Interdisciplinary Ensembles and Dialectical Integration

A Proposed Model of Integrated Interdisciplinarity

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NON-DIALECTICAL ENSEMBLES

Unification Through Differential Tension

The kind of model I call a “non-dialectical ensemble” can be aligned, at least initially, with a Heraclitean/Heideggerian conception of unity in difference. Its justifications will have to be worked out on a phenomenological basis, and its specifically Heideggerian implications will have to be spelled out with respect to a phenomenology of culture that can be articulated through Heidegger’s philosophy of art. But first let’s look at the relevant Heraclitean passages:

That which is in opposition is in concert, and from things that differ comes the most beautiful harmony.
They do not understand how that which differs with itself is in agree-
ment: harmony consists of opposing tension, like that of the bow and
the lyre.

War (polemos) is both king of all and father of all, and it has revealed
some as gods, others as men; some it has made slaves, others free.

Things taken together are whole and not whole, something which is
being brought together and brought apart, which is in tune and out of
tune; out of all things there comes a unity, and out of a unity all things.¹

The model is that of an ensemble in which the tension between the vari-
ous elements within it, in their interplay, bring about a unity that is noth-
ing other than the differences that make it up. Hence Heraclitus says, “Out
of all things there comes a unity”—that is, out of and across the differential
elements gathered together in the ensemble, a unity emerges or is
produced—and “out of a unity all things”—that is, each element becomes
what it is through its differential tension with respect to the others, and
hence the identity of each emerges or is produced through that tension.
Relation is not something produced between objects already constituted;
rather the relation is primary, and the elements come into their own, as
it were, in and through that relation. Conversely, the relation is nothing
without the elements that mutually engage in bringing it about.

The key here is that the elements making up the unity are held together
in being held apart—they don’t lose their mutual differences but rather
those differences are precisely the unity—hence the necessity of struggle
(polemos). This polemos is not necessarily the aggression associated
with the valorization of war in the conventional sense. Rather, it empha-
sizes the fact that the difference between elements is essential. It is not a
neutral melting pot that collapses the differences between the elements,
but rather a dynamic unity of polemos that is unified in and through the
tension across differences. The elements don’t precede the unity as self-
subsistent atoms that then, subsequently, come into relation. Rather, they
first emerge as what they are in and through the dynamic unity of strug-
gle. At the same time, the “unity” here is nothing other than the interplay
among the elements that make it up.
In Heidegger’s appropriation of this Heraclitean paradigm, the unity of a given historical world is brought about through the dynamic tension of the creative works contributed within it. A historical world determines how things are manifest—for example, as creatures before a Creator in the Middle Ages, as objects observed by consciousness in modernity, or as a reservoir of constantly available resources and raw data in postmodernity. The specific determinacy of these various modes of appearance constitutes a unified “world” that is only brought about and established in and through the assembly of divergent works. The unique character belonging to each of those works is in turn only manifest in and through the context of that unity. In Heraclitean terms, across the ensemble of works a unity emerges, and that unity is nothing other than the differential tension operative among and across the works themselves—out of all things there comes a unity and a unity out of all things. “Truth,” understood in its ancient Greek sense of disclosure or unconcealment (a more or less literal translation of the Greek word for truth, aletheia), is the measure or set of limits that determines the specific way beings as a whole are manifest in a given historical era, and it is a measure that is neither eternal nor given in advance of human achievement. Rather, it is a measure that has to be established through and across creative human works—works such as those of architecture, visual arts, music, poetry, politics, philosophy, science—the whole range of human works with no advance determination about how these works might be hierarchically arranged with respect to each other. The unity of “culture” can be understood as precisely such a measure established across an ensemble of works in this fashion.2

The kind of philosophical thinking Heidegger engages in calls into question the objectivistic stance of a reflective consciousness set over and against a subject matter or object that is to be theorized about or observed. This setup, he argues, belongs to an ontological framework that not only fails to uncover more basic levels of experience but does so in a way that overlooks the primary phenomenon of human existence as something inherently belonging to a world. In short, according to Heidegger such an ontology overlooks the world and replaces it with a worldless ahistorical subject set over and against a realm of objects. Hence rather than beginning with the assumption of a subject-thinker and an objective reality, Heidegger proposes to initiate a different beginning—one that begins
with a unified being-in-the-world as a basic feature of what it means to be human. We might borrow from Merleau-Ponty and call this a “pre-objective” level of being that is prior, ontologically speaking, to the representation of the world as an assortment of objects whose empirical or theoretical properties can be specified by an observing consciousness.

