Materializing Bakhtin

The Bakhtin Circle and Social Theory

Edited by
Craig Brandist and Galin Tihanov

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Contents

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Notes on the Contributors

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Introduction:
Appropriation in History

For a very long time, Bakhtin Studies have been informed by a holistic approach, which in the nearly 20 years since its inauguration by Tzvetan Todorov's *Mikhaïl Bakhtine: le principe dialogique* (1981) yielded a number of biographies, expositions and anthologies of, as well as introductions into, Bakhtin's writings. Simultaneously, there has been a strong trend of interpreting Bakhtin from the agenda of group rights, gender studies and post-colonial theory. A third persistent line has been the use of the Circle's writings for the purposes of analysing literary texts; this is the principal way in which Bakhtin has been turned into a constant presence in the seminar and classrooms of European and American universities.

At present, Bakhtin Studies are undergoing a noticeable shift of attention away from the application of the Circles's work towards the exploration of its historical foundations and contexts. Recent examples of this new trend have been Caryl Emerson's *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (1997), the first book investigating the history of the responses to Bakhtin's work in Russia, *The Contexts of Bakhtin* (1998), a volume edited by David Shepherd and containing essays written in the early 1990s, and the articles of Brian Poole, Nina Perlina and Nikolai Nikolaev, among others.

More often than not, scholars of a more historical persuasion have been arguing that their perspective should be deemed incompatible with the desire to harness Bakhtin's work for interpreting modern cultural and social occurrences. This volume attempts to bring together the strong sides of the two latter perspectives to demonstrate that by exploring the historical backgrounds and contexts of Bakhtin's work we could attain a better grasp of its significance. Hence the title of this volume: it conveys our belief that, as Valentin Voloshinov

wrote in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, the products of intellectual endeavour could live only for as long as they are materialized in the process of active appropriation in society, and in the current flow of history.

Interdisciplinary by its design and intent, the work presented in this volume spans the fields of intellectual history, anthropology, social philosophy, history and linguistics. The opening article, by Peter Hitchcock, claims Bakhtin's thought for the analysis of the contradictory effects of 'globalization' in the context of recurring ideas about the allegedly impending 'end of history'. Jean-François Côté's essay examines, from a predominantly philosophical perspective, the convergence and distance between Bakhtin and Hegel's philosophy. Galin Tihanov places the writings of the early Bakhtin in a broader historical context to show that they are unthinkable outside of a German philosophical tradition pondering the relations between culture, form and life at the beginning of the twentieth century. Craig Brandist's contribution advances the intriguing hypothesis that Bakhtin's reworking of German philosophical sources bears the distinct marks of an unacknowledged debt to the tradition of the Russian Populists. Barry Sandywell's article aligns Bakhtin with Marx and Benjamin to give attention to hitherto unexamined aspects of Bakhtin's social thought. Not unlike Côté and Sandywell, Michael Gardiner offers a study of Bakhtin's stance toward dialectics, but unlike theirs, his contribution places Bakhtin in dialogue with Merleau-Ponty's unorthodox Marxism. With Greg Nielsen's essay, the pool of well-reasoned comparisons between Bakhtin and other theorists of the self and society expands to comprise the work of George Herbert Mead. Unlike all these contributions, the short piece by Chris Humphrey turns to the limits (and limitations) of Bakhtin's theory of carnival and critically reassesses its relevance for historians at the end of the century. Finally, in a seminal and sober-minded examination of the history of Soviet linguistics over the last 70 years, including the work of Voloshinov, Vladimir Alpatov argues convincingly that the taken-for-granted marriage between Marxist philosophy and linguistics never took place.

In introducing this volume, we hope that it will supply strong evidence of the necessity for the various trends in Bakhtin Studies to enter a stage of mutual challenge and enrichment, thus carrying over the legacy of the Bakhtin Circle into the next century.

GALIN TIHANOV
CRAIG BRANDIST

1
The World According to Globalization and Bakhtin

Peter Hitchcock

The main problem with globalization is not only the nefarious economic system it represents, but also that it lacks a coherent or logical basis for its apprehension. Within the time/space compression of the moment, with all the presentist tendencies of postmodernity, and with all the loud trumpeting that because of technological and economic integration the world is a smaller place, there is relatively little discussion about how globalization can be understood without expounding on some cognitive, imaginative or sensate means to do so.[1] The ever-laconic *Spectator* noted in 1962 that 'globalization is, indeed, a staggering concept' and so it has turned out to be. How does one address a concept that does not appear to be one? Of course, culture is the primary means through which we currently understand globalization (we may qualify that to technologies of culture for those who wish to include McLuhan's model of the global village) but it is not its essence, its *primum mobile*. Indeed, what is staggering about culture in this instance is not its irrefutable difference but its consummate inability to provide a transformative knowledge of the primary motor of globalization. Globalization does not offer up this knowledge with the ease of a *Lonely Planet* guide, or even with the electronic certitude of the information superhighway, precisely because it is grounded in a cognitive and epistemological impasse: there is no order of thought identical with the process of globalization as currently construed, no language adequate to the universalizing totality it is held to express, no subject that could embody the post-human manifestations of its reach, no culture that could fully come to terms with the non-representational excess of its Being. What is truly staggering about globalization is that in forty years of pontification about the term (which describes a process at least five centuries old) we are only

just beginning to come to terms with the most basic ground of its deadening opacity. Paradoxically, globalization is not an allegory of the process of acquiring newly inclusive vistas of cosmopolitan knowledge (which is the obvious irony in the title of Tim Brennan's recent book, *At Home in the World* (Brennan, 1997),[2] but is instead an allegory of ignorance, of asymmetrical ignorance as Dipesh Chakrabarty would say, that stands as an indictment of the crippling and disastrous inequalities of the world system (see Chakrabarty, 1992).[3] What makes culture stagger, perhaps, is the prospect of association with something as tawdry and contaminated as the narrative of globalization now on offer.

While there may be good reason to address the philosophical and cultural grounds of globalization, the idea that the work of Mikhail Bakhtin can help in this endeavour may strike one as either precious or absurd. Bakhtin is revered for many reasons, his contributions to the theorization of the novel, his elaboration of the festive and the popular, his materialist exegesis of language, his philosophy of the author and authoring, and his novel approach to questions of speech and speech genres. He is not, however, best described as cosmopolitan when considering economic structures or international cultural relations, and there is no point in berating him for this since they simply did not occupy his otherwise intensely active mind (even in such heady lectures as 'Stalin and the English Bourgeoisie'!). But Bakhtin is often discussed in terms of global concepts (see Morson and Emerson, 1990: chapter 1) or his obsessive concern for 'the plenitude of differences in the world' (Clark and Holquist, 1984: 1) which, while it does not make him a social scientist of culture or globalization, does suggest that his conceptual apparatus might usefully be deployed in linking and thinking the difference of both. Why?

Such a prospect should not frighten since, for one, the provocation of Bakhtin's work is usually to be found in his theoretical constructs rather than the readings that he provides to elaborate them. In *Art and Answerability*, for instance, all that intricate philosophizing on author and hero in aesthetic activity cannot possibly be supported by the decidedly thin analysis of Pushkin's poem 'Parting' that follows it. Similarly, the rather brilliant chapter 5 of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* is only ostensibly about Dostoevskii, and works much better as a grid for the critique of novelistic discourse in general. To extrapolate from this note on Bakhtin's theorizing does not mean, of course, that the use of 'world' and 'global' in discussions of Bakhtin is the equivalent of the 'global' in globalization, although there is a universalizing

tendency in both. What I would argue is that Bakhtin often took up the question of the individual's relationship to the world as a philosophical and aesthetic problem of some import and that this 'world', as such, is no more abstract than that proposed in the 'real' world to which globalization usually refers. To some extent, the test of Bakhtin's 'global concepts' is the degree to which they denature and defamiliarise the new orthodoxy of globalization taking hold of transnational debate. But more than this, the actual limits they place on thinking globally opens up a pertinent discussion between globalization as an economic moment and transnational culture as its albeit contradictory and contributory symptom. Far from being irrelevant to this fateful conjuncture, elements of Bakhtin's thinking throw a trenchant light on the artifice of globality as well as the impasse it represents for more worldly exchanges on egalitarian social relations. Wary of the scandal of invoking Bakhtin in this way, I would first like to clarify the basic problems in the rhetoric of globalization as currently construed.

The conventional mantra announced in the term globalization is of an economic sea change in capitalism characterized by flexible accumulation, flexi-local production, corporate transnationalism that flaunts state affiliation or obeisance, and a post-Fordist integration of production forged through the free-flow of capital around the globe.[4] Without doubt there is validity to all of these claims; the problem is that the term itself masks the difference in intensities of the qualities portrayed. Simply put, these features do represent a qualitative difference in formations of capital, but they only constitute a fraction of economic activity not just globally but in terms of capital itself. The rhetoric of globalization exists first under the sign of hyperbole.

Most critics of globalization usually preempt the timing of the conditions of its emergence (for instance, there are dozens of references in Marx's work that already point to the axiomatic nature of capital's transnational proclivities in the nineteenth century) and/or detail the sinister collusion of this economic form with that somewhat more pedestrian edifice, the Nation State (I will return to Marx below). In addition, and no less damaging, economic data itself undermines the case for globalization. For example, the ratio of exports to GDP in advanced industrialised nations is not that much greater than it was before the First World War when it stood at about 16 per cent.[5] Similarly, the balance sheets of most multinationals show that the bulk of their trade is overwhelmingly national or regional where they (in tandem with the state) can best protect their market interests. The

second word in the rhetoric of globalization is localization (or, for the neologists, glocalization).

Personally, I am taken with such critiques of globalization, particularly since the loudest discussants of the subject often indulge in a kind of capitalist triumphalism from the Right, or cynical defeatism from the Left. Accepting all the criticisms, however, some important qualifications should be made. First, the data fiends need to differentiate the type of company being transnational. The model for contemporary globalization is not the old stalwarts of heavy industrial production like GM or Boeing, but organizations that primarily use semi- or unskilled labour through sub-contracts or outsourcing.[6] As recently as 1997, the sneaker giant Nike had by some estimates over 100 000 people, mostly in Asia, making shoes and sports-related clothing with the ubiquitous 'swoosh' (the mark of Sorrow) upon them. But the transnationalism here is in the contract between Nike and the small to medium-sized companies that are licensed to make its products, like the Tae Gurang Industrial Company in Korea, Samyang Tonsang, or Sung Hwa Corporation in Indonesia. Yes, there is some FDI involved, but the bulk of the economic activity is up to local companies who scramble around the labour markets of Southeast Asia sub-contracting to meet Nike's 12 to 18-month production cycles. Nike will ship them blueprints, mock-ups, and a steady supply of air sacs for the shoes (this see-through technology is entrusted to a North American company, Tetra) but Nike is not really in the business of making shoes, it markets them. Despite the 'swoosh' on the products, most of the workers in Asia never see Nike on their payslip, much less an American in the factory. The true face of globalization is precisely its facelessness. Sure, the behemoths of capitalism have trouble moving productive capital, but sub-contracted sweatshops can move all the time (in a five-year period Nike closed 20 factories and opened 35 more). Using productive capital or plant as a measure of globalization for steel production, for instance, will obviously show that fixed assets remain relatively fixed (although even then, whole steel plants have moved around the globe, as even the residents of the Rust Belt will attest), but those who cannot see globalization should compare Nike's annual report with what actually happens to capital where its products are made. Nike sells most of its product in the American market, and therefore fits the criticism of glocalization. Yet half a dozen countries are involved in landing that product even though their import/export figures rarely get itemized in the Nike equation on sales of $9.6 billion in the last year. Within the rhetoric *of* globalization the formula *for* globalization is itself at stake.

In another argument, I have used Bakhtin's trenchant sense of time/space relations to analyse the Nike phenomenon (see Hitchcock, 1998). Here I want to focus on why the global in globalization is so difficult to fathom by taking up Bakhtin's thought on the borders of I and Other and on the liminal difference between the subject and the world. Globalization is first and foremost an economic regime whose problems require economic and political solutions. But they also necessitate a vigilance about the conditions of apprehension of global-ity far beyond what defines a transnational corporation, an attention to the question of understanding the globe that itself informs possible solutions to the brave new world (order) that globalization represents. Let us consider, for a moment, the world according to Bakhtin.

In his early years, Bakhtin often reads the question of the human subject's relationship to the world in terms of the aesthetic. This is an immediately alarming prospect for Marxists because the aesthetic has often been a bourgeois provenance deployed precisely to cover the real foundations of the subject's existence. While Kant casts a long shadow over Bakhtin's early philosophical musings, the realm of the transcendent is not quite the substance of his aesthetic, which is context-specific and surprisingly social. How does the author, thinks Bakhtin, without imbricating both the internal logic of her or his art with the logic of the world that informs it?

> All of the world's values enter into the aesthetic object, but they do so with a particular aesthetic coefficient, and the author's position as well as the artistic task he has set himself must be understood in the world in conjunction with all these values. What is consum-mated or formed into an integral whole is not the material (words), but the comprehensively lived and experienced makeup of being. The artistic task organizes the concrete world: the spatial world with its own axiological centre – the living body, the temporal world with its own centre – the soul, and finally, the world of meaning – all in their concrete interpenetrating unity. (*AA*: 190)

The author is a maker whose art is dependent upon an ability to complete or consummate (the religious cognate is not uncommon in Bakhtin) wholes from disparate worlds. Again, Bakhtin's sense of the world here is not the one considered in the boardrooms of Beaverton, Oregon where Nike plots marketing, nor is Bakhtin's notion of value the equivalent of surplus value that is vital for capitalism. And yet, there are lessons in Bakhtin's invocation of 'interpenetrating unity' in

terms of the ruse and reality of globality. What the artist holds to be the world cannot be the world that she or he represents but neither can the artist abjure that world that gives the 'whole' of art its meaning. Bakhtin understands that when one is in art, one is not in life and yet he attempts to elaborate the terms through which both are answerable or responsible for one another. Neither the world nor art is taken as an intransitive given; they are both for Bakhtin created in the ongoing event of Being. Yet the whole in Bakhtin's argument is not a stable entity but must be in the event of Being for the subject whose existence depends on it. Several elements are at stake, then, in the relationships of author to creativity (and author to hero, but this need not detain us here), to the world, and to existence. The artist can live in art, but only to the extent that the artist and art are mutually responsible to each other and the world. This interpenetration also textures what constitutes being in the world for Bakhtin. You cannot step outside of this obligation according to Bakhtin: you have no alibi for being, you cannot claim to be anywhere else than where you are in being. But isn't this horribly individualist, as if the world hinges upon a monadic consciousness?

   Not so, says Bakhtin. Our obligation to existence in art and life (as people, as artists or social scientists) precisely depends upon a coordinating vector in the non-repeatable events that constitute our being. The uniqueness of the individual is not the product simply of their self-recognition: the 'whole' of their existence is dependent on the Other. Again, this requires clarification. On one level, the aesthetic event depends upon co-experiencing the aesthetic object itself, whether a human, an object, a colour or a line as Bakhtin suggests. This is not a pure identification, however, which would negate the place from which such experience is possible (an absolute identification with the other is not just a fiction, but a form of psychosis). Co-experiencing, for Bakhtin, must be sympathetic for aesthetic activity to have meaning as an event: 'what is *constitutive* for such events is the relationship of one consciousness to *another* consciousness precisely as an other. Events of this kind include all of the *creatively* productive events – the once-occurrent and inconvertible events that bring forth something new' (*AA*: 86–7; emphasis in original). Ultimately, it is not the other as object that is important to Bakhtin's definition, but the other as another consciousness, as another being who is productive in the eventness of events (the capacity for co-being in events). The world, as such, is participative to the extent that the aesthetic activity required in apprehending it is an acknowledgement

of I and Other. And yet, the world as is remains non-participative to the extent that either aesthetics is read as individualist or that the world of culture itself is split off from the world of life as it is lived in all of its once-occurrent eventness. There are many philosophical issues that spin out of Bakhtin's thoughts on authoring and on action in *Art and Answerability* and *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, some of which pertain to a Husserlian phenomenology and others that take up the general challenge of deconstructing Kant's ethical imperative. What I want to develop are those threads of his philosophy that impact how the world can be understood and whether this indeed might make culture a greater aid in coming to terms with globalization's claims to 'being' in the world.

The world according to Bakhtin requires a differentiated notion of culture, but this in turn is dependent upon a certain impasse in modes of cognition. At a most basic level, for instance, one might ask how the other (the other human, the other subject) has access to that unique once-occurrent eventness that the 'I', in its being, must continually live? The answer that this uniqueness is co-participative begs the question of whether it can be actually cognized by the other. On this point, Bakhtin forces the issue. The moment of cognition in all its uniqueness is what constitutes the event as aesthetic. The realization of co-being is the ability to cognise the world we inhabit by living aesthetically. To put it bluntly, if we do not live aesthetically, the world, as such, cannot be actively cognized:

> Aesthetic activity collects the world scattered in meaning and condenses it into a finished and self-contained image. Aesthetic activity finds an emotional equivalent for what is transient in the world (for its past and present, for its present-on-hand being), an emotional equivalent that gives life to this transient being and safeguards it; that is, it finds an axiological position from which the transient in the world acquires the axiological weight of an event, acquires validity and stable determinateness. The aesthetic act gives birth to being on a new axiological plane of the world: a new human being is born and a new axiological context – a new plane of thinking about the human world. (*AA*: 191)

There is much that is right and wrong about this formulation. First, the history of aesthetics is not exactly unencumbered by ideologies, particularly those that justify the existence of some people's activity over others (whether such people are artists or those who make a fetish of

art in the face of their own barbarism). Second, although Bakhtin is careful to invoke aesthetic activity as the operative principle it is hard not to sense the artist 'acting' within it and, in particular, arbitrating the 'emotional equivalent' that fends off or organizes all that scattered meaning in the world. Indeed, it is not too hard to imagine this world as the world of modernism, with the artist as disaffected god quietly paring fingernails, incognito, over the abstruse planes of existence that characterized a good part of the twentieth century (the allusion is to Joyce, of course, but for political and other reasons, Bakhtin's primary example is Dostoevsky). On the positive side, Bakhtin knows that the event he describes is not simply the equivalent of the world or some representational surrogate. He is trying to explain how the world, as such, might remain fleeting and abstract and can only be given form for cognition through an activity that makes truth and value from its inconstancy. Bakhtin neither denies the latter nor celebrates it; he merely acknowledges that what is given in the world is not directly the means to apprehend it.

