not only as an expression of a cultural 'whole', it also occasionally opens up for another direction, creating lines of flight (this is obviously not a Bakhtinian concept but a Deleuzian one), all while determining the possibilities within the specific novel itself.

They are the organizing centres for the fundamental narrative events of the novel. The chronotope is the place where the knots of the narrative are tied and untied. It can be said without qualification that to them belongs the meaning that shapes narrative. (Bakhtin, 1981: 250)

Now if there is such a relation of a kind between the containing of something given and the expression of something new, we may say that the novel or other form of expression expresses a relation between the general and the particular. But another question, mixed in with the first one of the form of the relation, is whether the forms of expression also express

relations between the universal and the singular. These two questions are deeply embodied in one another, as the processes in the relation between the forms of general and particular, universal and singular, are the very same forms in which the expression itself takes place, not before or after, but in the same expression.

From the extremely brief introduction to a couple of Bakhtinian concepts, I may draw yet a couple of important points. One is the insistence upon a force that works upon the single event of the novel as we see it – or, if we like, upon the event of the meeting between writing and reading, if this is to be preferred as the locus of production of meaning. Is the relation between the ‘fictional events’, as I have termed it elsewhere (Koefoed, 2004) and the superseding heteroglossia merely one of local interaction or something else? And if we do restrict ourselves to local interaction on the visible plane, then what about the level of reality of heteroglossia itself (notice the point that Bakhtin never reduces this to the ‘culture’, but speaks instead of relations between discourse (*slovo*, actually ‘word’) and history, social conditions, etc)? Bakhtin does write about a ‘whole’, but this whole is never described as an entity in itself; rather, it stands forth throughout the texts as a complexity of levels of interaction, which would disappear as soon as these interactions disappeared. There is no ‘holism’ as a total and perhaps totalitarian spirit which would be always present without our looking at it and without any kind of expression taking place. There is whole in the sense that this whole is itself constantly shattered and broken into endless streams and events of local sense. In the local event, the elements that enter the production of sense are themselves tempered with and altered, so as to take on a new form and become expression that seem new and may ignite fascination, sublimation, intuitive reactions, etc. But what disappears into silence in Bakhtin’s own work as well as in later interpretations is the possibility of a dynamics that is not merely psychological. The tendency to ontological individualism has silenced a question that is important: is sense only created by the interpretation of discursive generalities by individual minds – or is there a dynamics taking place, in which singularities express the universal through their unfolding, maybe even one in which the complex and the simple, the folded and the smooth, exist simultaneously and form a non-local causality with its own materiality?

In Post-colonialist readings of Bakhtin (i.e. Homi Bhaba), we find both the image of the meeting as a striated space of impure dialogue, that is a space in which the various discourses injected are mixed up with one another and morph into new forms of discourse that can be said to be neither Western nor non-Western. In this first perspective of the cultural meeting, we need to understand the various cultures as something that enters into the meeting and share with one another a common production of meaning that did not exist previously, e.g. Indian literature writing itself into a Western idea of the Indian that was not yet coined, yet anticipated in Western theories of dialogism (as Rushdie allegedly phrased it once); or of an African line of

philosophy allowing for the formulation of ideas that may solve problems stated in Europe long before, but without the two worlds knowing of each other's worlds of ideas, and so on. With all the logic inherent to this way of understanding the meeting – as a locus for changing what was separate into something that is mixed – there is a linearity about it that I think we need to challenge. But in order to do so, we need to shift from Bakhtinian dialogism to other perspectives.

### **Sufism and the fold**

Just as we have Nicolas de Cusa's philosophical writing on God's implication and explication which tells us of how God unfolds (explicates) from a state of complication into whatever becomes in the world, so do the writings of Ib'n al Arabi explain how Allah undisclosed or unveils himself as the world becomes. This happens through constant singularisations of the universal, which imply that the inherent ambiguity of any situation becomes more complex as time passes. It is an expression of what Ib'n al Arabi terms the 'renewal of creation at each instant'. Only God is eternal and changeless, whereas all things change. The world is the product of God's unveiling, and in this process nothing is ever created twice. Just like the process described in Cusanus' concept of Unfolding, this is a one-way process.

Every death is a birth into another world, every disappearance an appearance elsewhere. But the overall movement never reverses itself, since the cosmic roads know only one-way traffic. To return from 'here' to 'there', we have to take a different route than the one by which we came. (Chittick, 1989: 19)

There is certainly a beauty and a complexity in the world views described in Cusanus as well as in Ibn al Arabi, and a wonderful plethora of concepts (for instance, this is where the 'Deleuzian' concept of the fold originates). Of course, they offer a possibility of understanding how the meeting could be defined from a whole which allows for multiplicity. This concept of the whole, defined as God, is a virtuality which is capable of reproducing itself endlessly in the folds of the meeting (as we see it described in Deleuze's rendering of Leibniz' baroque version of the concept of the fold in *Le pli*). Since every element in the meeting changes along the axes of the fold or of God's self-disclosure, there will be plenty of explanation for the dynamisms of the meeting. However, all of this of course resides on a one-way understanding of causality and determination. The choices available to the human in the pursuit of life towards the 'return' are only a matter of what the path of that return will be, what face of God humans will see as they leave this world.