Following his mentor Husserl, Heidegger initially proposes to gain access to this pre-objective level of being through phenomenological inquiry. That is, by carefully attending to the way beings are manifest, we may thereby bring to light ontological determinacies that make possible the specific way in which these beings appear. To put it another way, “being” for Heidegger names the “phenomenality of phenomena” or the manner of appearance, and “beings” name what appears. Appropriating Husserl’s phenomenological methodology in such a way as to clarify ontological inquiry, and reviving the ancient Greek understanding of truth as “unconcealment,” Heidegger determines truth to be, not a correspondence of a proposition to a fact (as in “true” statements about things) but the most fundamental way in which beings are manifest. Thus the assembly of creative works in their differential tension brings about truth, the manifestation of what is (“all things”) in and through the specific historical character of a unified world (“unity”). Truth itself is not an eternal verity; it is nothing other than the way in which beings are manifest. Heidegger thereby proposes a historically immanent understanding of truth with respect to which the diversity of creative works is crucial.

Heidegger’s thinking is particularly attractive from an interdisciplinary perspective because he does not privilege the philosopher or even ideas per se (as the Western philosophical tradition from Plato to Hegel tends to do). If, as Heidegger argues, the measure of truth gets established historically across the entire ensemble of works, then it will be the ensemble, not the philosopher (including Heidegger himself), that determines what is hierarchically ordered, if indeed anything is to be. A model for interdisciplinarity derived from this account might be called a non-dialectical ensemble of unification through differential tension. Under this model, integration is not imposed from the top by an overarching unity, nor is it something merely added to elements conceived as already present and complete. Rather, it is something that emerges in and across the differential tension between the various disciplinary approaches that enter into the arena of
polemos. It’s not that there are no pre-existent elements already present in any way at all, but rather that through the interrelations these elements are in the process of becoming, such that what emerges through the process is an identity and integrity of each that was not simply present in advance. In an interdisciplinarity brought about in this way, the mutually interacting disciplines are not hermetically sealed enclosures persisting in mutual indifference but rather are elements in dynamic tension with the other elements in the field. Furthermore, the unique character of each discipline is manifest as such through its interaction with those other elements. This model then is more than one of mere communication in which isolated participants are understood to communicate across the disciplinary gulf that separates them while remaining unaltered themselves.

Limit Conditions: Polemos as Dramatic Script or Musical Score
The arena of polemos consists of the limit conditions within which interplay can take place, much as the script of a play or a musical score can specify the limit conditions within which a dramatic production or a musical performance can occur. These conditions can be more or less predetermined, but they never exhaust the possibilities in advance. For instance, a classical-period musical composition can overdetermine these limits in advance but still not exhaust all the possibilities of performance; on the other hand, a more improvisational composition can set up a space within which the flexibility of performative variation can occur.

Relying on the work of Charles Bigger (2004), we might say that this notion of a set of limit conditions that mark out a space within which creative variation can occur and differential unity can emerge is close to Plato’s late conception of the “form”—the eidos or idea stands to variational becoming as a plot does to a play or as a score does to musical performance: “Form is to a process as a plot is to a play that could have been played in many different times and places, languages, societies, and the like. Each is the play; none are its clones” (2004, 89). Furthermore, these limit conditions are not themselves fixed and established once and for all—what constitutes the play or the musical piece in this case can change with the performative interpretations (a possibility of change within the “form” itself that Plato acknowledges in the Sophist, 249a–b). Thus the limit conditions themselves are always open to reinterpretation.
and challenge. The only constancy is the necessity that there be limit conditions. In Plato’s late theory of the forms, the constant necessity of limit conditions might be taken to be the “eternal” aspect of the form, and the transcendence of possibility over the actuality of any given state of affairs, a possibility opened up by those limit conditions, is the chorismos or gap between “being” and “becoming,” a gap whose terms are always contestable and open to reinterpretation.

Similarly, possible limit conditions faced in an academic context might be the external standards and expectations imposed by the state, the predispositions and disciplinary proclivities each person brings to the table, the overall vision of the specific identity and character of one’s academic community as a collectively negotiated project, and exactly who and what will be involved in the whole process. Some of these are predetermined, but we can also specify what limits might better enable us to engage in something productive and interesting. To invoke the musical analogy again, in composing a piece of music for performance, I will encounter certain predetermined limit conditions—my natural abilities as well as those I may have achieved up to that point in time, the level of musicianship required by the piece vis-à-vis what is actually available or practically achievable, the desires/tastes of the target audience, perhaps externally imposed expectations (e.g., if the work is commissioned), and finally the overall historical context within which certain musical structures are seen as being more acceptable or palatable than others. The score itself therefore already results from a set of limit conditions and the creativity (or lack thereof) that can emerge within them. Among these latter limit conditions I also find my own biases and predilections. Perhaps I am bound by my socially ingrained habits of hearing such that I expect certain kinds of harmonies and only recognize those as “musical.” The score might be innovative or tedious depending upon these limits. These limits can be critically examined and thereby either overcome or modified. They will nevertheless in some sense form a generalized image or model of what I envision as the musical piece whose coming into being I want to facilitate. In this sense one might understand the model of interdisciplinarity presented here as a set of possible limit conditions that could be adopted in negotiating together with one’s peers the score of the musical piece that is to become interdisciplinarity.
The Deficiency of Non-dialectical Ensembles

The kind of non-dialectical ensemble of unification through differential tension articulated by Heidegger boils down to whatever comes out in the wash. There is no inner necessity that such a non-dialectical unity possess one kind of character over another, nor are the elements of such an ensemble—beyond the common response to the call to make something happen—each inherently related to others by virtue of their own integrity or specificity. Indeed, even if a unique identity of each element were to become manifest through its differential tension with others within the field circumscribed by its limit conditions, any emergent unity may well nonetheless remain a matter of indifference to the elements themselves in their preoccupation with their own respective identities. As we will see below, an indifference like this can reassert itself in a still more entrenched fashion as a result of such emergent identity—even when that identity is only gained through interrelations.