Now this still falls far short of an adequate explanation of the world, and particularly the world of globalization, which is our chief concern. Yet I would argue that the narrative of globalization wants to situate an activity that would cognise the world, but ends up forwarding itself and the world as an alibi of existence that is precisely the object of Bakhtin's criticism. The partial truths of globalization as an economic integer, like its fraction of overall economic activity, are often projected as a global dominant. As an activity, it may acknowledge the world 'scattered in meaning' but it obstinately refuses the cognitive risk (and co-participation) inscribed in eventness, and the axiological function of answerability or responsibility that this necessitates. While the guardians of globalization may court the aesthetic (which would take our argument into the nether worlds of commodification, corporate sponsorship, and the engine of advertising), they would prefer to empty out meaning at the point that it questions the world to which globalization actually refers. They would surely appreciate the idea of 'newness' that Bakhtin embraces (for this year's 'new human being' is a catchy consumable) and the metaphor of birthing that is often Bakhtin's own alibi for getting men into the 'natural' creative act. But the process of meaning that Bakhtin analyses is somewhat more thorny, and so too are the values or axiology that it implies. Indeed, whatever the gestures towards the aesthetic within the rhetoric of globalization, under the terms of the aesthetic that Bakhtin examines globalization is not aesthetic enough. It fails in its

sweep to acknowledge the difference and responsibility in cognition that threaten what might otherwise pass for its logical integrity. Not surprisingly, this ruse in accumulation was something of which Marx was well aware.

For most, the idea that Marx was an aesthetician is intolerable or at best an acknowledgement of a certain humanist philosophical disposition before that now infamous epistemological break. Certainly, the 1844 manuscripts argue forcefully for an aesthetic provenance within materialism, for which Terry Eagleton provides a pertinent gloss:

> Marx is most profoundly 'aesthetic' in his belief that the exercise of human senses, powers and capacities is an absolute end in itself, without need of utilitarian justification; but the unfolding of this sensuous richness for its own sake can be achieved, paradoxically, only through the rigorously instrumental practice of overthrowing bourgeois social relations. Only when the bodily drives have been released from the despotism of abstract need, and the object has been similarly restored from functional abstraction to sensuously particular use-value, will it be possible to live aesthetically. (Eagleton, 1990: 202)

Again, this is different from Bakhtin's articulation of the aesthetic, but nevertheless a similar role for aesthetics emerges. Like Bakhtin, Marx understood the givenness of the world as something that had to be worked; a human's sensate fulfilment does not exist in the mere fact of our bodies or the world in which we live. Indeed, our recognition of an externally verifiable world does not obviate our role in constructing it but becomes the very basis of our answerability – a responsibility that is socialised. The world according to Marx has developed an economic system in which the body's sense of itself has been sundered, as Eagleton points out, by 'abstract need,' as if the world of 'having' under capitalism was the purest expression of a human's sensate being and surplus value the axiological ground of activity. Marx is not arguing for art for art's sake but for a sensuous particularity that provides a ground for meaning, and not just see-through soles.

In the early philosophical manuscripts Marx is grappling with several issues simultaneously, but in general his attention to human sensate experience is a means to understand the process of estrangement that is intrinsic to the capital relation. I don't want to labour this point, but Marx's aesthetic predilections are concerned with what happens to human activity under the sign of capital. He asks: 'what is

life but activity?' and then proceeds to elaborate how labour is separated from the products of its activity and how this literally denatures human activity in general:

[It is] … in his working-up of the objective world, therefore, that man first really proves himself to be a species-being. This production is his active species-life. Through and because of this production, nature appears as his work and his reality. The object of labour is, therefore, the objectification of man's species-life: for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore he contemplates himself in a world that he has created. In tearing away from man the object of his production, therefore, estranged labour tears from him his species-life, his real species-objectivity, and transforms his advantage over animals into the disadvantage that his inorganic body, nature, is taken from him. (Marx, 1988)

This split in Being, being human, is calamitous, for those who labour are presented with an external world in which their activity is effectively nullified as a relation between a human and nature (as 'man's inorganic body'). The estrangement of the worker under capital is not wrong simply because somebody else gets rich: it is fundamentally wrong because it denies labour the very substance of life activity, that which constitutes a human as human in relation to the world. This is a crisis in activity that globalization seeks to globalize (again, under conditions that Marx clearly understood as a structural compulsion of capitalist productive capacities). The young Bakhtin, like the young Marx, takes up the philosophical problem of the changed circumstances of the world that humans make:

The contemporary crisis is, fundamentally, a crisis of contemporary action [*postupok*]. An abyss has formed between the motive of the actually performed act or deed and its product. But in consequence of this, the product of the deed, severed from its ontological roots, has withered as well. Money can become the motive of the deed that constructs a moral system. In relation to the present moment, economic materialism is in the right, although not because the motives of the actually performed act have penetrated inside the product but rather the reverse: the product in its validity walls itself off from the actually performed act in its actual motivation. But the situation cannot be rectified from within the product: it is

impossible to break through from here to the actually performed act. It can be rectified only from within the act itself. (*TPA*: 54–5)

For Marx, of course, the solution is to make that practical activity of humans revolutionary because this is the only way to take back the objective world that is now expressed as the relationship between things (like Bakhtin, Marx abhors the fact that products have taken up the motives of human existence, and can make tables dance like that hideous example from the commodity chapter in *Capital*). The answer then to the philosophical problem inscribed in the capital relation is to change the nature of activity. Bakhtin also wants change, but he places a heavier burden on interpretation than perhaps Marx's Eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach would allow. Nevertheless, his solution, that activity must be made answerable or responsible, is not a meta-physician's dream. Bakhtin does not read the world as an abstraction from the reality it presents; rather, he attempts, at least in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, to understand the 'fundamental moments in the architectonic of the actual world of the performed act or deed – the world actually experienced, and not the merely thinkable world' (*TPA*: 54). Thinking globally, in this sense, would require a unity of thought with the practice that produces it and yet 'thinking globally' is the most empty slogan within the rhetoric of globalization because its economic logic has already granted the product sway over the life activity and species being of those who produce. The idea that the world can be thought under this regimen is not simply an idealism; it is a concrete expression of the banalisation of human activity in the contemporary epoch.

Aesthetics alone, thankfully, cannot untangle this knot in Being because in itself it cannot encompass every aspect of the answerable deeds we perform. It demonstrates the principle of activity without constituting itself as an agential discourse (or, for Marx, the actually performed deed of revolution). It does, however, raise significant issues about cultural critique that waxes global at this juncture and here again Bakhtin may be of use. The expansion of capital along global trajectories has always entailed a concomitant cultural dynamism. Often this has been of a negative valence, as the connections between imperialism/colonialism and, for instance, orientalism have amply illustrated. The new intensities of capital have not bucked this trend, although the actual conditions of global cultural difference exceed the simplified confines of the cultural imperialism gambit. The homogenising tendencies of global cultural flows, like those discussed

by Arjun Appadurai, (see Appadurai, 1993) have been met by the diffi-
culties of differentiation, so that while the world has been 'given' a
coke (obviously, it has been sold it), 'coca-colonization' (as Salman
Rushdie once termed it) doesn't quite encapsulate the processes of
resistance and de-linking that take place in the same time/space or
chronotope of commodity culture. Even if one limits one's argument
to items of mass culture, it is clear from Cultural Studies and other
approaches that consumption cannot extinguish creativity and/or
radical activity (indeed, it can provide examples of it). Furthermore, if
globalization is not just about the economics of space, but also the
cultural dynamism of space, the exploded borders of its logic open up
the possibility of greatly expanded transnational activity in cultural
and in political formations. Yet, just as we can learn a lot from study-
ing the complex contradictions in the long history of capital's
will-to-globalization, so the possibilities of transnational cultural and
political practice would also have to be read against the achievements
and failures of anti-capitalist internationalism of at least the last 150
years. The pretensions of globalization do not necessarily make it
easier to organize, nor do they guarantee in advance that the expir-
ation of capitalist social relations is at hand (whatever was wrong or
misguided about the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels were
certainly right to stress that historical change is dependent upon
historical context and not simply wish-fulfilment).[7] But what is there
in globalization that might make culture a pertinent touchstone of
critical inquiry?

   As I have suggested above, we will always find a cultural representa-
tion for globalization, whether it is a Coke bottle, Windows 98 or a
Sony TV, but the task remains to unravel the cognitive limits on
globalization not so that those limits disappear (for they are intrinsic
to its very possibility), but rather so that no system, economic or
cultural, might stand in for global difference. The opacity of globaliza-
tion is that it uses difference for undifferentiation; it congeals culture
as a conduit for stasis; it renders the local merely a fragment of its
larger picture; it promises freedom via a worldliness that means
oppression for those who are not among the 'golden billion'.
Accepting that cultural globalization does not simply express the
dubious power relations of globalization as a history of dominance,
one must continue to doubt the relative weight of struggle it carries
and whether heterogeneity itself defies the machinations of expansion
into globality. Here, then, I will schematise cultural globalization as
distinct from economic globalization before returning us to the world

according to Bakhtin and how it may be sensed. Cultural globalization's multicultural manifestation is primarily in the form of recognition by accretion achieved in a wonderful flourish by adding the letter 's' where necessary and eschewing the upper case: literatures, not Literature; americas, not America; traditions, not Tradition. The cultural accretionist will laud almost anything as long as it represents variety. The point is rarely the position of adjudication of he who hunts and gathers this vibrant multiplicity but the fact that there are all those marvelously intricate names out there that can be added to the gumbo, or the massala, or the culinary mixture of the day. The cultural accretionist is not just an academic, literary type, but any liberal humanist who banks on multiplicity *sui generis* as cultural capital. Obviously, multiplicity or heterogeneity is absolutely vital (one only has to think of one's own manifest plurality) but there are ways to conceive the 's' in an interventionist rather than simply accretionist fashion.

The second form of cultural globalization is very similar to the first but works on the principle of consumption. Here globalization is an index of intensification in the conversion of quality into quantity, but it also foregrounds the act of consumption itself. The cultural consumer is here a subject that uses up culture as a condition of worldliness. It is not the addition of culture that is at issue, but its availability to be ingested that strikes the consumer as a very global thing to do. The act of consumption is spurred by the production of desire, globalization as desire, and comes with desire's intricate dependence on lack – a lack that remains in excess to the moment of consumption and thus requires still more of that global fix. Given the psycho-sexual provenance of such consumption it is perhaps small wonder that its most visible displacement is in a kind of ethnicist frenzy for global cookery. Indeed, the global city is defined by just this division of gastronomique labour – the migrant worker, or subaltern, or racial 'minority' cooks so that one might have 'a taste of China' as my local restaurant puts it. If you eat the world then, of course, you must be part of it.

The consumption and accretion models of globalization represent Global Lite but are nevertheless vital components of quotidian globality, the way economic globalization itself gets naturalised in everyday culture. If there is something inescapable about their reach it is because there is very little that is obviously disturbing about their practice. It should also be added that such cultural globalization does not just feed on a process but is a very active feature of it. These forms

produce identities in the global imaginary. They are easily the most prominent models of global citizenry, yet we need to complicate the processes of selving at issue. Clearly, there are already emergent critical forms of cultural globalization.

Postcolonialism, in some of its more agonistic manifestations at least, describes a significant paradox in historicising globalization. Postcolonialism is about the disjuncture and difference wrought by the experience and subsumption of the colonial moment. Here globalization is a ready index of displacement, diaspora, migration *and* intense forms of localization, national reformation and independence. The same doors that open out onto the bright lights of globalization close in on a detailed history of expansionism, resistance, revolution and readjustment. There is no space here to detail all the pitfalls of post-colonialism as a concept but it seems to me that it usefully functions as an interrogative pause about the logic of connection in globalization. The postcolonial subject has its own alibi, yet there is in this aura a problem for those heady narratives of integration. Just like those inedible concoctions of the multiculti mix, the hybridised or interstitial identities of the postcolonial flutter more than philosophies of the Same. Postcoloniality is not just the name for what cracks the colonial State, but also what confounds a logic of assimilation by projection ('you're really like me underneath'). It is the desire for that unveiling that postcoloniality questions and thus it tends to thwart the idea that the world is simply there to be revealed in all its commonality.

The fourth and most theorized form of cultural globalization, the one that seems to partake of every other (and every Other), is also the one that frequently is the effect of its own cause (and indeed constitutes the metaleptic majority) which has made it all the easier to proclaim it as the dean of discursivity or signifier of signifiers. This is postmodernism. Like postcoloniality, postmodernism focuses on a certain irreducible play across the field of difference, that identities multiply beyond their putative tactical essences (class is striated or fractured by race; gender exceeds the substance of race matters, and so on). This is where that troublesome 's' becomes interventionist. The subjects of histories never quite congeal into a subject of history, so one lesson of postmodernity for globalization is that there are subjects and worlds that resist recuperation within the oneness of the world (a multiplicity that is built into Bakhtin's notion of the cognitive/ethical). As Aijaz Ahmad has pointed out, we live in one world not three, which is a materialist injunction about the deleterious modes of global integration that the pomo/poco theorist bends to as well as against. But

that 's' ensures or at least encourages an attention to how identities get articulated so, although the postmodern has been contaminated by the zeal of its own profusion, it nevertheless grapples in the space between the aesthetic and the political, never tongue-tied to pronounce its own importance but ever dubious about whether one side or the other might render it effete. But all its irony and pastiche is much too patronising about the possibilities of social praxis in the face of material contradiction. People really don't have to go through the eye of the postmodern in order to change the material circumstances of their lives. This does not mean that such people simply live outside postmodern effects or its notorious 'condition' but that the ebullience of pomo stylization must, according to its own logic, fall short of a devoutly-wished globalization.

Globalization is about power, but not a power that accrues to all, a comment that cancels through the effortless 'we' of my sentences. How could cultural globalization possibly disable the will to power that is integral to its worldly pretensions? If it now parades the diversity of representation then who or what arbitrates the hierarchies of representation intrinsic to plurality that, after all, is no more 'blind' than Teiresias? If cultural globalization negotiates the differentiation of identity then does it have a politics of identity and what if globality itself negates this identitarian formula? Recall, once more, Bakhtin's modest proposal. The apprehension of a world is not the product of training or expertise, or sensitive analogies from advertising campaigns. Cultures are ways to live, but if Bakhtin's thoughts on aesthetic process and the relations of I and Other remain provocative, it is because the recognition of another culture does not necessarily constitute a global event of answerability. Living the differences of the world, like living aesthetically, would require a different relationship to other cultures than the accretionist and consumption models. So what is Bakhtin's lesson for cultures of globalization?

The Bakhtinian shorthand for productively thinking the world in this way would be 'dialogise'! Yet this too would have to be qualified, since there is already plenty of evidence that over-exuberance about the 'dialogue' in dialogism can just as easily jump over real difference and hierarchy in the world as a smile from Ronald McDonald. Cultural globalization often wants the Other to talk back, but only on terms constructed by the 'I' (or let us say, the North or the Western hemisphere of the globe to give it geopolitical context). The invocation of dialogism, then, will continue to be an empty gambit if the axiological function of the Other in the answerable act remains an object and

not a co-participant (and this would require a much greater dialogical imagination than that which globalization embodies at this time). A culture of globalization should, on the one hand, be understood in the way it engages the contradictory sense of the world resplendent in the economic logic of globalization characterized above and, on the other, be cognisant of the modest yet important role it can play in actively thinking differences in the world. The assumption of differences is not enough because dialogism is agonistic: it refers to dynamic struggles over difference, something that doesn't necessarily melt borders but throws into relief the logic of their construction and interaction.

The world according to Bakhtin does not, then, solve the impasse in cultural globalization and certainly does not present a blueprint for dismantling the daunting machinery of global capital. Bakhtin does, however, alert us to the constitutive contradictions of the world that are common to both. These can be read both as logical contradictions in how the world is rendered for globalization and as a provocation to analyse more seriously the terms of cognition and imagination in the worlds we make. The failure of globalization is not only the horror of economic hierarchy it brings, but the absence of a cognitive correlative for its apprehension. This cannot be conjured out of the philosopher's hat, just as culture cannot simply be retooled to be virulently anti-capitalist (there are obviously concepts of culture that are coterminous with the development and expansion of capitalism itself) but Bakhtin's warning is that the world is not realized by naming it. His world has chronotopes (the time/space of comprehension), bodies and borders, and conditions of answerability that have yet to be met by anything like the world according to globalization. And so any scientific critique of the historical emergence of globalization as a social force (which Bakhtin demonstrably does not provide) might usefully be tempered by Bakhtin's thoughts on how we might ground art and activity as something more than an alibi for being, or being 'global' in this age. Far from being a distraction, such thinking keeps alive capacities for change that don't simply mirror the imaginary relations of globalization as currently construed. It actively presages a world according to a different sense of participation and responsibility, but a world that is not just predictive or finalised. At the very least, it is a world to win.