Another aspect in both directions is the matter of locus of dynamics in the case of a meeting. In Sufism, what the human may hope to access is the truth that may be seen by his soul. Matter has no access to spirit, and spirit has no access to matter – only by the intermediary of the soul will they be visible to one another. Likewise, when we move to Leibniz through Deleuze,

there is a dualism that is only mediated by the window of the monad. In the meeting, the windows of the monad are visible to each other, and through them, expressions and impressions are accessible to one another. There is an intermediary, but there is also a dualism that ultimately blocks the access from monad to monad, but also from monad to the world. Similarly to the situation in the Sufi world view, there is a holistic principle that creates a connection and a separation at one time. Since we are created in the image of God (Sufism), and since the world and God are present in the monad in an infolded state; there is a connection *avant la lettre* in both cases. And in the end, there is both a presence which precedes every event in the world, but also one that ultimately escapes us:

We may talk of event only as already engaged in the soul which expresses it and in the body that effectuates it, but we may not talk about it at all without this part that subtracts itself from it. As difficult as it may be, we have to think the naval battle from the point of view of a potential that overflows the souls that engage in it and the body that carry it out. (Deleuze, 1988: *Le pli*: 142)

As is probably clear by now, I am by no means exploring the truth about Sufism or the early renaissance Christians, let alone Leibniz and the baroque. What is the point here is that we have the opportunity to enter a dialogue with currents of thought that are open to the idea of there being some kind of a non-locality present in the setting of the meeting.

One of the problems in the highly evolved religious discourse is that there is no social dimension per se. In this sense, we might say that the meeting is not a case of sociality as a matter between humans, or even between humans and things, as a particular over-human is dominating the stage to such an extent that nothing else may emerge independently of it. So, if only for the sake of understanding the social as it lasts, I will dismiss with the concept of God as such and leave only the idea of a form of total or encompassing force present in every aspect of the world before, during, and after the meeting. What we will also accept is the concept of the fold, but we shall turn it around and let it describe the way in which the totality may be opened up from within thanks to the event of the meeting. In fact, the opening of the totality through the event may be the very definition of a meeting that makes a difference. At the same time, we must ask ourselves if this opening up – literally a cutting up of totality or the whole by the local event of the meeting – is possible without introducing a new form of non-locality. This would be a non-locality that does not move from top to bottom, from God to simple humans, but from the complex opacity of the local situation of the meeting, towards the total, the complete, the virtual.

### **Event philosophy and the question of the meeting as a non-local field**

The question will then be this: where will we find the equivalents of a philosophy of the event, which does not limit itself to amputating the religious content of medieval European thinkers such as Nicolas de Cusa;

nor merely modernises the concept of the event into a phenomenological one, taking away everything that this concept could hold of openings into the ideas of non-local teleology, causality, simultaneity, or simply evental rhythms across time and space? As soon as we add these ideas to what was once a concept used to explain how God created the world, but since then disenchanted by Western philosophers themselves, the Western tradition of rationality seems to jump off the train.

The advantages of such a refolding of the concept of the event and the evental meeting would be obvious: rather than universalising European philosophy, it would be a search to universalise a concept through the adoption of conceptual strands, themselves performing a meeting between Western, Eastern, Northern, and Southern philosophies. Or rather, to attempt to follow the line that I drew for this conceptualisation in the last section: one could let the concept of the evental meeting be the cutting up of what was once theology and phenomenology be exploded back into a non-locality of multiple angles to the evental meeting: from thermodynamics to mystical experimentation, theory of sociality and discursivity, mystical examinations, theories of intuition, transcausality, quantum physics, and literary and mythical theory, to name some possibilities.

Of course, so far I only speak of strands of thought that are mainly part of the local from which I speak. But most of the ideas that are present as thoughts and theories in Western science are present in one or another world view of non-scientific character. And likewise, the non-local is present in a series of scientific and philosophical discursivations. The question of course remains how the conceptualisation of a philosophical dialogism may create an opening up of all these many doxa and an invitation into the theorisation within philosophy itself? Of course, this first examination will only be a scratch into the surface of a very big question, which was raised by modern physics but never truly pursued by neither philosophy nor cultural theory in the West. And still, the idea of the non-local is present in many other directions of thought, of theory, of science: architecture (the field of architecture); economics (the principle of the invisible hand is only one of many examples), social sciences (culture, to take the most impressive complex of concepts), to name a few. The non-local is used as a means of explaining factors that bridge local events and regions of praxis. In most cases, however, I would claim that the non-local concepts tend to accept an inside-out determination, and remain mostly unable to deal with an evental concept of outside-in non-locality.

An evental concept of non-locality will take off from the philosophical investigations that I have made into the sociality of the event in the past years. To explain this briefly (a longer version will be ready for a later version), the event is defined as the focus in which the actual and the virtual are reduced into a chronotope of pure potentiality. A complex of chronotopes – complex by the way it draws in dimensions that obey different logics, before and after their eventalisation. On both sides of the

event, the 'infinite extends: the infinite diversity of actualisations of which an unpredictable amount will fall from each other and become in potentialisation; the infinite unfoldedness of the virtual, which is reduced to an equally unpredictable level or amount of potentiality through the event. All of this resides in the evental (such as the meeting, the conversation, etc), in which time, space, matter, and action is twisted into a singular condensation of the universal and brought to life as the manifestations of a totality. But of a totality that did not know itself before it was cut to pieces by the event.

Such an idea of the evental meeting will need to dwell in a number of different approaches, as insinuated – and only some of them would logically originate in the so-called West. This journey of understanding of the evental will be my contribution to the circle for the coming years, hoping to draw on the wealth of non-local philosophies and thought worlds.

End of short version.

Any ideas for interesting places to search for non-European concepts of eventality or events will be most welcome, before as well as after the winter symposium.