DIALECTICAL UNITY

Following the general contours of Hegel's dialectical logic, we might formally articulate differential unity in terms of a logic immanent within various forms or shapes of unity, each of which shows itself to be self-defeating owing to inherent contradictions within it. The unsustainability of each in turn implies a new variation that in a way responds to the self-defeating character of its predecessor. The immanent logic that moves us from one shape to the next is what differentiates this model from the previous one, which articulated a given unity-in-difference through phenomenological analysis without being able thereby to posit any necessity to the specific shape that unity may take.

Leaving aside a detailed treatment of that immanent logic for now—a treatment which would require considerable analysis and justification—we can specify several of these forms or shapes of differential unity (keeping in mind that the appearance of mere juxtaposition can only be dispelled with the demonstration of the immanent logic they each imply). To put it another way, we can conceive of several variations on the dialectic between relation or relational unity, on the one hand, and the unique
character or integrity of each element within such relational unity, on the other, spelled out in terms of a critique of the category of “identity.” The deficiencies present in each variation imply a further development into or replacement by another more adequate version, and thereby can begin to provide an answer as to why integration should be regarded as better than fragmentation in the first place, thereby also suggesting a normative dimension lacking in the Heideggerian account.

Abstract Identity, or the “Melting Pot” Model
In this model, difference collapses into an indifferent sameness. Difference counts as a negative to be dissolved into the unity of an indifferent neutrality. The negativity is implicit insofar as difference is either barely allowed to emerge at all or is immediately subsumed under an overarching unity with respect to which it counts as something to be devalued. To put it another way, the unity appears explicitly as something positive and purely affirmative (e.g., “I’m an American before all else”), but is implicitly negative insofar as it must in addition negate the differences that are nonetheless present in order to reduce them to a subordinate status (“I’m also gay, female, Latina,” etc.). This is the unity of indifferent neutrality that collapses all differences into a primal soup—the “melting pot” model.

However, because of the character of the unity as indifferent neutrality, it lacks both identity as well as unity and is thereby self-defeating. The specific identity of any element present is due to its difference from the other elements. Without such difference the elements would be indistinguishable from one another. But that difference is precisely what is negated in favour of its unification with the others in the melting pot. Unity itself becomes seen as the “grand narrative” that erases or submerges difference. To the degree that such negation of difference provokes the reassertion of that difference against the overarching unity we get something like “identity politics.” But the identity thereby reasserted is in turn achieved at the expense of the overarching unity rather than through that unity. Although it may at first look as if the very idea of a grand narrative or overarching unity has been decisively rejected, such identity politics risks replicating the same melting pot model at the micro level—members of the group are identified as such in their unity under that group, but their specific differences from each other again fall outside their unity in the
group. The “identity” asserted becomes a mini-melting pot. The logic of this reversal may well facilitate the situation noted by Will Kymlicka (2001, 76) in which “traditional elites” within such groups exercise oppressive practices and rights violations over member of their own communities.

Needless to say, this model of unity does not appear to hold much promise for an integrated model of interdisciplinarity. Rather, we are left with the alternatives of fragmentation without unity or unification without difference, both of which alternatives are negative in their exclusion of their own other (difference excludes unity and vice versa). At best such a model might perhaps lead to an assembly of various disciplines under the umbrella of collectively promoted goals—an “additive and encyclopedic” form of multidisciplinarity, according to Julie Klein’s definition (Klein 2006), rather than interdisciplinarity proper. At worst it might merely collapse into an institutionally imposed mandate requiring compliance. In either case there is no “inter” in such an interdisciplinarity, still less an integration.

Unlike the usual assertion of identity politics, however, the problem highlighted by a Hegelian analysis is not a moral or ethical one. Rather, it is a logical one: such an abstract identity in the melting pot does not actually achieve identity, and the unity fails to unify insofar as differences fall outside it and must be reasserted against it if they are to count in their own right. The melting pot is a semblance of unity concealing its own inherent fracture.