Notes

1 This is, of course, where the case for economics runs up against the argument for philosophy. I will not be using Bakhtin to arbitrate the two in the

discussion that follows but to see in what sense a cognitive/ethical principle is at stake in what globalization can become. For a related, if gestural, reading of the world according to philosophy, see Jean-Luc Nancy (1997).

2   Brennan suggests that cosmopolitanism has been contaminated from the outset by its development within the terms of worldliness provided by colonialism and imperialism. Clearly, this represents an *unheimlich* existence for a more egalitarian world.

3   Globalization is a wonderful and frightening example of Chakrabarty's pointed critique. What could better illustrate asymmetrical ignorance than the difference between the pronouncements of the avatars of globalization and the world to which it refers?

4   I should point out that, while the proponents of globalization are concerned with what is primarily an economic logic, some of their chief critics often accept the terms of globalization in offering an alternative. It is my contention that to accept the terms of globalization is already to displace the question of the cognitive aporia that girds globalization in the first place.

5   For more on the nature of this phenomenon, see, e.g. Weiss (1997). Obviously, the formula for globalization looks different according to the criteria used. If, for example, one based the 'existence' of globalization on financialization and currency speculation, there would be little doubt that the economic relations of the globe have seen a massive restructuring (similar, some might say, to the rise of the casino).

6   Clearly I am not arguing that heavy industry does not play a significant role in contemporary economic activity (General Motors, for instance, remains one of the largest companies on Earth) but it does not provide the best example of capital mobility under the sign of globalization. It is somewhat ironic, therefore, that Chris Harman, in an otherwise recondite analysis of the term and its condition, pivots his critique on the relative immobility of productive capital within heavy industry. It seems to me the 'new orthodoxy' is not best undermined by reference to an old one; see Harman (1996).

7   Some critics are more optimistic than others on this point. Brecher and Costello, for instance, have argued for a 'globalization from below'. Again, while I am in agreement with the production of counter-hegemonic resistance formations these cannot appear as a mirror of the operative logic of globalization. Delinking would have to be accompanied by de-thinking on this point; see Brecher and Costello (1994).

2

Bakhtin's Dialogism Reconsidered through Hegel's 'Monologism': the Dialectical Foundation of Aesthetics and Ideology in Contemporary Human Sciences*

Jean-François Côté

The problem that I would like to outline here may at first glance seem to be quite marginal in the field of Bakhtinian studies. As is often the case, however, the margins may disclose some fundamental issues. This marginal problem concerns the relation – and I would add immediately the *ambiguous* relation – of Bakhtin's thought to Hegel's philosophy. This problem can be said to be marginal in Bakhtin's thought itself, since he never really addressed it in a fully developed manner – unlike the way he (or one or the other of the various members of the 'Bakhtin Circle') addressed the problem of Saussurian linguistics, formalist literary theory, or Freudian psychoanalysis, for instance. Most of what Bakhtin thought about Hegel's philosophy has to be gleaned from scattered remarks in his writings on other subjects, or deduced from the definitions he gives of his main aesthetic, ethical or logical (epistemological) concepts. While I will be using these two procedures to try to highlight what I consider to be very important for a more complete understanding of the implications of Bakhtin's thought for the contemporary human sciences, I will immediately summarize what I consider to be the main point at stake in the discussion that follows: it seems to me that if we are to grasp the real significance of the fundamental notions of dialogue and dialogism elaborated by Bakhtin throughout his works – in relation to what

remains an incomplete philosophy – we also have to consider the differences and similarities that exist between these notions and Hegel's thought. To put it more precisely, the Bakhtinian notions of dialogue and dialogism can be best understood if we relate them to the Hegelian dialectic, rather than rejecting any possibility of mediation between them. In other words, what I hope to establish by this confrontation of Bakhtin's thought with Hegel's philosophy is the clear relation between dialectic, dialogism and dialogue. I think that it is only through an investigation of the relation between these three notions that we can fully appreciate Bakhtin's debt to Hegel and how Bakhtin's original approach helps us to re-actualize Hegel's thought in a critical fashion, in order to theorize some aspects of our own social, cultural and historical life, particularly according to the analytical enterprise of the human sciences.[1]

Bakhtin on Hegel: convergent points of view

It would seem that an examination of Bakhtin's relationship to Hegel could be a rather short enterprise, if not simply a dead-end, if one subscribed to the well-known views of some major commentators. Michael Holquist, for one, states the problem quite clearly when he refers to Bakhtin's philosophical background, and theoretical horizon, as being 'militantly *anti*-Hegelian' (1990: 16).[2] Holquist's contention is based on the Marburg school's neo-Kantian philosophy that spread through the German and Russian universities from the late nineteenth century on, a movement that supposedly swept away all forms of Hegelianism in favour of the full recognition of the achievements of the natural sciences. It seems that when the analysis of '*matter*' proved so successful as to redraw our entire representation of the '*world*', the philosophical analysis of '*spirit*', and the claim that the latter could further our understanding of the former became wishful thinking at best. It would have quickly been forgotten in the light of a new episte-mology, entirely freed from any non-positivistic account of the problem of the '*mind*'.[3] The theory of knowledge of the natural sciences then apparently became a guarantee of the definitive split between *mind* and *world*. Holquist contends that Bakhtin accepted this as the ground of his own epistemology, which led to the development of his notion of dialogism.[4]

While Holquist is probably right that dialogism refers to the funda-mental process of Bakhtin's theory of knowledge, we should not confuse this with Bakhtin's general orientation which is quite distinct

from that of the natural sciences. In fact, as Bakhtin would himself recognize in an important late fragmentary text of the 1970s entitled 'Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences' (*SG*: 159–70), his notion of dialogism was developed in direct opposition to the methodology of the natural sciences:

> The interpretation of symbolic structures is forced into an infinity of symbolic contextual meanings and therefore it cannot be scientific in the way precise sciences are scientific. The interpretation of contextual meanings cannot be scientific, but it is profoundly cognitive. It can directly serve practice, practice that deals with things ... The exact sciences constitute a monologic form of knowledge: the intellect contemplates a *thing* and expounds upon it. There is only one subject here – cognizing (contemplating) and speaking (expounding). In opposition to the subject there is only a *voiceless thing*. Any object of knowledge (including man) can be perceived and studied as a thing. But a subject as such cannot be perceived and studied as a thing, for as a subject it cannot, while remaining a subject, becomes voiceless, and, consequently, cognition of it can only be *dialogic*. (*SG*: 160–1; emphasis in the original)

Bakhtin's statement requires many modifications, to which we will return in due course. For the moment, let us assume that it draws at least a clear distinction on the epistemological level as to what differentiates the natural sciences from Bakhtin's own analysis of 'the world'. One cannot appeal to a late re-orientation in Bakhtin's thought that would justify Holquist's evaluation of his earlier position. If something has to be said about Bakhtin's earlier ideas, it is that they were closer to an idealist existential philosophy which was no less opposed to any simple 'positive' or 'positivistic' approach to the world (as one can see from *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (*TPA*), that important posthumous work written between 1919 and 1921). Moreover, Bakhtin's early concentration on aesthetic phenomena – not to mention his deep personal religious convictions[5] – strongly favoured a clear interest in the 'spiritual productions' of the human mind, something which is, I think, again fundamentally opposed to the less speculative interest of natural sciences. We can already see an initial proximity between Bakhtin and Hegel, which has been recognized, at least partially, by Holquist himself.

Holquist, along with Peter Zima, have indeed acknowledged a link between Bakhtin and Hegel in the former's early conceptions on

aesthetics, going as far as to present, through a cross-reference to Lukács, the idea of 'patent filiations in Bakhtin's concept of novelness to certain key ideas of Hegel'.[6] While the 'history of consciousness' gives Bakhtin, the young Lukács and Hegel a common rooting within a phenomenology of mind, their respective later orientations show some radically different versions of its development. According to Holquist, the difference is that:

> … instead of the unitary and constantly upward-moving surge of progressive consciousness that we find in Hegel and Lukács, [Bakhtin's] dialogism conceives history as a constant contest between monologue and dialogue, with the possibility of reversions always present. The novel is the characteristic text of a particular stage in the history of consciousness not because it marks the self's discovery of itself, but because it manifests the self's discovery of the other. (Holquist, 1990: 75)

I think that we find here the real starting point for a discussion of further similarities between Hegel and Bakhtin, as well as clear evidence of some very important differences between them – neither of which are, however, located exactly where Holquist would like them to be. We can indeed agree with Holquist that it is through an elucidation of the notions of monologue and dialogue, as well as in their interplay and their 'possibility of always present reversions', that one finds the originality of Bakhtin's own phenomenological enterprise. But can we at the same time conclude from this that the main difference with Hegel's philosophy is simply that the latter 'marks the self's discovery of itself', whereas the former would manifest 'the self's discovery of the other'? I think this question requires a better evaluation of the Hegelian dialectic on the one hand and a fuller consideration of the implications of Bakhtin's notions of dialogism and monologism on the other. To anticipate the last sections of this chapter, we must note that Bakhtin's emphasis on the presence of the 'other' in relation to the 'self' does not mean that the revelation or discovery of this 'other' represents the final word in the process of being. This would simply indicate that Bakhtin's theorizing leads to the constitution of a theory of *alienation*.[7] Similarly, while centred on the process of self-consciousness and self-cognition, Hegel's dialectic does include reflection about 'otherness', precisely because this process involves the (trans)formation of the self, since it would otherwise simply lead to the constitution of a theory of *solipsism* (a self

totally closed on itself). Let us now turn to a closer examination of Bakhtin's definitions of 'dialogism' and 'monologism' in relation to his broader philosophical position.

Bakhtin's dialogism, and its ambivalence towards Hegel's dialectic

If one considers Bakhtin's direct comments on Hegel's dialectic, one may again be tempted to bring our case to a rapid conclusion. It seems indeed that Bakhtin is defining his own phenomenological perspective, which he wants bluntly to oppose to that of Hegel. This is particularly clear in part of the late manuscript to which we referred earlier:

> Dialectics was born of a dialogue so as to return again to dialogue on a higher level (a dialogue of *personalities*) … If we transform dialogue into one continuous text, that is, erase the division between voices (changes of speaking subjects), which is possible at the extreme ([as in] Hegel's monological dialectic), then the deep-seated (infinite) contextual meaning disappears (we hit the bottom, reach a standstill). ('Methodology' in *SG*: 162)

This passage is very interesting for many reasons. First, it marks an apparent opposition between Bakhtin and Hegel on the idea of dialectic, which in its Hegelian form is supposedly cut off from its origins in dialogue and abstracted into a dialogue not of persons, but of 'personalities'. Second, it describes this Hegelian conception as a 'monological dialectic', which suggests a qualification of dialectic that needs to be explained. This is at least partially done when we read that in the 'monological dialectic' dialogue is transformed into one continuous voice (or text) in which the divisions between voices are erased. Third, it presents a phenomenological position that considers a 'deep-seated (*infinite*) contextual meaning' (my emphasis) to be foremost in understanding the nature of dialogue.

I will begin by examining this third aspect, in order to make it clear that we are not dealing here with a simple identification of dialogism and dialogue. The 'contextual meaning' that gives dialogism its 'deep-seatedness' in dialogue is not dialogue itself but rather our possible *perception* of an event called 'dialogue', which describes the phenomenological structure of this event. In fact, the dialogic dimension of the event can equally apply to both monologue and dialogue, in so far

as they both refer to events which take place existentially 'in the world', as 'unitary' and 'once occurring' acts, as well as having a relation to a specific 'contextual meaning'.[8] Moreover, the process that Bakhtin calls 'monologization' is a prerequisite for a singular consciousness to enter into either a dialogue or a monologue. This process is at work, for instance, in aesthetic creation, in a way that entails, in Bakhtin's words, a 'gradual obliteration of authors as bearers of others' words'. He describes as follows:

> Others' words become anonymous and are assimilated (in reworked form, of course); consciousness is *monologized*. Primary dialogic relations to others' words are also obliterated – they are, as it were, taken in, absorbed into assimilated others' words (passing through the stage of 'one's own/others' words'). Creative consciousness, when monologized, is supplemented by anonymous authors. This process of monologization is very important. Then this monologised consciousness enters as one single whole into a new dialogue (with the new external voices of others). ('Methodology' in *SG*: 163; emphasis in the original)

The explanation of the process of monologization, important as it is in describing how participation in a dialogue is made possible for the individual (through '*creative consciousness*'), can be a little troubling if we are to understand how it is differentiated from dialogism. Since it seems to be at work in the way we, as individuals, attain our personal 'volitional-emotional' particularity in and through language by our speech acts, it would make of dialogism a co-equal moment in this process. It is not speaking, but *understanding* which is then particularly and specifically implied.[9] Despite this difficulty in drawing a precise line of demarcation between monologism and dialogism, since they both seem equally implied in the phenomenological structure of 'language-events', the advantage of this explanation is that it shows how 'monologism' is not so much an opposition, as a complement to dialogism. Actually, we can even suggest that 'monologism' is but the structure of a particular event (speech act) that is 'waiting' to be *understood dialogically*.[10]

This statement illuminates the second aspect described above, concerning Hegel's 'monological dialectic' that Bakhtin criticized for transforming 'many voices into one'. But what is revealed here to a certain extent goes against Bakhtin's position, for it is due to a *lack of dialogical understanding* that Hegel's voice is left (or rendered)

'monological'. Indeed, we can hardly accept Bakhtin's critique on this point, because of his own principles regarding the nature of dialogue itself, which always require us to understand any kind of speech act according to our *response* or *answer* (as well as its own status as a rejoinder). Reflecting on the more general problem of 'speech genres', Bakhtin remarks:

> The boundaries of each concrete utterance as a unit of speech communication are determined by a *change of speaking subjects*, that is, a change of speakers. Any utterance – from a short (single-word) rejoinder in everyday dialogue to the large novel or scientific treatise – has, so to speak, an absolute beginning and an absolute end: its beginning is preceded by utterances of others, and its end is followed by the responsive utterances of others (or, although it may be silent, others' active responsive understanding, or, finally, a responsive action based on this understanding). The speaker ends his utterance in order to relinquish the floor to the other or to make room for the other's active responsive understanding. ('The Problem of Speech Genres' in *SG*: 71; emphasis in the original)

Bearing this broad consideration in mind, it is difficult to see how Hegel's philosophy could not be considered part of a dialogue taking place with other philosophies of his time (and a dialogue in the history of philosophy as well). It would be just as difficult to consider his 'monologue' to be unanswered or 'unresponded'. It would be unfair, though, to reproach Bakhtin for a failure to understand Hegel's voice, and to refuse to enter into a dialogue with it. Rather, we can assume that beyond the superficial direct critique of Hegel, Bakhtin in fact *responded actively* and more often *implicitly* to Hegelian philosophy in his own works (that is, he *understood* it).[11] But our explanation, however unjustified it may appear at first glance, has made it possible for us to advance in our understanding of Bakhtin's position *vis-à-vis* Hegel's philosophy. Returning to the first aspect, that Hegel's dialectic was cut-off from its origins in dialogue, and abstracted in a dialogue of 'personalities' and not of 'persons', we can suggest a quite different understanding of what is at stake here: Bakhtin identifies with an important aspect of Hegel's philosophy that not only considers *dialectic* as the *essential structure of experience* as such, but insists on its actual consequences in defining an *existential* philosophy that combines comprehension of the world with the comprehension of language through the aesthetic production (or poetic) of a meaningful

expression. The 'standstill' reached by dialectics in its abstraction from dialogue is really inhabited by 'movement', and asks in fact for a new 'departure' toward further dialogue.

The idea that dialogism refers to the necessity of dialogue is quite common to readers of Bakhtin's works; what we have emphasised here, though, should allow us to see monologue, equally considered as a language event, also to be determined by dialogism. A second idea, which is generally accepted, refers to the internal dialogism of language, of words, of forms of language, of speech genres, since they are seen to present the 'objective' aspect of the realization of language events. The third idea of explicitly linking dialogism to its ontological foundation in dialectic is, however, much less common; but it is this last idea, I shall argue, that we find in Bakhtin's ontological claim. This also partially masks the nature of the '*Being*' implied by his philosophy.

Bakhtin's existential philosophy, the main principles of which are expressed in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, as well as throughout his works on the aesthetic of the novel, is founded essentially on the recognition of '… the act … actually performed in Being' (*TPA*: 12). Bakhtin goes quite a long way in his examination of the participation of any singular or individual act in regard to its ontological status. For him, every moment of *existence* bears this ontological reference, a situation which he explicitly acknowledges as the real possibility of a 'first philosophy', that is to say, of a fundamental reflection on Being.[12] When one ponders some of its implications, this requirement to consider the ontological component of every 'actually performed act' could well be seen as a 'monological' conception of being. But only if we were unaware of the role played by monologism in the very structure of the event as such, and of the co-equal moment of dialogism that permits linking it to something other than itself (that is, its ontological grounding in Being).[13] In fact, the dialogism implied in this structure exists *between* universal Being and its particular 'eventness', while monologism allows us to perceive the singularity of the 'eventness' as it departs from the universality of Being. The 'actually performed act' here is the one which is, according to Bakhtin, essentially considered in its '*responsiveness*' or its '*answerability*'.[14] At this point we retrieve the idea of dialogism (and of dialogue or monologue), as well as monologism, as they participate in every 'actually performed act', in every moment of existence. This general idea, expressed here in terms of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, is strikingly similar to the idea that Hegel develops when he explains the relation that unites essence and existence.[15]

In Hegel's philosophy the relation of essence and existence, or rather the *foundation* of existence in its essence, is important because the ontological definition of existence clearly marks 'the unity of identity and difference'.[16] For Hegel the ontological structure of the experience of consciousness is essentially *dialectical*.[17] It is nothing else than the dialectic, understood as the *foundation* as well as the *essential structure* of human existence that constitutes the real definition of experience (or of the experience of consciousness). The *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as well as the 'doctrine of the concept' developed in *The Science of Logic*, dialectic is the fundamental process at work both for essence and existence.[18]

What this means for the relation between dialectic, dialogism and dialogue is the following: dialectic stands as the essential (or ontological) structure of experience, in the same way as dialogue stands as the central feature of existence. But it is dialogism that mediates between them in the understanding of their mutual relation – to the extent that this relation also implies the understanding of monologue, monologism and the reference to a unitary structure, which is that of dialectical ontology. Bakhtin thus developed his notion of dialogism to reaffirm the possibility that the relation between dialectic and dialogue be elucidated not only for the benefit of the existential dimension of experience, but also for the benefit of our understanding its essential dimension which had first been put forward by Hegel. The fact that we can associate Bakhtin's thought with Hegel's philosophy, in this respect, above all means that we have to consider how and why the two enterprises differ so greatly in other areas. We will explore some of the manifold implications of this.

Bakhtin's existential philosophy and Hegel's essential dialectic: logic and aesthetics

Bakhtin's central opposition to Hegel apparently lies in the former's insistence on locating the existential aspect of any aesthetic creation in the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*), or the requirement of positing to this as the true location of any meaningful expression.[19] But again, this opposition is significantly reduced if we consider that it is *concrete determination*, as it happens both logically and historically, which is the real movement of Hegelian dialectic, on the one hand, and on the other that Bakhtin's dialogism functions in relation to historically reproduced, existing cultural forms. Furthermore, aesthetic production itself produces a 'sublation' of social languages, a 'sublation' to be

considered in their representation.[20] This is not to say, though, that the two enterprises, being rooted in a dialectical ontology for the analysis of existence, will follow exactly the same path. But the difference here is nonetheless instructive for our understanding of both philosophers.

Bakhtin's work on the novel is opposed to Hegel's philosophy in at least two ways. Firstly, being so well linked to his 'philosophy of the act', Bakhtin's work considers the essential significance of the work of art, whereas Hegel, in his *Aesthetic*, was sceptical about the possibility of assessing the essential significance of the work of art of his own time, i.e. the capacity of the work of art to express truth. Secondly, while acknowledging the novel as an art form, Hegel never perceived its intrinsic value in understanding the poetic dimension of (social) life.[21] But it is precisely on these two levels that Bakhtin's works appear radically to criticise, and thus to understand dialogically and dialectically, both Hegel's judgements in aesthetics and the re-actualized social or cultural (and eventually, historical) significance of the work of art, particularly the novel, in a context that is totally different from that of Hegel.

The problematic of the Hegelian aesthetic is defined on the historical level by using the Aristotelian principles of the scalar evaluation of poetics. For Aristotle, the poetic act is understood according to its capacity to enlarge, diminish, or give a 'just' representation of its object (in the characters of tragedy, comedy or 'drama' respectively) (Aristotle, 1987: 2–4). Hegel (1975) develops this evaluation on the level of an historical vision of the great periods of aesthetic production: symbolism, classicism and then contemporary romanticism, the different moments where idea and form either coincide or not. Form exceeds the idea in symbolism, the idea and form coincide in classicism, and the idea exceeds the form in romanticism. Thus, in moving from Aristotle to Hegel we not only find that the proper object of aesthetic reflection has been transformed (it has been enriched by a historical dimension), but also that the very meaning of aesthetic production has been displaced (in passing from the *representation* of the 'object' to the *presentation* of the 'idea').[22] It is in this context that art loses its status of figuring 'Absolute spirit' – as religion will also lose it after art, since it is science which from then on bears the task of achieving the 'presentation' of the idea. Bakhtin does not at all reject this last proposition. Bakhtin situates his own enterprise of *understanding* art according to a scientific frame of reference, but in so doing, he focuses on the explanation of the social dimension of the act

of creation in aesthetics, an aspect that had not exactly been neglected in Hegel's *Aesthetics,*[23] but which had at least not been elaborated to its full, dialectical, potential. Indeed, (and this is especially true when Hegel refers to the 'subjective art' of his time) it does not seem that the individuality of the artist could reach a wider spiritual context that would allow us to see in the artistic work either the specific dialogical dimension that it displays in the relation of the writer to the social or ideological context (as Bakhtin would show for the novel), or the historical transformation realized through artistic expression. The latter perception is made possible by the concept of 'chronotope' used in Bakhtin's phenomenology of the novel.

It is nevertheless important to remember that the progression of these 'moments' of objective spirit always happens, for Hegel, as for Bakhtin, in the relation between the (individual) singularity of the act and the (spiritual) universality in which it participates. In addition, the dialectic that animates this potentially conflictual relation always finds its resolution within the development of a 'renewed' spiritual universality – or a new form of objective spirit. What is of interest here, is the way Bakhtin himself envisions the relations between the aesthetic act in its singularity and ideology, in a relatively similar context, i.e. it evaluates the scalar relations between the singular expression and its ideological context in developing new analytical categories applied to historical experience. As Ken Hirschkop (1989) has shown, in 'On the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse' Bakhtin presents a general, historical account of aesthetic development where the characters of the 'monoglossia' of the Greek world, the 'polyglossia' of the Roman world and, finally, the 'heteroglossia' of the modern world[24] appear respectively. These categories deal with aesthetic individualities that are then no longer merely individual, but rather social, cultural and historical. Starting from this historical categorization, we can see that the relations between aesthetic creation and the social world, its 'spiritual' configuration as it appears according to the positions developed by the singular act in these contexts, and the possibilities of both monologism and dialogism as they relate to these contexts. In affirming the ideological context through singular expression (which would represent the ideological position of monologism) or, on the contrary, in contradicting this ideological context (which represents the position of dialogism), each singular aesthetic expression determines a specific 'ethical' – or, rather *ideological*[25] – position which relates it to a larger spiritual context. This is precisely where Bakhtin helps to re-open the modern historical judgement of the 'subjective' content of art.

This aspect of the relations between aesthetics and ethics also parallels Hegel's analysis, even though they differ as to their respective teleological destinations. On this level, however, we should not suppose that Bakhtin's perspective is free of teleology. It is, for instance, according to a 'decisive evolution' of the novel that Dostoevsky's work appears ('... without question *a step forward* in the development of the Russian and European novel') (*PDP*: 35), and it is always according to a long socio-historical maturation that a particular aesthetic form is revealed.[26] But there is a 'beyond' to dialogism strictly speaking, seen in the way a singular expression manages to 'overcome' its own time, and contributes to the formation of a higher spiritual form in such a way that its singularity belongs to a larger universality. In showing how Dostoevsky's poetics disclose a full dialogical dimension,[27] for instance, or in proposing that Rabelais's medieval world has to be approached much differently than previously for its full contribution to the culture of the Renaissance to be appreciated,[28] Bakhtin not only criticizes some shortcomings of Hegel's aesthetics, but he also calls for a serious revaluation of some historical judgements, even of the whole philosophy of history that culminated in Hegel's system of thought.[29] This problem of what Bakhtin calls 'great time',[30] of temporality and of historicity, remains on the agenda, since Hegel could not have the last word on the history, and on the conception of history, that came after him.[31] But let us look further at how Bakhtin responds to Hegel on this level. It is according to this that the respective enterprises of Hegel and Bakhtin can again be seen as parallel, and that Bakhtin's aesthetic analysis (particularly of Rabelais and Dostoevsky) finds its real meaning. It is also in this sense that the *historical dialectic* that inhabits the creation of aesthetic forms, as is expressed in his '*theory of the novel*', must be perceived, and that Bakhtin's contribution to the problematic of the human sciences can finally be evaluated.

Aesthetics and ideology from the point of view of a dialectical ontology

The study of the relations between aesthetics and ideology constitutes, in my view, Bakhtin's greatest innovation in understanding the historical development of culture. Identifying the domain of ideology as the place where the singular expressive act meets the 'objective spirit' in which it participates (either positively or negatively), this offers a solution to the important question of the determination of *historical*

individualities.[32] This question sometimes finds exemplary formulation in Bakhtin, as in the series of social, cultural and historical 'backgrounds' for the expression of Rabelais's novelistic discourse, each time witnessing its concrete anchoring (in the words used, those of the 'immediate' context, to those of the Picrocholine war, to those, finally, of the '… *larger individuality, encompassing all, universal*' of Rabelais's era) (*RW*: 447). Here, it is the decomposition of expressive moments in their various locations, be they singular (in the novelistic discourse of Rabelais), or dialogical (in the position that Rabelais adopted towards the culture of his own era) and, finally, dialectical (in that it witnesses, and contributes to the historical transformation which is occurring in European culture at the time), which provides an understanding of the expression. For Bakhtin, one has to reconcile the singular act and what it expresses with the idea of a 'universal history', through the mediating term of the dialogical relation of an author to his or her socio-historical context. Here, 'universal history', as the ultimate locus of the totalisation of meaning for the understanding of expression, remains 'open' – or, rather, 'infinite'; it always expresses for Bakhtin the situation of organization and expression of the space and time relations of human experience. This is what makes the understanding of this development of human experience possible, and at the same time situates the latter in a specific ideological relation to its own time, as well as the dynamics of the dialectical ontology which allows our *understanding* to proceed that way. But it is also what makes historical judgement difficult from the point of view of an analysis of aesthetics, and posits it as a problem. One cannot be, at this point, satisfied with the mere display of the logic of 'dialogism' at work in aesthetic production, or of the ethical goal of 'dialogue', and the formal understanding with which they provide us for dealing with this problem.

The dialogical relation then represents, as it takes form in ideology, the *middle term* between dialectic and expression (or between the ontological grounding of experience and the concrete existence of the expression). This dialogical relation is situated and constituted in the ideological *milieu* between the 'logical' and 'aesthetic' dimensions of experience. This aspect of the analysis of aesthetic production is not always totally clear in Bakhtin's work, one of the problems being the lack of an explicit (or categorical) distinction between style and genre.[33] If Bakhtin recognizes, immediately so to speak, an ethical dimension of the ontological structure that he describes – or, to put it differently, if he fails to adequately stress the existence of these two different dimensions of experience – it is, among other things, because

he might have been blinded, to a certain extent, by the neo-Kantian problematic inherited from Hermann Cohen's philosophy. Since this problematic highlights only some aspects of a relation produced by a dialectical ontology, in posing that 'alterity' it is defined by the external relation of the individual to the 'other'.[34] From this point of view, the alterity of this 'other individual' is only, so to speak, a 'secondary' alterity; it constitutes a term that Lacanian psychoanalysis (in this also an heir of Hegelian dialectical ontology), calls alterity with a 'small a', in contradistinction to a first or more fundamental alterity called the 'big Other'.[35] But when Bakhtin speaks of the 'outsideness' [*vnenakhodimost*'] necessary for aesthetic production as the typical relation of the author and the hero, the 'alterity' that is in question is not an empirical alterity (the 'small *a*'), but really an imaginary or symbolic alterity ('big Other'). The distinction between these two forms of alterity calls for the recognition of the three dimensions of experience designated by the terms 'dialogue', 'dialogism' and 'dialectic', and for the phenomenological structure from which they can be deduced . But it also requires the recognition of the expressive act to be itself understood according to ideological positions which modulate or qualify this relation, and which avoids assuming that only the phenomenal level of 'dialogue' represents the ultimate account of any ideological relation, but rather visualises the 'historical dialogue' that is taking place in aesthetic production.

It is precisely the moment of *understanding* that associates such a singularity, in its dialogical relation, with what it is not in itself – that is, to what has made it possible ontologically, as well as the ideology in which it dialogically participates. This is a principle that Bakhtin himself uses in the understanding of aesthetic productions, in underlining an author's participation of the discursive or novelistic universe in its era (as with Dostoevsky and Rabelais), and to its wider participation in 'universal history' (of the novel, or of humanity). It is, then, in highlighting the dialogical relation between the author and his or her ideological context that dialectical ontology is reaffirmed in what Bakhtin calls the 'great temporality' of history. This latter stages not simply individual singularities, but rather singularities that take the form of 'historical figures' (or of 'personalities'), in a so to speak 'second level' understanding undertaken by 'historical poetics'. Only some aspects of this project are delineated by Bakhtin himself.[36] It is this historical poetics that contains an actual phenomenology of the novel that borrows extensively, if only implicitly, from Hegelian phenomenology, in presenting different characters, their succession in

historical time and their avatars (appearing, disappearing, reappearing or returning, transforming themselves, and so on).

That said, it is also important to note that the general aesthetic principles that we find in Aristotle and Hegel have some equivalents in ethics. For Aristotle, the ethical principle of 'just measure', the one located between defect and excess, constitutes the ethical aim (and is the basis for what he calls the 'moral virtue'). We here see the relatively paradoxical relation that the aesthetic act has with ethical deed, since comic or tragic representations refer precisely to categories that purposively 'deform' 'just measure'. This is precisely due to the fact that we are not, in the aesthetic dimension, evaluating the act in its immediate relation to ethics, but rather the act according to the type of *representation* that it gives rise to.[37] The way Hegel presents the problem is also very interesting from this point of view: in chapter 6 of the *Phenomenology*, where he deals with the forms of objective spirit, he clearly establishes the possibilities which will reappear in his aesthetics. The way spirit realizes itself is understood according to the three possibilities offered in (re)presentation, that is to say, the realization of its form is either inferior, equal, or superior to the ethical idea that it presents. The originality of Hegel, compared to Aristotle, is again to invest the ethical dimension with a historical content and an 'ideal' determination. This means that the possibilities of the ethical realization of spirit give way to great historical figures, which witness the progression of objective spirit, and also lead to the vision of a historical dynamic where the 'ideal' is constantly facing 'reality'. We should briefly recall that in the Hegelian schema the different moments of *ethic*, *culture* and *morality*, distinct on the historical level, represent, respectively, the progression of objective spirit towards the realization of its definitive form. At each of these historical 'steps', the singular act bears a specific ethical content, which is either inferior, equal, or superior to the given spiritual context. In the context of 'ethical life', where it is the community (that is, the common mores) who speak through the individual, the conflict bursts out when an individuality confronts the moral law of the community – as in the tragedies of Antiquity, such as Sophocles' *Antigone*, which represent these dramatic conflicts. In the different ethical context of *culture* (that is to say, of 'spirit alien to itself', as Hegel (1977) defines it), the *Enlightenment* presents the general struggle of spirit against 'superstition' (religion). It is finally in the *Principles of the Philosophy of Right*, that the coincidence of the rational and the real will be proclaimed and demonstrated, that which makes of modern bourgeois society the socio-historical apex of

'morality' (in the system of *Sittlichkeit*). Obviously, we have to understand that today, with the gradual destruction of the great principles of modern bourgeois society, the coincidence between the ideal and real has been displaced, a situation which also displaces the problem of evaluating the ideological and historical situation of our time. This opens the whole problematic of the human sciences, and of a 'postmodern' view of historical development.

One way of looking at the ideological and historical situation of our time from the point of view of aesthetic productions is to bring back the Bakhtinian distinction between the 'official' and the 'popular' that proved so crucial in understanding the advent of the historical transformation of the Renaissance. In expounding the full social dynamics of aesthetic productions since, say, the middle of the nineteenth century according to the requirement of an historical understanding of this development, one could envision how aesthetic production contributes to an understanding of our own ideological and historical situation. Many phenomena are to be considered here. The 'decline' of fine arts in Hegel's epoch, which gives way to 'humour' as it is simply subjectively understood, appears in the light of Bakhtin's reflection on laughter and its representation, as a possible renewal of the spiritual context of a 'post-bourgeois' era in popular expressions. Similarly, the 'anti-bourgeois' art of aesthetic modernity in the fine arts calls for an evaluation of what is at stake there in terms of the ideological and historical developments of contemporary culture. If the task of *historical poetics* is to develop a more general understanding of this dimension in understanding the relation of meaning to universal history, the concept of the chronotope appears to be central for grasping the real possibility of the dynamic at work in aesthetic creation. The chronotope allows us to see the emergence of singular cultural expressions, which already possess an 'historical individuality' because of their existence as aesthetic forms, and also allows us to conceive the 'trans-historical' relations of these forms among themselves. This can be understood as a dialogue of cultural and literary traditions which put into practice the dialogism and dialectic of meaning.[38]

In this respect, our capacity to understand the *dialogical* relation that takes place between the singular act and its specific ideological context[39] yields to the larger problem of the formation and succession of 'historical individualities' (or of what Hegelian phenomenology calls the different 'figures of consciousness'). Bakhtinian dialogical understanding thus allows recognition of a historical dialectic which is active precisely in the context of an aesthetic work that can be in

conflict with the ruling ideology of its time. Dialectical history is represented by the fact that this work announces, by its negative critique, the positive advent of a 'new world'.[40]

Bakhtin and the human sciences

I will conclude briefly by saying that the importance of Bakhtin's work for the development of the the human sciences is best perceived by repositioning the relation between the singularity of the expression and the universal resonance of the former's meaning. In showing how the dialogical relation is understood according to its ideological positioning, as well as how this ideological positioning shows a development of culture that has to be understood, in its turn, according its historical transformation, Bakhtin pleads for a re-opening of our understanding of history as a whole. It is this idea that brings us back to the relation of Bakhtin and Hegel. The historical 'opening' asked for by Bakhtin seems to be categorically opposed to Hegel. And this opposition is truly 'categorical', since it is an opposition between two dimensions of experience; it is an opposition that sees aesthetic sensibility at work in creative expression in its relation to theoretical conceptualisation at work in understanding. The (re)opening of history towards the future that Bakhtin is calling for has to do with the poetic act, that is aesthetic creation, whereas Hegel, in the apparent 'closing' of history in his own time, was rather stating the conceptual position of theoretical knowledge, the one that can only happen in the *aftermath* of events (as the owl of Minerva …).