Such abstract identity logically implies a transition to a subsequent stage. Insofar as the differences that the melting pot excludes must then be devalued relative to the indifferent neutrality of the melting pot itself, the latter can now only assert its own value by means of such exclusion. In other words, the movement is double: first the assertion of a neutral unity that subsumes differences, an assertion which remains naïve so long as the subsumed differences disappear from its view (e.g., the notion of liberal equality implicitly based on the model of the white male property owner, such as the assertion that “all men are created equal” in the American Declaration of Independence, initially fails to notice its exclusion of women and non-white races). But insofar as the unity here is a unification of those elements that are mutually different, that difference has to appear in an assertion against unity. The reassertion of the latter unity
now in turn must be asserted against those differences—the first naïve unity can no longer be taken for granted. This then generates a unity whose character is explicitly negative. The melting pot was indeed negative, but only implicitly. It had to wait for the assertion of its implicitly excluded differences to show itself to be the negativity that it is. Hence, now the identity asserted against unity, as well as the unity asserted against difference, both become explicitly negative.

We might conceive of such a unity as being forced to cast its net of inclusion wider, as has indeed happened historically in liberal democratic societies. For example, those who were previously excluded from the net—women, minorities, etc.—are now included under a wider umbrella. But nonetheless the assertion of those various identities as different—as women, as gay, etc.—is still negated in favour of a universality that does not include within itself the particularity of those identities. Such universality remains just as abstract as the identity asserted against it—it is a universality that subsumes particulars under it, but those particulars in their specific mutual differences still fall outside the overarching unity. And once again, when those differences are asserted against their implicit exclusion we get the same alternatives where each side only achieves its identity through a negation of the other: an identity asserted against unity as well as a unity asserted against difference. This mutual assertion against leads us to a notion of negative identity.

**Negative Identity**

This model is that of an identity whose unity with the other is negative. It is what it is by not being the other. This “not-other” is constitutive of its identity. However, its very negative relation to the other undermines any identity it might have in its own right. It only has an “apparent” or illusory identity that evaporates when its presuppositions are made explicit: “I know what I’m against, but I don’t know what I’m for,” or “You’re either with us or you’re with the terrorists.” In such a negative identity, any identity I have actually lies in the other. Insofar as that other is explicitly devalued, my own identity is implicitly devalued. If the other is likewise defined by such a negative identity, then we have a situation in which identity is always pushed outside oneself to the other. Any “identity” present is a semblance that conceals thoroughgoing dependence.
In a purely formal way this is where the two previously mentioned melting pot alternatives lead us: to assert difference against unity is to assert the identity of “difference” and hence also to implicitly negate difference in favour of identity (e.g., identity politics becomes a mini-melting pot). At the same time, to assert unity against difference is to set up such unity as something different from “difference,” and hence it is to implicitly assert difference rather than unity. Since each side can assert itself against the other—difference against neutral unity and neutral unity against difference—and since the negativity of that “asserting against” can remain under the radar at a merely implicit or covert level, each side can focus only on the unity or identity and simply ignore the implicit negative relation upon which such unity or identity is predicated. This leads us to a notion of a unity that is achieved through an indifference to difference. In other words, we can assert “our” identity as not x (we’re not terrorists, we’re not capitalists, we’re not socialists, etc.—we’re “us” because we’re not “them”) and then forget the “not.” Because of its prevailing indifference, it might be termed “mechanistic” insofar as the working parts of a machine are mutually external and indifferent to their operation within the mechanical process.

**Mechanistic Identity**

This model is that of a kind of identity that is only achieved through a relation of indifference and externality to others. Each element in a mechanistic system is external to the other elements and is indifferent to any action exerted upon it from the outside—even when such action from the outside determines what it is. Rather than achieving identity through negation of the other, identity is achieved through indifference to the other. Rather than “I am what I am because I’m not one of them,” it’s more like “I am what I am regardless of them.” This indifference lends a sense of self-sufficiency that remains unaffected by relations—regardless of what happens out there, I still am what I am. In this sense one might characterize the status quo in academia to be a mechanistic relation among the various disciplines: “You do your thing, I will do mine; maybe we’ll run into each other once in a while in the hallway.” Ayn Rand’s “ethical egoism” (an oxymoron) fits in here as well: “I’m under no obligation to do anything that’s not in my self-interest.” Or Milton Friedman’s “fiduciary duty” that
is indifferent to how it may affect stakeholders outside the contractual relationship. Such identity gains its self-sufficiency at the price of collapsing relations into one of mutual externality and indifference.

But insofar as such mechanistic identity even on its own terms is still implicitly negative in its very indifference—that is, insofar as unity here is achieved through the negativity of mutual indifference—such unity still needs the difference from others in order to be indifferent to them and thereby to gain the self-sufficient character of its identity. Once that very self-sufficient character—an identity that is more than a mere formal difference from others—is itself seen to require relations to others nonetheless, we are led to a conception of “integrated unity” in which the differing elements are unified through their specific differences rather than in spite of them.