We should not, however, forget that the moment of theoretical understanding is not absent from Bakhtin's work, since it appears for him as a modality of symbolic presentation, as a constituent part of the problematic of *understanding*.[41] One might think that the respective aims of Bakhtin and Hegel are very different, to the extent that understanding, as it is conceived by Bakhtin, asks for an opening of history more than a 'definitive' judgement of it. But the relation of Bakhtin to Hegel is nevertheless still significant in this respect: the Hegelian 'closure' of history clinging, like any utterance in a dialogue situation, to a necessary 'new opening', calls for the *formation* (*Bildung*) of a new form of spirit. Understanding is necessarily achieved in the form of an expression, and this expression in turn calls for understanding. And it is exactly the 'death' and 'rebirth' of meaning, if not of forms of expressions, as they appear in the *transformations* of history which is at stake here – a dialectical process of which both Bakhtin and

Hegel were well-informed. It seems Hegel's philosophy found a rela-
tively unexpected 'rebirth' in Bakhtin. This is at least what Bakhtin
himself shows us when, reflecting on the question of the spiritual and
the way we work on and in it:

> The study of culture (or some area of it) at the level of system and
> at the higher level of *organic unity*: open, becoming, unresolved and
> unpredetermined, capable of death and renewal, *transcending itself*,
> that is, exceeding its own boundaries. (Notes 1970–71' in *SG*: I35)[42]

The situation of spirit in this context is simply defined as the *milieu* of
scientific and cultural understanding that it contributed to form. This
milieu insures us of the potential of understanding. Bakhtin offers us
the possibility of analysing the ideological aspect of this relation
between culture and history, but in the absence of an historical judge-
ment on cultural expressions, the latter remains to a certain extent
'undetermined'. That spirit still realizes itself today within a cultural
understanding deprived of its historical dimension would be the sign
of our 'alienation', that is to say of the spiritual situation of our ('post-
modern') time, a situation against which (and with which) we are
struggling in understanding ourselves.

Notes

1 By the term 'human sciences', I mean the *Geisteswissenschaften* tradition,
   which goes back to Dilthey, Weber and Simmel, as well as to the way it was
   reinterpreted by Ernst Cassirer. The present use of the term should also,
   however, include the current debates between post-structuralism
   (Foucault), hermeneutics and critical theory. On the relation of Bakhtin
   and Hegel, I also follow some of the arguments developed by Craig
   Brandist (forthcoming), and Galin Tihanov (1999, forthcoming).
2 One finds a similar account in Morson and Emerson (1990) particularly in
   the following passages: 'Bakhtin … cautions us against confusing dialogue
   with logical contradiction. It is different from Buber's I-Thou relation.
   Least of all does it resemble Hegelian or Marxist dialectics' (49); 'No less
   than dogmatism, relativism precludes dialogue, as Bakhtin frequently
   points out. Nor should we expect some "synthesis" or "merging" of points
   of view: dialogue is not a self-consuming artifact, nor is it "dialectic", for
   "dialectic" (in the Hegelian or Marxist sense) can be contained within a
   single consciousness and overcomes contradictions in a single, monologic
   view' (55–6). As we will see, these arguments do not take into account the
   idea that dialectic appears to be the *condition of possibility* of dialogism, nor
   do they highlight the relation – and even the mutual implication, as we
   will see – of dialogism and monologism.
3 On this see Rose (1981). We will return to some of the implications of this,

particularly as it determines the difficulties related to the ethical dimension of Bakhtin's thought seen from the point of view of this neo-Kantian affiliation.

4 According to Holquist, 'Dialogism, then, is part of a major tendency in European thought to reconceptualise epistemology the better to accord with the new versions of mind and the revolutionary models of the world that began to emerge in the natural sciences in the nineteenth century … Bakhtin begins by accepting Kant's argument that there is an unbridgeable gap between mind and the world … The non-identity of mind and world is the conceptual rock on which dialogism is founded and the source of all the other levels of non-concurring identity which Bakhtin sees shaping the world and our place in it. Bakhtin's thought is a meditation on how we know, a meditation based on *dialogue* precisely because, unlike many other theories of knowing, the site of knowledge it posits is never unitary' (1990: 18–19).

5 On this, see Mihailovic (1997).

6 The full quotation goes as follows: 'There are patent filiations in Bakhtin's concept of novelness to certain key ideas of Hegel, or at least to that Hegel who inspired the young Lukács of *Theory of the Novel*. Now, it is well known that Bakhtin was a thinker with little sympathy for Hegelian dialectics, which in his later notebooks he explicitly attacks. We are, then, confronted with a contradiction here that will require a bit of a sorting out. What all three thinkers (Hegel, Lukács, and Bakhtin) appear to have in common is a vision of history conceived as the history of consciousness … Bakhtin differs fundamentally from Hegel and Lukács, although his dialogic history of the novel is also tied to a history of consciousness. In Bakhtin's history, the criteria by which higher degrees of consciousness can be judged are not singularity and unity as in Hegel and Lukács, but rather multiplicity and variety' (Holquist, 1990: 73, 75). Peter Zima (1989) develops a similar argument.

7 Simply put, Bakhtin envisioned the question in this way: 'It is [the] concrete architectonic of the actual world of the performed act that moral philosophy has to describe, that is, *not* the abstract scheme but the concrete plan or design of the world of a unitary and once-occurrent act or deed, the basic concrete moments of its construction and their mutual disposition. These basic moments are I-for-myself, the other-for-me, and I-for-the-other' (*TPA*: 54). The differentiation between theses *three aspects* of the relation between 'I' and the 'other' is also present in Hegel's dialectic of the mutual recognition of consciousnesses that takes place in the process of formation of self-consciousness that is analysed at the beginning of the chapter 4 of his *Phenomenology*.

8 It is from this point of view that Bakhtin criticizes the linguistics of his time, in writing: 'Dialogue is studied merely as a compositional form in the structuring of speech, *but the internal dialogism of the word (which occurs in a monologic utterance as well as in a rejoinder)*, the dialogism that penetrates *its entire structure*, in all its semantic and expressive layers, is almost entirely ignored' ('Discourse in the Novel', in *DI*: 279; my emphasis).

9 It seems that it is the way we can understand the following explanation: 'The activity of the one who acknowledges a voiceless thing and the activity of one who acknowledges another subject, that is, the *dialogic*

activity of the acknowledger. The dialogic activity of the acknowledged subject, and the degrees of this activity. The thing and the personality (subject) as *limits* of cognition' ('Methodology' in *SG*: 161).

10 The only 'proof' we need here is the way Bakhtin himself undertook the understanding and recognition of Dostoevsky's novels according to their dialogism, whereas most critics (that Bakhtin criticised for their shortcomings) assimilated them to one form or other of ideological monologism.

11 Even though this understanding might have been indirect, or filtered, through Marxism, neo-Kantianism, or even more, through Ernst Cassirer's reformulation of Hegelianism. On Cassirer's relation to Hegel and Bakhtin, see particularly Brandist (1997).

12 In Bakhtin's own words: 'We have identified as unfounded and as essentially hopeless all attempts to orient first philosophy (the philosophy of unitary and once-occurrent Being-as-event) in relation to the content/sense aspect or the objectified product taken in abstraction from the once-occurent actual act/deed and its author – the one who is thinking theoretically, contemplating aesthetically, and acting ethically. It is only from within the actual performed act, which is once-occurent, integral, and unitary in its answerability, that we can find an approach to unitary and once-occurent Being in its concrete actuality. A first philosophy can orient itself only with respect to that actually performed act' (*TPA*: 28). I want to underline here that Bakhtin clearly distinguishes three dimensions of reflection (logic, aesthetics and ethics), potentially encompassing a whole philosophical system, when he refers to the concreteness of the act of '... the one who is thinking theoretically, contemplating aesthetically, and acting ethically'.

13 Bakhtin considers this as being the 'dialogic correlation between identity and non-identity'. He expresses this in a way that strikes us as being very close to a Hegelian perspective, given we are ready to acknowledge the proximity of his notion of 'symbol' to Hegel's notion of 'idea': 'The content of a true symbol, through mediated semantic coupling, is correlated with the idea of a world-wide wholeness, the fullness of the cosmic and human universe. The world has contextual meaning ... Each particular phenomenon is submerged in the primordial elements of the *origins of existence*. As distinct from myth, this is an awareness that one does not coincide with one's individual meaning' ('Methodology' in *SG*: 159).

14 Bakhtin writes: 'In its answerability, the act sets before itself its own truth [*pravda*] as something-to-be-achieved – a truth that unites both the subjective and the psychological moments, just as it unites the moment of what is universal (universally valid) and the moment of what is individual (actual). This unitary and unique truth [*pravda*] of the answerably performed act is posited as something-to-be-attained *qua* synthetic truth [*pravda*] ... The actually performed act in its undivided wholeness is more than rational – it is *answerable*. Rationality is but a moment of answerability ...' (*TPA*: 29).

15 In paragraph 122 of the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel writes: 'At first, essence is shining and mediation *within itself*; but as totality of mediation, its unity with itself is now *posited* as the self-sublation of distinction, and so of mediation. This, therefore, is the restoration of *immediacy* or of *being*, but

of being in as much as it is *mediated through the sublation of mediation*; – *existence*' (Hegel, 1991a: § 122).

16   '*Ground* is the unity of identity and distinction; the truth of what distinction and identity have shown themselves to be, the inward reflection which is just as much reflection-into-another and vice-versa. It is *essence* posited as *totality*' (Hegel, 1991: § 121).

17   In the introduction of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel writes: '*Inasmuch as the new true object issues from it*, this *dialectical* movement which consciousness exercises on itself and which affects both its knowledge and its object, is precisely what is called *experience* [*Erfahrung*]' (Hegel, 1977: 55).

18   Hegel writes: 'The Idea is essentially *process*, because identity is only the absolute and free identity of the Concept, because this identity is the absolute negativity and hence dialectical. The Idea is the course in which the Concept (as the universality that is singularity) determines itself both to objectivity and to antithesis against it, and in which this externality, which the Concept has with regard to its substance, leads itself back again, through its immanent dialectic, into *subjectivity*' (Hegel, 1977: § 215).

19   On this, Bakhtin writes: 'An act of our activity, of our actual experiencing, is like a two-faced Janus. It looks in two opposite directions: it looks at the objective unity of a domain of culture and at the never-repeatable uniqueness of actually lived and experienced life. But there is no unitary and unique plane where both faces would mutually determine each other in relation to a single unique entity. It is only the once-occurrent event of Being in the process of actualisation that can constitute this unique unity; all that which is theoretical or aesthetic must be determined as a constituent moment in the once-occurrent event of Being, although no longer, of course, in theoretical or aesthetic terms. An act must acquire a single unitary plane to be able to reflect itself in both directions – in its meaning and in its being; *it must acquire the unity of two-sided answerability – both for its content (special answerability) and for its Being (moral answerability)*. And the special answerability, moreover, must be brought into communion with the unitary and unique moral answerability as a constituent moment in it. That is the only way whereby the pernicious non-fusion and non-interpenetration of culture and life could be surmounted' (*TPA*: 2–3). I want to underline here the confusion between ontology and ethics (or 'moral') which appears in Bakhtin's thought. On the issue of the existential component of Bakhtin's philosophy, see also the persuasive argument in Tihanov (1999 forthcoming).

20   On this, see also the persuasive argument developed in Brandist (forthcoming).

21   See for instance Hegel (1975) and also the long remark following § 549 in the *Encyclopaedia* (1991a), where Hegel develops further considerations about the novel in its relation to history. While stressing the 'inessentiality' of the novel when it is based on the imagination of 'private events' and 'subjective passions' (Hegel is referring in passing to Walter Scott novels), he also refers to biography, as the latter explicitly links the 'private' and 'subjective' to world history in a way which is strikingly similar to the kind of work that Bakhtin is doing when analysing the aesthetic production of Rabelais, for instance. The difference, here, lies in Bakhtin's capacity of

perceiving the essentiality of aesthetic creation in its relation to world history.

22 On the distinction made between 'representation' (*Vorstellung*) and 'presentation' (*Darstellung*) within the Hegelian perspective, and on its implications, see Taylor (1975: 466–76).

23 When Hegel refers to the figure of the artist, it is to define the relation of the 'inner subjective consciousness', the 'creative subjectivity', the 'genius and talent of the artist' to the Ideal (the Idea of the beautiful), linking it to the objective spirit, he does not envision the potentially conflictual aspect of this relationship (1975: 280).

24 See Hirschkop (1989: 17–18).

25 I think that it is important here to use 'ideological' instead of 'ethical', not only to avoid confusion with the Hegelian terminology (as in fact, the term ideology did not belong to the Hegelian vocabulary), but more specifically to point out the way 'ideology' stands as the specific milieu where any 'ethical' positions can be taken.

26 Bakhtin writes: 'Great discoveries of human genius are made by the specific conditions of specific epochs, but they never die or lose their value along with the epochs that gave them birth' (*RW*: 35). Here Bakhtin avoids the relativistic position that would equate the significance of every historical periods from the point of view of our understanding of a 'universal history'.

27 See the explicit critique of Hegel's 'dialectical monologism' in relation to the analysis of Dostoevsky's novels by Engelhardt in *PDP* 24–7.

28 The very *meaning* of the Renaissance is challenged in its usual connotation in *RW* where it is linked to the 'rebirth' that is part of the medieval popular culture representations of life, as they appear in the context of the carnival.

29 Actually, this task of actualisation of Hegel's thought can be seen through the theoretical understanding of interpretation that Bakhtin himself gives when he writes in a sketchy way: 'Understanding as correlation with other texts and reinterpretation, in a new context (in my own context, in a contemporary context, and in a future one). The anticipated context of the future: a sense that I am taking a new step (have progressed). Stages in the dialogic movement of *understanding*: the point of departure, the given text; movement backward, past contexts; movement forward, anticipation (and the beginning) of a future context' ('Methodology' in *SG*: 161–2).

30 On the problem of the constitution and reconstitution of history, Bakhtin writes: 'At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival. The problem of *great time*' ('Methodology' in *SG*: 170).

31 I would like to add a brief remark here, which could perhaps help us to clarify the 'misunderstanding' that had apparently taken place, as much in Bakhtin's works itself as in some of his commentators, concerning his relation to Hegel's philosophy. One should not forget the sociohistorical and ideological context in which Bakhtin came in touch with Hegelianism – or some forms of Hegelian–Marxism. The 'dialectical monologism' of official Soviet Marxism that Bakhtin encountered may have had a serious bearing

on his evaluation of Hegel's philosophy. It is up to us to try to understand 'dialogically' – that is, in its 'contextualized meaning' – all the consequences of some of these personal, social, historical and cultural misunderstandings that took place on this occasion.

32   I refer to the idea of 'historical individualities' as it has been developed in the context of the human sciences tradition, and as it is central for the reflection of Weber, Simmel or Dilthey.

33   See Brandist (1997: 24).

34   On this see Nielsen (1998).

35   On this see Clain (1997).

36   The notion of the 'chronotope' is used by Bakhtin as a mediation in the understanding of the relation between the ideological context and history. On this see Côté (1997).

37   This allows us to talk about the aesthetic or poetic act in that it is 'just' in itself, according to the aesthetic end that it follows, and not *immediately* according to its ethical dimension. This mediated relation between aesthetics and ethics is not always clear in Aristotle himself.

38   On this, Bakhtin writes: 'Cultural and literary traditions (including the most ancient) are preserved and continue to live not in the individual subjective memory of a single individual and not in some kind of collective 'psyche', but rather in the objective forms that culture itself assumes (including the forms of language and spoken speech), and in this sense they are inter-subjective and inter-individual (and consequently social); from there they enter literary works, sometimes almost by passing the subjective individual memory of their creators' ('Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel' in *DI*: 249, n.17).

39   Thinking about the social and historical elements invoked by the critics to explain Dostoevsky's work of composition, Bakhtin writes: 'But before these important factors could become a new mode of artistic visualisation, before they could give birth to the new structure of the polyphonic novel, lengthy preparation was necessary in general aesthetic and literary traditions. New forms of artistic visualisation prepare themselves slowly, over centuries; a given epoch can do no more than create optimal conditions for the final ripening and realization of a new form. To investigate this process of artistic preparation of the polyphonic novel is the task of our historical poetics. A poetics cannot, of course, be divorced from social and historical analysis, but neither can it be dissolved in them' (*PDP*: 36).

40   Hence in relation to Rabelais, Bakhtin writes: 'While destroying the official conception of his time and of contemporary events, Rabelais did not seek, of course, to submit them to a scholar analysis. He did not speak in the conceptual language but in the tongue of popular comic images. While breaking up false seriousness, false historic pathos, he prepared the soil for a new seriousness and for a new historic pathos' (*RW*: 439).

41   On this, Bakhtin writes: 'Any interpretation of a symbol itself remains a symbol, but it is somewhat rationalised, that is, brought somewhat closer to the concept.' To which he adds: '[meaning, or contextual meaning] cannot be dissolved into concepts' ('Methodology' in *SG*: 159, 160).

42   My emphasis.

3
Culture, Form, Life : The Early Lukács and the Early Bakhtin

Galin Tihanov

This study explores the background to Mikhail Bakhtin's and Georg Lukács's later work on the novel. While their writings are currently included under the increasingly discredited, although still practical, category of 'literary theory', Lukács (1885–1971) and Bakhtin (1895–1975) did not think of themselves as literary theorists, for the intellectual traditions they inherited and the background they came from were those of philosophy of culture and aesthetics.[1] I have opted for a comparative perspective involving the work of both the early Bakhtin and the early Lukács because this perspective does justice to the fact that the early (and the later) Bakhtin was firmly located in a German philosophical tradition which was shared and characteristically represented by Lukács.[2] The main argument is that Lukács's and Bakhtin's later attention to the genre of the novel was the result of frustrated hopes of synthesizing the study of the immanent aspects of art with that of the social dimension of culture. Indeed, Lukács's and Bakhtin's early careers end with the abandonment of their attempts at a systematic philosophy of art (which remained unfinished in both Lukács's and Bakhtin's cases) in favour of an interest in the social aspects of literature. It is the predicament of immanentist philosophy of art and the attempts to move towards a more noticeable historicism and a concern with social philosophy that will claim my interest here. In the course of the argument, I shall explore culture and form as the two central categories organizing Lukács's and Bakhtin's early thought and shall conclude by some brief remarks on their emerging preoccupation with genre which I have discussed at length elsewhere (see Tihanov, 1997a). As will become evident, the early work of Bakhtin and Lukács has a great deal to tell us about the genesis, the shape and the features of their later theoretical thought.

Culture

The relevance of culture for the work of both Lukács and Bakhtin is to be seen on two levels. First, the opposition between culture and civilization provided a lifelong framework for their discussions of literature; and, secondly, the concept of culture served as a mediating concept on which attempts at addressing problems of social philosophy were founded. It is for these reasons that it is necessary to outline the scope and the development of the concept of culture in Lukács's and in Bakhtin's works.

The early works of Lukács and Bakhtin champion a theory of culture that springs from the dominant neo-Kantian opposition of culture and civilization and from the philosophy-of-life subordination of culture to life. The neo-Kantian opposition of culture and civilization has its roots in the growing self-awareness and the often painful self-perception of the German intelligentsia caught up in the contradictory process of social modernisation. In a study written in 1936, Norbert Elias, making the best of his position as a thinker to draw conclusions some two decades after neo-Kantianism and philosophy of life had lost their aura, traced the origins of the division between culture and civilization back to the eighteenth century. As early as 1784, we learn, Kant distinguished between 'culture', comprising art, learning and morality, and 'civilization', which included the external and material manifestations of social life.[3] This clear distinction was retained in various forms in the debates of the two main schools of neo-Kantianism. It determined the concerns of the entire first generation of German sociologists, shaped the discussions about modern German education in the 1910s and the 1920s, and was strongly echoed in Spengler's summarising vision of the decay of the West.[4]

The philosophy-of-life ideas about the preeminence of life over culture have a shorter history that goes back to Nietzsche and Dilthey, and culminates in the writings of Bergson and Simmel. Both Lukács and Bakhtin were immensely affected by the philosophy-of-life view of the relations between culture and life, and they both accepted the resulting necessity of analysing the problem of form. (We will return to this in the next section.) It is important to emphasize that neo-Kantianism and philosophy-of-life did not exist in isolation from one another. There is a powerful trend in current Bakhtin studies which sees Bakhtin as the exclusive recipient of neo-Kantian ideas. But neo-Kantianism was not insulated from the ongoing debates in German philosophy and there were recognizable points of intersection between

it and philosophy-of-life. Despite all the differences and polemics between the two trends,[5] they were both hostile to positivism, and willing to admit that the source of value lies in the singularity of individual phenomena rather than in abstract general laws. The intellectual biography of Simmel, who, as Thomas Willey has demonstrated, was informally associated with the Baden school (Willey, 1978: 168–9) and made of the split between fact and value the negative premise of his own theory of culture, furnishes sufficient proof that these were two different yet not isolated trends in the eyes of those exposed to their impact.

Finally, we need to stress that Lukács's and Bakhtin's understanding of culture was shaped not only by neo-Kantian thinking or philosophy-of-life, but also by Hegelian ideas, and especially by the relativisation of the boundaries separating the domains of objective and absolute Spirit in favour of a totalising idea of human culture. Indeed, both Lukács and Bakhtin moved from an early preoccupation with neo-Kantianism and philosophy-of-life towards a stronger respect for and commitment to Hegel. This is a crucial point to make, for it is precisely in the appropriation of Hegel that philosophy-of-life and neo-Kantian theories of culture most evidently meet. Again, the student of Bakhtin will inevitably encounter the current insistence that because of the prevailing influence of neo-Kantianism Bakhtin either did not have anything to do with Hegelianism or, if he nevertheless occasionally sounded Hegelian, this was due solely to the powerful effects of Soviet Marxism through which he soaked up a diluted form of Hegelianism. None of these contentions is tenable. Lukács's ideas of culture, and especially those of Bakhtin, are Hegelian to the extent that neo-Kantianism and philosophy-of-life themselves were 'infected' with and developing towards Hegelianism. In the eyes of their contemporaries the Hegelian link between neo-Kantianism and *Lebensphilosophie* was more easily detectable. Writing in 1927, Heinrich Levy convincingly argued the case for Windelband's dual inclinations: towards Hegel, whence Windelband's taste for universal history and philosophy of culture may be shown to come, and towards Kant, to whom Windelband remains indebted for the dualistic framework of fact and value (Levy, 1927: 59–65). In philosophers like Windelband, Levy submits, a symptomatic meeting between neo-Kantianism and *Lebensphilosophie* took place and helped to sharpen interest in Hegel: the neo-Kantian movement was looking for clarification of the general conditions of culture in the concrete life of Spirit, whereas philosophy-of-life was seeking to establish a logical foundation for this concrete life (Levy, 1927: 92). This is a

rather plausible way of explaining the interest in Hegel both on the part of neo-Kantians such as Windelband, who was ready to accept, though not entirely wholeheartedly, the fact that 'the hunger for world-views … finds satisfaction in Hegel' (Windelband, 1915: 278),[6] and also on the part of philosophy-of-life thinkers like Dilthey or the later Simmel. A particularly strong example of the accommodation of Hegelian philosophy of culture in an initially neo-Kantian theoretical agenda may be found in Cassirer, the last of the great neo-Kantians and one of the central inspirations for Bakhtin's work in the 1930s. Cassirer's *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* is a powerful attempt at redefining the Kantian forms of human experience into Hegelian stages in the historical growth of human consciousness and culture.[7]

Both Russian and Hungarian philosophical circles were receptive to the polemics surrounding the definition of culture in the first two decades of the century. In Russia, the journal *Logos* provided the main ground for this exchange, with articles on the philosophy of culture by Simmel, Windelband and Rickert, among others. Separate editions of these authors' works were also available in Russian translation.[8] In a place like Budapest, not entirely fairly but pointedly described by one Lukács scholar (in a transparent reference to Musil) as 'Die Stadt ohne Eigenschaften' (Hellenbart, 1975: 68) and thus as an environment provincially open to influences from outside, German philosophy was a dominant presence. In the Budapest Sunday Circle, initiated by Béla Balász and Lukács, and convening for several years in the latter half of the 1910s, philosophy of culture was a major point of discussions.[9]

Having outlined this broadly shared intellectual context, it is time to turn our attention to Lukács's and Bakhtin's ideas of culture.

Lukács

A lecture by Karl Mannheim, another Hungarian-Jewish philosopher and for a short time even a pupil of Lukács, gives a clear notion of the maturity of these debates and the centrality of the concept of culture in them. Mannheim's lecture, delivered in 1919 in Budapest under the title 'Die Grundprobleme der Kulturphilsophie', records the neo-Kantian approach to culture in relation to civilization, nature, and soul as well as the strict differentiation between fact and value. When contrasted with nature, culture is the domain of the objects that humans produce from the material provided by nature to serve their different goals. This definition, however, is disturbingly broad and Mannheim introduces a further distinction: culture proper covers only those objects that relate to absolute values (the beautiful, the good,

and the true), whereas the objects designed to satisfy the practical needs of people are to be considered as phenomena of civilization. The state, for example, is a phenomenon of civilization when we look at it as the protector of the interests of the individual; when we think of the role of the state as an educator called to inculcate absolute values, then we are dealing with the state in its guise of culture (Mannheim, 1919: 226). In relation to the soul, a further differentiation within culture proper is bound to occur. All products of culture are marked by a certain degree of objectification and for that reason they all have their objective and independent sense (*Sinn*). The soul cannot find expression except in such an object of culture proper which is not, however, merely a means of expression, but is also a self-sufficient whole with its own inherent sense (Mannheim, 1919: 213). The objects of nature exist in space and time, our psychic processes take place in time, whereas the genuine object of culture abides in the realm of validity and sense (*in der Geltung, im Sinn*). Culture proper, regarded as the bearer of autonomous sense, constitutes the world of objective culture. Subjective culture, on the contrary, is that condition of culture where its objects suspend their independence and acquire meaning (*Bedeutung*) from us and for us.[10] Subjective culture, in other words, is 'something of significance for the development of our soul' (Mannheim, 1919: 227). The potential danger is that culture can never be purely subjective and that following the mechanisms of objective culture we may become servants of our own products (see Mannheim, 1919: 221).

This level of lucidity and rigour in drawing the limits of culture as against civilization, and within culture itself, remained unmatched in Lukács's writings. Lukács never sought to outline the scope of culture other than by implicit reference to the ideal spheres of the religious, the ethical, the logical and the aesthetic, all of them being various types of 'behaviour of the soul' (Lukács, 1974a: 22). Unlike Mannheim's, Lukács's approach to culture in his early works vacillated between *Lebensphilosophie* and neo-Kantianism, being closer, as Axel Honneth rightly suggests, to the former rather than the latter (see Honneth, 1986: 43–4).

For Lukács, the need to consider culture emerged out of his broad project of aesthetics and philosophy of art. The vital premises of this philosophy of art – the conflict of culture and civilization, the non-identity of objective and subjective culture, and especially the primacy of life over culture – are all taken for granted by Lukács. They are so hugely important for his ideas and so integral to the basis of

his work that he rarely, if ever, takes the trouble to make them explicit. Hence the impression that his early philosophical work is opaque and incoherent. It would seem, however, that it might be more profitable to approach his early writings hermeneutically, uncovering the essential foundations of his thought which he considered to be a self-explanatory element of a shared philosophical climate.

The most important of Lukács's early texts to spell out his assumptions about the limits and the essence of culture is his 1910 essay 'Aesthetic Culture', which has been unduly neglected by most commentators. Even those who have dealt with it, fail to see it as a central piece that bears the germs of almost all the ideas that Lukács subscribes to in his mature writings. For this reason, we need to deal with this essay at some length here.

Lukács starts with a clear opposition between civilization and culture:

> There are those, who, when the topic turns to culture, prefer to talk about aeroplanes and railways, the speed and efficiency of telegraphs … But let us never forget one thing: all these manifestations – even in the best of circumstances – are merely roads to culture; they merely provide an opportunity, enhance the potential, and lend substance to the formative power of culture. ('Aesthetic Culture', in Lukács, 1995: 146)

But while unproblematically superior to civilization, culture has a rather complicated relation to life. Lukács is uncertain as to which aspect of this dual relation deserves the stronger emphasis. On the one hand, he regards culture as an active force which shapes and conquers life; on the other hand, culture is thought of as no more than an instrument by which humans react to life. Thus an enthusiasm for the value of culture as autonomous creation is tempered by a philosophy-of-life view of it as a mechanism of adjustment to life. Lukács's notion of culture remains split between an activist understanding (culture as a creative power) and an expressivist view (culture as a symbol of life's richness and essential homogeneity):

> Every culture denotes the conquest of life. Culture signifies a powerful unity of all aspects of life (this is never a conceptual unity of course), so that no matter what perspective we choose on life, we see essentially the same thing everywhere. In an authentic culture

everything is symbolic, because everything expresses – and expresses it equally – what is of paramount importance: how the individual reacts to life, how his whole being responds to and confronts life as a whole. ('Aesthetic Culture', in Lukács, 1995: 148)

If we recall Mannheim's 'grid' of interpretation, we shall see that Lukács introduces life as a new element against which culture should be defined. Art, presumed to be the core of genuine culture, should capture the fullness of life, but without dissolving passively into it. Art, Lukács insists, has to try and attain the *essence* of life. When Lukács singles out the two 'pure types' produced by modern culture – 'the expert and the aesthete' (*ibid*.: 147) – he apportions to each of them a specific vice that needs rectification. The expert, an early epitome of the monster of reification that is to occupy such a prominent place in Lukács's opus, sees things bereft of the supporting sense of unity and wholeness; the aesthete, an equally pitiful hero of the modern age, mistakes the appearance for the essence: he equates 'all manifestations of life with an affectionate surrender to transient moments' (*ibid*.: 149). We can thus discern the delineations of a notion of culture and art that accounts for Lukács's later developments as a thinker. Art, being the core of culture, should strive to oppose the fragmentary purview of the expert; its single most important mission is to restore and render the totality of life. Yet art cannot rest content with life as it is on the surface, in the mere display of the phenomenal; beneath this surface there lies an essence which is assumed to be different from the 'transient moments'. In opening himself to a holistic approach to life and closing himself to what he dismisses as its mere appearance, Lukács is already drafting his theory of realism and typicality as a response to the antinomies of modernity. While propagating closeness to life and the flux of the present, realism, unlike naturalism, seeks to reveal the essence of life which is not immediately available. Although the source of truth for the artist is looked for in the life process in its entirety (a debt to Hegel and *Lebensphilosophie*), the Kantian division of fact and value, of appearance and essence remains intact. Realism is not simply a description of reality, it is an attainment of the real as significant and essential. Those who confuse the two things are bound to become the captives of naturalism or impressionism. Lukács launches an unequivocal attack on the latter trend as early as 1910 in his article 'The Parting of the Ways': 'The very belief that there is something palpably permanent in the vortex of moments, the conviction that things exist and have an essential nature, excludes Impressionism

and all its manifestations' (in Lukács, 1995: 170). 'Aesthetic Culture',
too, is a diatribe against mood-driven art that has lost all contact with
life and no longer searches for truth. This line of reasoning is corrobor-
ated in Lukács's unfinished treatises on aesthetics: although the
aesthetic positing (*die ästhetische Setzung*) can in no way be independ-
ent of the 'experienceability' (*Erlebbarkeit*) of the world (Lukács, 1974b:
55–6), art has to go beyond the ephemeral sphere of sheer experience
(Lukács, 1974a: 26). Thus we may conclude that culture – through art
– relates to life in a contradictory fashion: it has to retain and reflect
the vigour and the richness of life, but it also has actively to model life
and distil its true and deep essence. It is important to keep this contra-
diction in mind, as it generates the problem of form to which we will
turn in the next section.