**Integrated Identity**

This model is that of a positive identity, but, rather than being maintained through an indifference to others, it is an identity that is produced in and through its relations to others. Relations don’t undermine the self-sufficient character of its identity but rather establish it. Each identity is what it is in relation to the others, and in such a way that neither the self-sufficient character of each element nor the interdependent relations between them are compromised. The “Jewel Net of Indra,” a Buddhist image, comes to mind here: a vast net of jewels in which each jewel contains the reflection of the others. This also suggests Rousseau’s political paradigm, later developed by Hegel in a way, in which I gain self-determining freedom and thereby first truly become who and what I am in and through my association with other citizens in a common deliberative political space, a unity in which the multiplicity of actors and the unity of participation are one and the same thing. Difference is no longer compromised nor merely opposed to unity. Identities establish real self-subsistent integrity in their mutual differences not at the cost of relations but through them. On the other hand, the self-sufficient character of each identity is not lost in relations but is only thereby established.

This kind of unity through the interrelations of integrated identities I will call an “integrated unity,” and is the preferred model of unity I take from Hegel. Applied to interdisciplinarity, I will call it “integrated
interdisciplinarity.” Here we might conceive of the various disciplines not just coming into an aggregated assembly in which their mutual relations would remain external to the inner identity of each, nor where each would maintain its identity either in a merely negative or indifferent relation to others, but rather an integration in which each discipline becomes more than what it might otherwise be independently of its relations and thereby gains a singular identity it would lack without those relations. If the kind of unifications possible with abstract, negative, and mechanistic identities are ultimately self-defeating, we are left having to come to grips with the kind of integrated unity we want.

Pragmatics
Exactly what the specific character of integrated interdisciplinarity will look like cannot be specified in advance. That is, exactly how the gap between the “being” of limit conditions and the “becoming” of differential interplay gets negotiated has to be worked out empirically, as does the character of the integrated identity that emerges through mutual participation. Any presumption to determine this in advance beyond the formal indications given here risks asserting a hegemony of the specifically philosophical discipline over the others in the playing field. From a philosophical perspective I can say what I think it might look like in general/universal terms, but this has to be fleshed out in the actual interplay between all of the players through the integrity of their respective work. Only through such work, in working together to determine what integrated interdisciplinarity means concretely, can it be ultimately determined whether the model presented here is an abstract or a concrete universal.

That model itself integrates the two models just presented. On the one hand, it preserves the Heideggerian/Heraclitean model of unity in and through the assembly of difference in its facilitation of creativity, a mutual interplay that is not presided over by a predetermined hierarchy of disciplines but which will always be responding to a set of limit conditions that can facilitate such creativity in varying degrees. On the other hand, it preserves the Hegelian model of integrated unity in which the specific character of the identity of the elements entering into the unity are themselves established and further developed through their interrelation with
the other elements present. The latter provides the normative dimension for the former, preventing it from collapsing into a melting pot as well as from becoming either merely negative or mechanistic. In view of the pragmatic work that remains to be done and the open future of interdisciplinary studies, I suggest the model as itself a possible paradigmatic limit condition that might better enable the articulation of the collaborative space within which something like an “integrated interdisciplinarity” might flourish and define itself.

At this point I would like to look at some examples of how specific disciplines have interrelated in an integrated way. These examples will serve not only to provide possible instances of integrated interdisciplinarity, but will also themselves suggest further developments to the model. The model is therefore fluid in that it invites its own development through the practice of integration.

INTEGRATIVE UNITY, ARTWORKS, AND PHILOSOPHY

Since I am most familiar with philosophy—and with certain philosophers at that—I will draw from that field some of what I take to be a salient moment promising a direction toward the kind of integrated unity in which more than one discipline mutually interacts and is each enhanced and further developed through that interaction. Because I am not an expert in more than one field, however, and because I am not collaborating with anyone in this essay, my examples do stem from the philosophical side of that engagement and may thereby inadvertently emphasize the kinds of implications that are more interesting to philosophers over other kinds of implications that might become prominent with a different disciplinary point of departure. This may indicate a need for the kind of collaborative work in which individuals from various disciplines actively take part in mutually engaged inquiries that are not mediated by the temporal distance that prevents inquirers from various disciplinary perspectives from being co-present in their inquiries, a problem that affects the examples cited below. We should also note that the various schools of thought found within any given discipline may either facilitate or hinder integrated interdisciplinarity to differing degrees. Some may be
more amenable than others to such integrated work. Insofar as any choice of examples will necessarily be limited, we also must acknowledge the possibility that not all kinds of disciplines may be amenable to mutual integration in the same ways. The specific character of each discipline may call for a particular kind of integration, and this specificity may well exceed the level of detail indicated in the model presented here. My proposed model may be able to accommodate those specificities, however, without necessarily articulating them in advance. I will conclude with the examination of a study that follows the spirit of Heideggerian practice just mentioned in integrating philosophical reflection with non-discursive works of art in such a way that not only wards off the hegemonization of one over the other, but which also demonstrates their mutual development through the interchange.