At this point we need to take a further step and consider the question
of the relation of culture to the soul. Lukács's answer does not strike
one as greatly original: the heterogeneous and numerous fields of
culture have to contribute to the homogeneity of the soul; all branches
of culture obtain their *raison d'être* from the task of bringing unity to
the soul and assisting it in finding the way to self-expression. In *Soul
and Form*, Lukács couches this answer, which was wide-spread in *fin-de-
siècle* and early twentieth-century Europe, in proto-existentialist terms,
insisting on the necessity for the soul to exemplify the metaphysical
authenticity of life. This authenticity, he fears, is on the wane in the
manifestations of the more distinct and verifiable but disunited facul-
ties of man.[11]

Lukács's answer, then, is less interesting in its own right than for its
indirect implications. It is in the process of working out this answer
that Lukács commenced his transition from neo-Kantianism and
Lebensphilosophie to Hegel. This transition has not been clearly spelled
out nor adequately interpreted by Lukács scholarship. Ruminating
upon the unity of the soul and the heterogeneity of the various fields
of culture, Lukács was by degrees arriving at the idea that there may be
a certain contradiction between the unitary being of the soul and the
fragmented existence of culture. Since the unity of the soul was
beyond doubt, and rational inspection of it was felt to be vulgar and
offensive, the only alternative approach available was to revise the
existing status of culture. We can see this process unfolding in Lukács's
writings in the mid-1910s. In a much neglected review written in
1914, he already displays some affinity to Hegel's notion of Spirit as an
overarching concept of human culture. Under the lingering pressure to
sustain the division of culture and civilization, Lukács criticizes Croce

and Dilthey for 'removing the sharp demarcation between objective and absolute Spirit' and insists on the separation of art, religion and philosophy from the products of objective Spirit (see Lukács, 1914: 879–80). This reservation notwithstanding, the first step had been taken and Hegel's category of Spirit was now firmly accepted as a possible alternative to a disunited picture of culture. Lukács accomplishes this transition in his *Heidelberg Aesthetics* (1916–18), where despite some reservations he presents an elaborate case for a Hegelian understanding of culture as a possible alternative to Kantianism.[12] Kant, Lukács argues, was adamant that in order to claim validity every value should be posited as something that cannot be deduced from other values and as resting on a different capacity of the human soul. This led him to assume that the fields of value need not only to be insulated from, but also opposed to one another (Lukács, 1974b: 211). Hegel took an ironic stance towards what he called Kant's search for various capacities in the 'bag of the soul'. Instead, he proposed that these capacities be regarded as interconnected stages in the development of Spirit. Thus Spirit is credited with begetting unity, and its products are treated as belonging to an unfragmentable whole. Hegel, Lukács concludes, surmounts Kant's 'pluralism of the fields of value' (*Pluralismus der Wertgebiete*; *ibid*.: 213) and champions a philosophy of culture which renders irrelevant the question 'how is ... possible?' (any domain of culture can be placed in the space marked by Lukács's dots). Instead, the task of philosophy of culture comes to be one of showing the various fields of culture as moments in the 'Ent-wicklung' (*ibid*.: 214) of Spirit. Thus the last chapter of the *Heidelberg Aesthetics* reevaluates Lukács's own determination to answer the question 'How are works of art possible?' with which his treatise starts (*ibid*.: 9). Lukács summons Goethe to endorse Hegel's argument with the consecrated power of intuitive wisdom (*ibid*.: 213), and this is the first moment of many more to come in which Goethe and Hegel are interpreted by Lukács as allies in the history of human thought.

This shift sheds profuse light on Lukács's subsequent embrace of totality both as a criterion for judging the perfection of art and as a social desideratum. But it also makes clear his abandonment of the notion of soul after 1918. As he was gradually questioning his own neo-Kantian premises, he quietly eliminated the concerns for the well-being of the soul which up to 1918 remained central to his work. After Spirit took over the powers of producer of culture, culture was no longer viewed as informing the individual human soul. Instead it was made to serve the growing self-awareness of Spirit on the road to

identity. Thus with the rise of Hegelian Spirit, the notion of culture had to be transformed while that of soul simply fell into oblivion. The link between aesthetics and ethics was severed or at least de-personalised. In the years to come Lukács was to be interested in how culture relates to collective identities: those of class and of human species. The purely philosophical approach gave way to the agenda of social theory and ideology.

It is this aspect of Lukács's understanding of culture that needs to be examined briefly in the last part of this discussion. The main question to be answered is what is the relation of class as a collective historical subject to culture within the process of social change? When in 1910 Lukács discusses the art of Hungarian post-impressionism, he praises it with the words: 'This art is an old art, the art of order and values; its is a constructive art' ('The Parting of the Ways', in Lukács, 1995: 171). In this short piece one can already discern Lukács's aesthetic conservatism and his reluctance to accept the new as necessarily the better.[13] It is essential to realize that the basis of this aesthetic conservatism remains unshaken even when Lukács begins to notice the presence of the proletariat as a new social force. In his eyes, a new class is not any better equipped to create genuine culture than the old (that is, the dominant) class. For this reason in 'Aesthetic Culture' Lukács insists that socialism 'cannot become the real adversary of bourgeois aestheticism, as it wants to be and knows it ought to be'. The proletarian art which socialism strives to create in the midst of bourgeois culture is no more than 'a weak and gross caricature of bourgeois art; just as fragile and superficial, but without the seductive charm of bourgeois art' ('Aesthetic Culture', in Lukács, 1995: 151–2). The aesthetic imperfection, or the lack of 'seductive charm', is one of the staple accusations Lukács levels against proletarian art in the 1930s, since, for him, it never quite manages to match the solid standards of bourgeois realist literature. As E. Lunn has rightly observed, Lukács does not see the new culture as 'qualitatively redefined by self-determining, collectivist production, but as the passive quantitative distribution of the given traditional literary forms' (Lunn, 1982: 126). Thus the so-called new culture is reduced to the democratisation of the one already existing: 'Communism aims at creating a social order in which everyone is able to live in a way that in pre-capitalist eras was possible only for the ruling class' (Lukács, 1973b: 5). Small wonder, then, that throughout his career Lukács remains attached to the traditionalist values of reason, order and proportion and shows no tolerance for the spirit of experimentation in art. Moreover, he always assumes that the grand

bourgeois writers, who enjoy the noble back-up of tradition and talent, are far better placed to fight the bourgeois order and fascism than is the literature of the working class. This may sound like a surprising paradox. Lukács's early writings, however, prove that it is rather the logical outcome of long-held values and approaches.

Bakhtin

Against the background of Lukács's writings Bakhtin's early work strikes one as drawing very much on the same philosophical sources and traditions (neo-Kantianism and *Lebensphilosophie*[14]) and discussing similar problems (the authenticity of life, the alienation of culture from life, the place of art in culture). These similarities should, however, not be exaggerated. An important difference is the fact that Bakhtin remained untouched by Hegel's thought in his early works. In Bakhtin's case, Hegel came onto the stage only in the late 1920s and the early 1930s when he made a perceptible contribution to Bakhtin's understanding of the novel, culture and society in the essays on the novel, in *Rabelais* and, in an often elusive but nonetheless effective way, in the notes of the 1970s. A further dissimilarity lies in Bakhtin's openly stated aversion to theoretism. This is not to say that Bakhtin disliked or did not attempt to attain systematic exposition; on the contrary, Bakhtin's early texts, especially 'Author and Hero' (despite its fragmentariness) and 'The Problem of Content, Material and Form', contain clearer and more persistent structure and argumentation than any of the young Lukács's preserved texts. Bakhtin's strong reservations about theoretism are reservations about the very possibility of considering art or culture or any other dimension of human life solely in terms of their purity and autonomy, without reference to their ethical value and their impact on the formation of social judgement. Lukács, while remaining passionately committed to questions of ethics, was still hoping in his *Heidelberg Aesthetic* to reveal the essence of an autonomous aesthetic positing (*Setzung*). In his early writings, Bakhtin is often inclined to view art as instrumental in the fostering of participatory being through responsible acts. Even when the autonomy of art is elevated to an ideal (which is clearly the case in 'Author and Hero' (AH)), this still does not contradict the imperative of participatory being. The only truly metaphysical problem for Bakhtin is God, whose presence he deems to be of a nature distinct from that of the visible realm of culture. For that reason in his earliest published article 'Art and Answerability' Bakhtin speaks of culture as comprising three domains: science, art and life ('Art and Answerability', in *AA*: 1)

without mentioning religion at all. God serves only as the 'highest level of authority that blesses a culture' (AH, in *AA*: 206).

It is important to stress Bakhtin's inclusion of life as part of culture in his early piece rather than any opposition between them. This is only a disguised philosophy-of-life type of procedure; it demonstrates that though culture is different from life, it is also always saturated with life and by the same token dependent on it. In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* we already witness an alteration in Bakhtin's philosophizing tactics. Here the superiority of life over culture is emphasised not so much by pointing to the dependence of culture on life as one of its constituents, as by underscoring the gap between culture and life and the powerlessness of culture, including art, 'to take possession of that moment of being which is constituted by transitiveness and open event-ness' (*TPA*: 1*).[15] Unlike Lukács, Bakhtin is doubtful in his early texts whether art should be deemed a privileged realm of culture. Like any other field of culture it, too, fails to restore unity between the product of human activity and the unique and fluid experiencing of life. The result of this failure is well known:

> two worlds confront each other, two worlds that have absolutely no communication with each other and are mutually impervious: the world of culture and the world of life, the only world in which we create, cognise, contemplate, live our lives and die, and – the world in which the acts of our activity are objectified and the world in which these acts actually proceed and are actually accomplished once and only once. (*TPA*: 2)

We can see that what really worries Bakhtin is not the neo-Kantian split of fact and value, but rather the impossibility of integrating the products of culture back into the flux of life. This is a recognisably Simmelian concern which brings Bakhtin close to Lukács's uneasy acceptance of objectification and outright rejection of reification. The desirability of this integration will stay with Bakhtin until his latest writings, when he will oppose the reification of human consciousness in his notes on the methodology of the human sciences. It is precisely the threatening separation of the cultural object from the natural richness, vivacity and inexhaustibility of life that seems to have motivated Bakhtin's attempt to revise the relations between author and hero. The author, a condensed embodiment of the creative principle of culture, should open himself to the unpredictability and unruliness of life represented by the hero. While being the objectification of the creative

power of the author, the hero remains the unconquered voice of life, an epitome of life's independence from the manipulative devices of art. In Bakhtin's early philosophical utopia the hero is destined to be the magical and ideal coincidence of artefact and life: the product of art which continues to inhabit the novel as an irrepressible life force; an alien trace in the tissue of the literary text that erodes the presumption of the autonomous and invincible nature of the aesthetic.

Thus Bakhtin's revision of the author–hero relationship amounts to an ethical (and theological, as we will demonstrate) re-reading of Simmelian philosophical impulses. The background to this revision, as we have already said, can be found in the essay on the philosophy of the act which analyses the dangerous transformation of the act from a fact of culture into a fact of civilization:

> All the energy of responsible performance is drawn off into the autonomous domain of culture, and, as a result, the performed act, detached from that energy, sinks to the level of elementary biological and economic motivation, that is, loses all its ideal moments: that is precisely what constitutes the state of civilization. (*TPA*: 55*)

Bakhtin summarises this result by evoking Simmel's distinction between subjective and objective culture: 'We have conjured up the ghost of objective culture, and now we do not know how to lay it to rest' (*TPA*: 55–6). The reunion of culture and life will be attempted in Bakhtin's later work (on Goethe and Rabelais) without reference to the uniqueness of the act in the open-eventness of being and without recourse to the author–hero relationship or to any other ethical concerns. Like Lukács, Bakhtin's later works abandon the ethical ground in favour of a more intense (if not always) direct interest in social problems. A partial return to ethical problematics is visible only in the 1960s and the 1970s, but it is embroiled with methodological generalisations addressing the gnoseological potential of the human sciences. In this context, it is not insignificant that even in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* Bakhtin speaks of historical materialism as a method which, albeit with a number of incongruities, succeeds in entering into 'the living world of the actually performed responsible deed' (*TPA*: 20*). Again like Lukács, Bakhtin is vaguely grasping after alternative methods in social philosophy. Unlike Lukács, however, he never fully embraces Marxism, although over time he does become increasingly receptive to Hegel's methodology.

An essential and distinctive feature of Bakhtin's discourse on culture is his assumption that culture may have boundaries separating it from civilization, nature, or – in a more uncertain way – from life, but it possesses no 'inner territory'. Culture, Bakhtin argues in an enigmatic but nonetheless oft-quoted passage,

> is located entirely upon boundaries, boundaries intersect it every-where, passing through each of its constituent features. The systematic unity of culture passes into the atoms of cultural life – like the sun, it is reflected in every drop of this life. Every cultural act lives essentially on the boundaries, and it derives its seriousness and significance from this fact. ('The Problem of Content, Material and Form' (PCMF), in *AA*: 274)

It seems to me that up to now Bakhtin scholarship has more often been helplessly fascinated with the boldness of this statement than prepared to subject it to an analysis revealing its background and meaning. There can be little doubt about the Simmelian origins of Bakhtin's idea. In his late work *Lebensanschauung* (1918), Simmel ascribes primary importance to the notion of boundary. Life, he submits, is the motion which 'in every single moment draws in some-thing in order to transform it into a part of itself, into life' (Simmel, 1918: 20). In the spiritual sphere this is the process we observe in education; in the biological sphere the same process manifests itself in self-preservation, growth and conception. All these instances Simmel denotes as 'more-life' (*Mehr-Leben*), for they multiply life without changing it qualitatively. In culture, however, when life becomes 'creative' rather than merely reproductive, forms start to appear which have 'their own objective meaning, solidity and inner logic' (Simmel, 1918: 22), and for this reason are 'more-than-life' (*Mehr-als-Leben*). Gradually, these forms may ossify and the products of culture become ready-made objects of consumption. Culture, then, is possible only in a process of constant redefinition of forms and an exchange with life in which existing forms are appropriated and new ones are created. If we agree with Simmel that creative forms both separate and reunite culture and life in an unceasing dynamics of objectification and appro-priation, we can better appreciate Bakhtin's anxiety to see culture not as a firmly delineated domain but rather as a constant negotiation over its own boundaries.

This notion of boundaries, however, is preceded in 'Author and Hero' by a belief that the boundaries between art and life, author and

hero should be more firmly drawn. In 'Author and Hero' Bakhtin still thinks that art should be deemed an autonomous realm with its own *specifica*. He regards the crisis of authorship in Russian literature from Dostoevskii to Belyi as an evil that relativises the boundaries of aesthetic culture (AH, in *AA*: 203) and makes the guaranteed position of outsideness no longer tenable. This leads to the dissolution of the aesthetic into the ethical: 'The position of outsideness becomes excruciatingly ethical (the insulted and injured as such become the heroes for the act of seeing – which is no longer purely artistic, of course)' (AH, in *AA*: 205). In the 1929 book on Dostoevskii Bakhtin no longer considers this change a disaster and tries to see in the new position of the author the basis for a new – and better – type of novel; he also attempts to provide a more elaborate sociological explanation for the crisis of authorship, but his tone and judgement are marked by strong ambiguity. It was only in his work in the 1930s (not without the influence of Voloshinov's ideas in the process of their collaboration on *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*) that Bakhtin fully embraced the importance of life speech-genres (*zhiznennye rechevye zhanry*), life-ideology (*zhiznennaia ideologia*, in Voloshinov's usage), and the permeable boundaries between official and popular culture and between art and life.[16] Thus in the 1930s Bakhtin proved a much more talented disciple of Simmel than Lukács who never examined the problem of boundaries in such depth (despite the fact that he had a strong record of personal contacts and apprenticeship with the Master, which Bakhtin lacked altogether).

A final remark on Bakhtin's concept of culture needs to be made at this point. For all his admiration of popular culture and the various forms of life ideology Bakhtin never abandons his reverence for a presumed canon of great art. Like Lukács, he retains his fidelity to those works of literature which stand the test of 'great time' and participate in the 'great experience' of humankind. Bakhtin's dualism of 'great' and 'small' time, of 'great' and 'small' experience, so clearly and passionately stated in his texts of the 1960s and 1970s, has its roots in the blend of three philosophical traditions. First, there is the neo-Kantian split between fact and value, along with the trust in the potential open-endedness of being, championed in the articles of Bakhtin's close friend M. Kagan;[17] second, there is the later Hegelian idea of totality, of culture as a world-historical and depersonalized unity which provides the ground for each sense (*smysl*) to touch on (and be touched by) other senses, thus entering an unlimited dialogue with them; third, there is the serious domestic tradition of Russian

eschatologism which supports the hopes that every meaning can enjoy a resurrection and that every word is hospitably awaited by a 'great time' in a second kingdom where a new and 'great experience' will do justice to that which has been forgotten while 'small time' lasted. This powerful Christian utopia is one of the main sources of the ongoing magic and attraction of Bakhtin's texts: on the surface, it suggests that everything can be salvaged in the 'great time'; in reality, however, Bakhtin never deals with works worthy of admittance to 'the home-coming festival' (*SG*: 170) of meaning other than those already belonging to a presumed canon of great literature. The mechanisms of this utopian salvation help us answer the question of why Bakhtin's thought survived the challenges of post-structuralism and proved even – for a great many interpreters – compatible with it.

Meaning, in order to be admitted to the bosom of 'great time' has to be, as Bakhtin clearly demands (*ibid*.), unstable and – to a considerable degree – depersonalised. Salvation cannot be hoped for before meaning sheds its stable identity and its status of being borne by an author who exercises control over it. Entering the dialogue of 'great time' is an act preceded by the relinquishing of authorial claims and the handing over of meaning – in all its changeability – into the care of Time. It is in this never-ending dialogue that a first or a last meaning can no longer exist. But what emerges along this chain of meanings is an unceasing rejuvenation through change, a salvation through inclusion into new contexts. Bakhtin, then, allows his fans to eat their cake without having to mourn its disappearance: the shaken stability of meaning and the humble withdrawal of the author are in fact only a means for purchasing the eternity and the dynamic identity of meaning in 'great' culture.

Form

In discussing the problem of the relationship between culture and life, we have suggested at several points that for both Lukács and Bakhtin the exploration of this question implied serious consideration of form as the point where life, culture and authorial activity intersect. It is therefore to the concept of form that our attention turns in this section. We shall examine Lukács's and Bakhtin's ideas of form in the context of *Lebensphilosophie* and neo-Kantianism and shall prove that the preoccupation with aesthetics was central to them before they embarked on socially oriented genre criticism.