HEIDEGGER: PHILOSOPHY AND POETRY

As previously mentioned, in that Heideggerian thought does not privilege philosophy over other academic disciplines it looks promising from an interdisciplinary perspective. Heidegger’s understanding of history in fact brings us to ask how non-discursive works might contribute to truth (i.e., to the way beings as a whole are manifest in a given historical era). Since access to the unconcealment of being is not exclusively or indeed even primarily philosophical, this drives philosophical thinking outward to seek neighbourhoods in which other modes of disclosure can mutually commune. Heidegger himself sought such communion with poetry, verbalizing the noun “neighbour” (Nachbar) to signify how philosophical thinking and poetry might “neighbour” together in such a way that the space of unconcealment—the space of truth—is opened.9

If the objectivistic stance of the modern subject is a superficial ontological horizon that conceals more fundamental modes of unconcealment, suspending that horizon in order to render those more fundamental modes more explicit also opens the door to other kinds of works that may not only reveal things at that pre-objective level but which might even contribute to establishing the very horizon that reveals them in that way.
In this way the theoretical stance of thought is no longer privileged, and thinking is brought into a neighbourhood over which it no longer presides. In attempting to clarify the essential way that language shows itself, for instance, Heidegger claims that rather than randomly picking examples of language, one should look at what is spoken “purely.” That is, one should look at something that is spoken in a way that establishes or renegotiates the essential limits of the disclosive power of speech. Furthermore, this establishing of limits must be preserved in what is spoken in such a way that it is accessible to the phenomenological thinking that Heidegger engages in. What kind of speech is this purely spoken word? In “Die Sprache,” an essay explicitly devoted to language, Heidegger writes, “What is spoken purely is the poem” (1971, 194). For Heidegger, it is in the poetic utterance that language most clearly reveals itself according to its own ontological character.

Hence philosophy can only clarify itself as a discursive enterprise that attempts to get at the truth by dwelling in the same neighbourhood with poetry insofar as the latter makes a decisive contribution to determining where the limits of language’s disclosive power lie. Similarly, Heidegger’s attempt to clarify the way human spatiality is set up and articulated by works of art prior to the Cartesian representation of space as homogeneous extension begins with reference to an architectural work—a Greek temple. It is no accident that Heidegger’s primary example of how a work of art establishes a space of unconcealment within which other beings are co-disclosed is a work of architecture that resists curatorial isolation as much as it resists the interpretation of art as a representation of something. The Greek temple, in opening up a region of unconcealment, simultaneously assembles and gathers within that region the beings that surround it—“tree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket,” the storm (Poseidon) that only “rages” when the temple opens up the space in which it can be manifest in its violence (Heidegger 1971, 42).

The affinity between philosophy and poetry might be facilitated by the fact that they both, after all, deal with language. Heidegger does point in the direction of non-discursive arts when he examines the Van Gogh painting and the Greek temple, but these examples themselves are left rather indeterminate and generic in his account (we are told neither which Greek temple nor which particular Van Gogh painting is being discussed),
and the analysis thereby remains at a very general, if not removed, level. At this point I would like to turn to an example of the intersection of philosophy and the plastic arts that develops in greater detail several specific instances of the latter.

**SCHUFREIDER: A PHENOMENOLOGY OF UNITY AND SPACE THROUGH MONDRIAN’S PAINTINGS**

In Gregory Schufreider’s analysis of Mondrian’s work, he is able to clarify the model of unity as a centred assembly of differing elements, each of which appears in its difference only in and through that assembly. Indeed, in his essay “Overpowering the Center: Three Compositions by Mondrian” (1985), the paintings of Mondrian are presented as graphic embodiments in a non-discursive format of precisely the kind of Heideggerian ensemble previously described. According to Schufreider, Mondrian appropriates the grid, which is often taken to be the quintessential representation of modern Cartesian space, and transforms it into something that opens out onto other kinds of spaces that are brought about through the paintings themselves. Through a phenomenological analysis of Mondrian’s work, he shows that the colour planes of the painting frustrate attempts to organize the elements of the painting around a centre. Rather, unification is brought about in the work through the interrelations of the elements themselves without reference to either an underlying homogeneity or a central focus. Much like Heidegger’s notion of how historical worlds get established, it is a groundless non-hierarchical ensemble of relations whose unity is nothing other than the differential mutual tension sustained between its various elements.

In a later essay, “Mondrian’s Opening: The Space of Painting” (1997), Schufreider further develops this direction of philosophical reflection opened up by Mondrian’s work. Although one might look to an artist like Mondrian in particular for integrating philosophical inquiry and artistic endeavor because Mondrian himself engaged in philosophical writing, Schufreider rejects the kind of approach that would look to paintings for mere illustrations of what has already been conceived in philosophy. If we were to follow this route, we would remain firmly entrenched within
the discursive dimension of aesthetics and therefore would not actually be straying far from the disciplinary enclosure of academic philosophy. However, Schufreider’s own reason for avoiding this approach is that he sees in Mondrian’s painting the possibility of a genuinely non-discursive thinking that is initiated in and through the work itself, and not by a prior theoretical discourse. He thus emphasizes the necessity of “exploring that other space of thinking which is his painting” (Schufreider 1997).

Although it may not be explicitly related to Schufreider’s own interest in Mondrian, the latter nonetheless suggests a fruitful direction for interdisciplinarity insofar as the kind of integrated unity proposed in the model is one in which each element becomes more than what it was prior to or independently of its integration with others within the limit conditions of the field. This is the strength of Schufreider’s later analysis of Mondrian for our purposes here. Whereas the earlier analysis might merely see in Mondrian’s work an exemplification of the kind of unification discursively articulated in the Heideggerian text, thereby leaving both philosophy and artwork relatively unaltered in a meta-level analysis that demonstrates their mutual consistency, the later analysis begins to conceive of a unique kind of space and a unique kind of unification brought about by the painting itself, a space and unification that perhaps would not have come to philosophical awareness at all without the artwork. In this way we might say that what is brought about implicitly through the work is thematized explicitly in philosophy, and thereby the two, philosophy and artwork, mutually engage in an integrated unity through which they each become more than what they were independently of that integration. Schufreider even argues that Mondrian’s work provides a possible resolution to a long-standing philosophical problem:

The point is that Mondrian ultimately found another way to resolve the traditional dualism between the individuality of the part and the universality of the whole, neither by abandoning hierarchy in a mere coordination of elements nor by submitting to hierarchical stabilization through the permanent dominance of some single element, but by working with the phenomenological appearance of the components of a visual composition to create a dynamic relation of interdependence between them. (Schufreider 1997)
Such a “mere coordination of elements” would indeed be the case if a Mondrian painting were compositionally unified by an underlying grid whose homogeneity of spatial extension coordinated the plotting of elements within its uniform space. On the other hand, a “hierarchical stabilization through the permanent dominance of some single element” could be achieved if there were a central focus to the work. But what Mondrian’s work actually achieves, according to Schufreider, is something quite different from these traditional, not to say metaphysical, solutions:

His neoplastic order requires the achievement of a constantly shifting equilibrium between the elements of a composition, a kind of reciprocating hierarchy of mutual subordination that allows each compositional component to emerge in its own complex identity as it is codetermined within a whole that is itself constituted in the interplay between those elements that are codefined within it. (Schufreider 1997)

Let’s make explicit some crucial characteristics of the kind of unification here attributed to Mondrian’s work. The unity is not static, but rather is dynamic in character. This means that there is neither a centre nor even a hegemonic element that can get stabilized within it. This might be taken to be a non-hierarchical egalitarianism of elements in which none are elevated over the others—a kind of bland uniform equality, itself its own kind of homogenization, or as one critic, Rudolf Arnheim, puts it, “a swarm of anonymous equals populating the picture plane” (quoted in Schufreider 1997). However, according to Schufreider, this is not the case. Rather than such egalitarian uniformity, the dynamism operative in the work produces a “reciprocating hierarchy” in which each element rises to the top when it is the focus of attention. Attending to each element in turn brings about this result, the overall effect of which is to prevent hierarchy from stabilizing. Thus rather than non-hierarchy being imposed from the outside or by some kind of external reflection, it is immanently produced within the dynamic interplay of reciprocating hierarchy itself.

A similar concept of unification through reciprocal hierarchy is elaborated in an unlikely place, namely, in one of the science fiction novels of C. S. Lewis, whose protagonist’s vision of the “Great Dance” of creation could well be taken as a description of Mondrian’s work:
In the plan of the Great Dance plans without number interlock, and each movement becomes in its season the breaking into flower of the whole design to which all else had been directed. Thus each is equally at the centre and none are there by being equals, but some by giving place and some by receiving it. . . . He thought he saw the Great Dance. It seemed to be woven out of the intertwining undulation of many cords or bands of light, leaping over and under one another and mutually embraced in arabesques and flower-like subtleties. Each figure as he looked at it became the master-figure or focus of the whole spectacle, by means of which his eye disentangled all else and brought it into unity—only to be itself entangled when he looked to what he had taken for mere marginal decorations and found that there also the same hegemony was claimed, and the claim made good, yet the former pattern not thereby dispossessed but finding in its new subordination a significance greater than that which it had abdicated. (Lewis 2005, 276–78)

The claim that Mondrian’s unification is non-hierarchical and non-hegemonic, then, has to be qualified. It is both hierarchical and hegemonic, but, insofar as the unification is dynamic rather than static, any such hierarchy or hegemony is temporary and subject to immediate displacement as soon as another element is attended to. Thus, beyond merely serving as an example of integration, Mondrian’s work, when its possibilities are made explicit through philosophical reflection, itself suggests (along with Lewis’s vision of the “Great Dance”) a further development of our model of integration. Namely, rather than merely abandoning hegemony or hierarchy in the kind of uniform equality that Nietzsche found repugnant (and which makes him into an enemy of democracy for some), it allows us to recognize a real hegemony within every discipline insofar as, from the perspective of any given discipline, it will tend to appear as “the master-figure or focus of the whole spectacle.” But at the same time, when one looks at what one “had taken for mere marginal decorations” one finds “that there also the same hegemony” is claimed—*and the claim made good*. Every discipline tends to regard itself as hegemon—the kinds of questions it raises and the kinds of inquiries it fosters are seen to be the most important. Why else would any of us enter a particular discipline in the first place?
But it’s not a matter of countering this claim by asserting that the kinds of questions it raises and the kinds of inquiries it fosters are not the most important, or that they need to be “contextualized” and thereby deflated. Rather than attempting to eliminate this desire for hegemony—which itself would be a questionable assertion of hegemony on the part of the advocate of interdisciplinarity—that desire is granted free space in the mutual interplay of elements within the integrated unity that itself is nothing outside that interplay. Each element in turn asserts hegemony and a reciprocal hegemony unifies the whole. Such unity, then, is neither imposed externally nor asserted as ground (as in an underlying grid), but rather is produced in and through the dynamic interrelations of the elements themselves.

This underlines the necessity of polemos—struggle, dynamic tension: a quiescent neutrality cannot be assumed. As Schufreider (1997) puts it, “only in mutually defeating the dominance of one another can the parts appear, and in differing ways, in relation to a whole that is itself shown to be composed, not in accord with a preestablished order but in the complex of relationships that are on-going between the elements themselves.” Any such imposition of an overarching umbrella under which all disciplines are knocked down to the same level is itself a form of concealed hegemony, and would merely institute the “melting pot” model of unity criticized above.

Not only does Schufreider’s account of Mondrian serve well as an instance of the kind of integration proposed in our model, but it also suggests the more determinate structure of reciprocal hierarchy as an improvement in the model itself. From the concrete example of such a unification having been achieved, we can derive a vision that might in turn serve as a set of limit conditions within which interdisciplinarity could be accomplished in ever more integrated ways. However, it might behoove us to recall the caveat mentioned earlier, namely, that different disciplines may call for different kinds of integration. Thus the integration of philosophy with empirical science may look rather different from that of philosophy with the fine arts. And insofar as my focus here is limited to philosophy we have only scratched the surface. Nonetheless, given the fact that we cannot specify in advance the wealth of empirical contingencies that will no doubt be encountered, the model proposed here, a model
which we may now tentatively designate as an integrated interdisciplinarity through reciprocal hierarchy, may prove both disclosive and useful as a set of self-imposed limit conditions within which interdisciplinarity might fruitfully thrive, and which itself requires the “inner readiness for mutual participation” Heidegger called for.

NOTES

1 The first three translations are from Freeman 1971, 25 and 28. The fourth is from Kirk and Raven 1957, 191.
2 For an argument defending a similar interpretation of Heideggerian thought and a more extensive explication of it, see Schufreider 1986.
3 The shapes of identity and unity presented here are generalizations presented in a meta-level analysis drawn from Hegel’s treatment of categories in the greater Science of Logic. My intent is to articulate these shapes in general terms and roughly indicate some features of a logic implicit within them that suggests a development from one to another above and beyond the static juxtaposition of given conceptions. However, a detailed treatment of the ontological account from which they are drawn is not only outside the scope of this essay but would also entail a considerable succession of transitions and categories not directly relevant to this inquiry.
4 See Slavoj Žižek’s account of this kind of universality, as well as his own attempt to articulate a concrete universal, in Žižek 1999, 100–103 and passim. For my response to Žižek, see Kisner 2008.
5 This formulation is a paraphrase of James Rachel’s attempt to interpret Rand’s “confusing doctrine.” See Rachel 2004, 337–38.
6 See Milton Friedman’s (in)famous article, “The Social Responsibility of Business Is to Increase Its Profits” (1970). It was Friedman’s valorization of fiduciary duty, with its concomitant indifference, that led to the notion of “stakeholders” above and beyond mere shareholders.
7 In Hegel’s treatment, this development cannot come about through a relation of universality to particularity alone but requires the mediation of “singularity,” or the individual. This individual character, however, is far from the atomistic Hobbesian/Lockean conception of individuality, often criticized as belonging to the model of the white male property owner, insofar as it is in turn only established through relation to the universal, on the one hand, and the other particulars, on the other. Hence it is an individuality—a singular identity—that is achieved through relations rather than in spite of or against them.
8 There are other possible examples not discussed but which may be developed along lines similar to those engaged here—for instance, the integration of philosophy and
psychoanalysis, along with other disciplines not directly represented by the theorists themselves, in the collaborative work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (e.g., Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

9 See, for instance, Heidegger 1996. See also “... Poetically Man Dwells . . .,” in Heidegger 1971, 211–29.

10 Chronologically ordered images of Mondrian's work can be viewed in “Olga's Gallery” at http://www.abcgallery.com/M/mondrian/mondrian.html.

WORKS CITED


Interdisciplinary Models and Dialectical Integration