Lukács

It is not until his *Heidelberg Philosophy of Art* (1912–14) that Lukács attempts a more systematic exposition of his views on form.[18] The title of the collection of essays *Soul and Form* might prove misleading for anyone hoping to find definitive statements about form in this early book. *Soul and Form*, however, offers a good example of the variety of meanings attached to the concept of form in most of Lukács's early writings. Form is meant, first, in purely aesthetic terms as the form of the work of art (as, for example, in the dialogue on Sterne or in the essay on the essay). Second, it is endowed with a metaphysical meaning: form as the expression of the highest unity between human beings and their destiny; form as the voice of fate (the essay on the essay; the essays on Rudolf Kassner and Paul Ernst). Close to this meaning is a third one which can be seen at work throughout the book: form, in a philosophy-of-life sense, emerges in the penetration of culture into life as a principle that shapes our life experience but remains (sometimes tragically, so Lukács submits) subordinated to it (the Kierkegaard essay is perhaps the most remarkable example of this). This analysis of the various meanings of 'form' would be more accurate if we also recognize that the three meanings often merge into one another, and the semantic boundaries between them are extremely flexible and permeable.

The *Heidelberg Philosophy of Art* retains these three meanings but subjects them to a more systematic scrutiny.[19] The primary meaning ascribed to form is that of a 'means for the expression of experience' (Lukács, 1974a: 22). For Lukács, then, aesthetics ought to be the theory of the 'forms of communication of the reality of experiencing' (*Mitteilungsformen der Erlebniswirklichkeit*). Thus Lukács arrives at a distinction between 'forms of experiencing' and 'forms of the work [of art]' (*Erlebnisformen und Werkformen*). This distinction motivates the introduction of the categories of 'creative' and 'receptive' behaviour (*Verhalten*), to which Lukács takes a phenomenological approach free of any elements of social analysis.

The recipient, Lukács insists, plays a crucial role in the consciousness of the creator (*der Schaffende*) who always has to keep in mind the image of a preferred audience and to consider the most appropriate ways of targeting it. On the other hand, what the recipient needs is not so much a mental image of the author, as an idea of authorship as such which would guarantee that the work of art appears as the product of a 'unitary will' (Lukács, 1974a: 71). In the encounter

between creator and recipient, Lukács concludes, it is the latter who enjoys real importance.

It is logical then to assume that the relevance of form will be determined from the point of view of the recipient rather than that of the producer. The recipient, so Lukács tells us, yearns for 'the miracle' of artistic experience which occurs when the artistic form is no longer consciously perceptible. In order to 'forget' the artistic form the recipient has to be exposed to an artefact in which the forms of experience and the forms of the work of art have reached the point of full mutual adjustment. The harmony of the two produces the desired effect whereby the work of art replaces reality. Any particular attention to artistic form on the part of the author is bound to destroy the magic effect of this substitution (Lukács, 1974a: 73). Artistic form, Lukács warns, should be visible only as the result of a deliberate analysis on the part of the recipient. Once again we are faced here with the early origins of Lukács's celebration of realism and his suspicious treatment of any special attention to form and formal innovation.

The young Lukács, however, uses the *coincidentia* (*ibid*.: 74) of the forms of experience and those of the work of art not as a starting point for the articulation of a theory of realism but as evidence of the rare existence of genius in art. A genius is 'the man who experiences [reality] *sub specie formae*, and for whom the technique of the work [of art] is the natural form of communication' (*ibid*.: 76). This unity, strongly redolent of the ideas of the German Romantics, is mirrored in the unity of the conscious (correlated with the 'technical' form) and the unconscious (correlated with the form of experiencing) (*ibid*.: 139). Given this early equation of the conscious and the unconscious, reminiscent of Schelling, we should not be surprised to find that in the 1930s Lukács should think it possible for writers with a 'reactionary worldview' (Balzac's monarchism is the best-known example) to produce great realistic novels, whose critical power exceeds that of writers who consciously adopt 'progressive' ideas.

Lukács's recourse to the exceptional power of the genius furnishes serious evidence that his early philosophy of form remains very remote from the social and historical dimensions of art. His phenomenological approach brooks no attention to history, and when he tries to argue the case for a synthesis of historicity and timelessness (*Geschichtlichkeit und Zeitlosigkeit*) in the work of art, he seeks support in Schelling's notion of myth. Like myth, the work of art possesses an 'historical eternity'; it may have grown from history and be destined to wane, but it is nevertheless 'thought of as abiding on the far side of

the ordinary flow of time' (*ibid*.: 208). Needless to say, what Lukács has in mind here is only the great work of art. Half a century after him Gadamer, drawing on Hegel in *Truth and Method*, will revive the same oxymoron (historical timelessness) to describe the *modus vivendi* of the classic. Form is the crucial element in this overcoming of time and social contingency. 'Every form', Lukács maintains, 'is a theodicy'; it brings salvation 'by leading all things to the being which is fully consistent with their own idea' (*ibid*.: 213).

The idea of form as theodicy can also be found a few years later in the *Heidelberg Aesthetics*, and this should suggest that despite the evolution in his philosophical orientation from a blend of *Lebensphilosophie* and neo-Kantianism to neo-Kantianism and Hegelianism, Lukács did not abandon his belief in the absoluteness of form. Desperately defending the autonomy of the aesthetic positing (*Setzung*), he insists that art can purify the experience of life of all accidental elements. In art, our experience of the world attains its true sense by freeing itself from the twofold attachment to the object and (more importantly but less likely) to the experiencing self (Lukács, 1974b: 56–7). In a statement that documents the tension between the Hegelian postulate of the unity of content and form and the neo-Kantian prejudice that only form can upgrade content to essentiality, Lukács claims that through its inseparability from content, and through the elevation of content to pure validity (*Geltung*), aesthetic form removes the distance between value and the materialisation of value (*Wertrealization*), which obtains in all other spheres of validity (*Geltungssphären*) (*ibid*.: 60, 76).

When Lukács attempts to amend this scheme by bringing in the aspect of history, and by drawing more heavily on the Hegelian alternative to Kant's separation of form and content (*ibid*.: 213), he arrives at the conclusion that embracing Hegel for the purpose of establishing a systematic aesthetics involves a compromise between historical and apriori categories (*ibid*.: 214). The dialectical account of art as an aspect of the totality of Spirit, which Lukács had embraced in his discussion of culture, is said here to provide insecure ground for aesthetics as a particular discipline (*Teildisziplin*). The global dialectical view of the development of art does not allow aesthetics to single out its abiding specificity (*ibid*.: 223).

Apart from this place in the *Heidelberg Aesthetic*, we should also point to Lukács's 1910 article 'On the Theory of Literary History' as an attempt to change the perspective from which form is discussed. Written under the strong if eclectic influences of Simmel, Bergson and Dilthey (whom Lukács criticizes rather inconsistently), this remains

one of the most important texts in Lukács's early intellectual career. Here Lukács is willing to regard form as 'the true social [element] in literature' (Lukács, 1973a: 29). At the same time, however, he insists that form, being an aesthetic category, is neither historical, nor socio-logical, but timeless (*ibid.*: 31). In addition, Lukács introduces the idea of the extraordinary work of art (cognate with his contemplation of the genius in the *Heidelberg Philosophy of Art*) to single out 'pure and great form' as that which 'dissociates from all communities, and becomes … timeless, ahistorical and asocial' (*ibid.*: 45). These hesita-tions in the understanding of form recur in a letter to Paul Ernst of 1912, where Lukács seemingly tries to redress the balance in favour of history: 'Regardless of how general and unclear our formulation of the concept of form may be, history cannot be excluded from it'. But while prudently accepting this conclusion, Lukács reacts to its inevitability in a revealingly negative way. Abrogating the spirit of modernity, he equates the acceptance of history in form with 'giving up the idea of meaning or of Eternal Form', an act he ascribes to the 'stupid Modernists' (Lukács, 1986: 195–6).

Thus, in *Soul and Form* and in Lukács's two attempts at an elaborated systematic aesthetics, as well as in the pieces where the dynamics of form is considered a real, if abhorrent, phenomenon, the grasp of form in its artistic immanence was never joined by a deeper understanding of its social and historical dimensions, no matter how sharply felt the need for such a supplement was. The discourses of form as a phenom-enon of life, of culture and of art could not be convincingly synthesized and remained largely separated.

Bakhtin

Aesthetic form did not begin to occupy a central position in Bakhtin's philosophy of art until he started work on his undated 'Author and Hero'.[20] Like Lukács, the early Bakhtin takes a phenomenological approach to art. It is remarkable that in their attempts to formulate a coherent aesthetics of form both Lukács and Bakhtin put the powers of the author to the test. In Lukács's writings, the counterpart of the author is, as we have seen, the recipient, whose presence in the consciousness of the author is declared more significant than that of the creator in the consciousness of the recipient. Indeed, Lukács needs to refer to the exceptionality of the genius to restore confidence in the power of the author. In Bakhtin, whose statements about the role of the recipient remain more oblique and far less systematic throughout his career,[21] the author is correlated principally with the hero. This is

a viewpoint which is comparable with Lukács's interest in the subject–object relation, which, as Lukács claims, obtains only in art (Lukács, 1974b: 92–5).

Bakhtin's 'Author and Hero' (AH) presents the Simmelian contradiction of life and form with rare lucidity. Bakhtin's criticism of 'expressive aesthetics' arrives at an unmistakeably Simmelian conclusion: 'From within itself, life cannot give birth to an aesthetically valid form without going beyond its own bounds, without, in other words, ceasing to be what it is in itself' (AH, in *AA*: 69).[22] Form is, then, a transcendence of life which involves the activity of an agent placed as if outside of life. In 'Author and Hero' and in 'The Problem of Content, Material and Form' (PCMF), as well as in Lukács's essays, it is the author who is endowed with this unique position: 'The creating author is a constitutive aspect of artistic form' (PCMF).[23] We may even say that the very concept of author can thrive only as long as life and form remain split and opposed to one another. As soon as they are thought to be in harmony, the necessity for form to be generated by an external agent disappears.

Keeping this in mind, we can now better understand why Bakhtin insists that culture, and in particular aesthetic culture, always implies a boundary and why the cultural act always takes place at a borderline. Form, being that which life is incapable of producing itself without altering its own identity, is the boundary separating life and (aesthetic) culture. In a sentence evoking Simmel's sociology of space and boundary in a remarkable way, Bakhtin concludes: '*Form is a boundary* that has been given an aesthetic treatment' (AH, in *AA*: 90***** emphasis in the original).[24] The hero, too, being a metaphor for the richness of life, has to be approached from outside. His boundaries are vulnerably exposed to the aesthetic activity of the author: 'We open the boundaries when we "identify" ourselves with the hero and experience his life from within; and we close them again when we consummate him aesthetically from without' (AH, in *AA*: 91). Bakhtin's reference to the 'feminine' passivity of being (AH, in *AA*: 125, 136), while highly problematic for its patriarchal genderedness (the roots of which lie in the long tradition of Russian theological discourse), does nevertheless successfully make the point that the only active principle in art is that of form. Form, as can be read in numerous places in 'Author and Hero' and at the end of 'The Problem of Content, Material and Form', should descend as a gift upon the represented content of life (PCMF, in *AA*: 315). The semantic field of heartfelt giving, of caressing rediscovery, loving bestowing of shape, and a tender appropriation of the hero's

otherness by the author reactivates the deep ethical layer in Bakhtin's aesthetics. No one should undertake an evaluation or a depiction of the other (the hero) from outside, without first anchoring himself in the unique point of his own non-alibi in being. The daring act of shaping the hero is possible only after providing a moral guarantee that this act is based on commitment and on the valour of taking up one's insecure and unrepeatable position in the openness of being. Aesthetic activity *is* a supreme manifestation of this courage. It rests on the outsideness of the author from any of the heroes to be depicted, and this means that it is predicated on the responsibility of occupying and holding onto a position that is no one else's. The work of art is the aesthetic counterpart of the deed (*Tat*), which is never subsumable under the general principles of formal ethics.[25] Bakhtin himself refers to aesthetic activity as 'an actually performed act or deed, both from within its product and from the standpoint of the author as answerable participant' (*TPA*: 54). In this respect, Bakhtin's and Lukács's early discourses share the same inseparability of aesthetic and ethical concerns. For both, form is saturated with ethical overtones and yet remains on the far side of life, more an outer boundary than an inalienable essence of it, a 'gift' from outside (Bakhtin's 'Author and Hero') or a 'supreme judge' from above (Lukács's essay 'Metaphysik der Tragödie: Paul Ernst').

Having said this, we still need to concede that Bakhtin's 'The Problem of Content, Material and Form', for all its similarities with 'Author and Hero', introduces a sharp dualism (of a neo-Kantian and phenomenological brand) into Bakhtin's ideas about form, which cannot be found in the more integrated and ethical approach to form in 'Author and Hero'.[26] This dualism is predicated on a differentiation between aesthetic activity as such and the work of art. The essence of aesthetic activity is contemplation 'directed toward a work' (PCMF, in *AA*: 267). The work of art, then, is only an external materialisation of the intentionality of aesthetic contemplation. Process and result are thus divorced from one another, and the work of art is implicitly inferior to the activity which generates it. The division is reinforced by the use of two different terms ('architectonics' and 'composition'), of which the first denotes the structure of the content of aesthetic activity *per se*, whereas the second serves to address the structure of the work of art as the actualisation of aesthetic activity (*ibid.*). Hence Bakhtin's discontent with 'material aesthetics': 'There is in the works of material aesthetics an inescapable and constant confusion of architectonic and compositional forms, so that the former are never

clarified in principle or defined with precision, and are undervalued' (*ibid*.: 268*).[27]

The outcome of this division is surprising for those wont to see in Bakhtin the great theoretician of genre and the novel. Genre is reduced to an external compositional form (*ibid*.: 269). Unlike architectonic forms, which are 'forms of the inner and bodily value of aesthetic man', compositional forms have an 'implemental' character and are 'subject to a purely technical evaluation: to what extent have they adequately fulfilled their architectonic task?' (*ibid*.: 270). Drama, for example, is a compositional form, while the forms of aesthetic consummation are the tragic and comic (*ibid*.: 269). The novel does not enjoy a higher destiny either: 'The *novel* is a purely compositional form of the organization of verbal masses; through it, the architectonic form of the artistic consummation of a historical or social event is realized. It is a variety of the form of epic consummation' (*ibid*.: emphasis in the original).

We can observe in this passage a dramatic devaluation of genre, and, consequently, a refusal to draw a clear line of demarcation between the novel and the epic.[28] Like Lukács, who in his *Theory of the Novel* considers the novel a generically distinct but weak link in the great chain of the epic tradition, Bakhtin seeks to accommodate the novelistic within the epic. Following his dismissal of genre as a secondary compositional form, he goes even further than Lukács in this direction by demonstrating a complete lack of interest in the generic *specifica* of the novel.[29]

Thus the analysis of Lukács's and Bakhtin's early writings leads us to recognize two grave problems inherent in their treatment of form. Since they both rigorously (Lukács more than Bakhtin) adhere to the postulate of the autonomy of art, the discourses on form and life fail to reach a point of real synthesis. Life remains a passive field for the application of form. Granted the status of an external agent, form is the principle which elevates life to its authenticity and depth. The discourses on life and form meet only on the ground of ethics which proves, however, insufficient for their thorough and organic interpenetration. The close treatment of form as a principle distinct from and higher than life is beset with a deep dualism, which impedes the study of literature in the unity of its social and artistic dimensions, and reduces the variety of historically conditioned literary forms to the subservient function of materializing eternal architectonic categories. Confined to the perspective of general aesthetics, Lukács's and Bakhtin's understanding of form remains – despite all attempts,

especially by Lukács, to overcome the limitations of this approach – impervious to the historical dynamics of art.

It is only when Lukács and Bakhtin turn to genre that the margin between the social and the artistic, between form and life gradually starts to fade. Following their attempts in the field of the philosophy of art, the commitment to a genre-focused criticism is the hallmark of their subsequent careers. Over the last two decades the category of genre has seen a rapid decline into disrepute, mainly because of the essentialist connection it promotes between artistic form and world views.[30] In the earlier stages of twentieth-century critical discourse, however, and especially in the late 1910s–1930s, genre enjoyed a good reputation as a tool of literary and cultural history, and as a means of conceptualising the variety of literary forms. The numerous histories of particular genres in German *Geistesgeschichte* as well as the writings of the Russian Formalists furnish ample evidence of this. With Lukács and Bakhtin, genre receives the added function of opening up the discourse on literature towards the social aspects of form in the broader context of culture. But as we have seen in the two previous sections, their drive towards historicism was constantly held in check by immanentist ideas about the timeless nature of form. The category of genre, then, bears the birthmarks of the discourse on form. In both Lukács's and Bakhtin's writings historicism and essentialism remain closely interwoven as an articulation of the only possible way of theorizing literature from the perspective of modernity: as a time-conditioned phenomenon which nevertheless proves to be representative of the pure, autonomous, and intransient essence of art.

Notes

1   Bakhtin's own words that he is a philosopher and not a literary historian or theorist are too well-known to need repetition here.

2   Comparative research on Lukács and Bakhtin has so far entirely neglected the early work of Bakhtin in order to concentrate exclusively on his writings on the novel, see, e.g., Strada (1976); Kovács (1980); Aucouturier (1983); Corredor (1983); Cases (1985); Hall (1985); Jha (1985); Wegner (1988); Orlov (1992); Neubauer (1996). The only exception to this general neglect of Bakhtin's early work is Matthias Freise's brief examination of possible links between the early Lukács and the early Bakhtin (see Freise, 1993: 58–61).

3   Elias (1939: 8). The entire first chapter of Elias's classic study is devoted to the 'sociogenesis' of the difference between culture and civilization in German usage.

4   A very good exposition of these problems in a broad historical context is to be found in Ringer (1969).

5 The most important document of the neo-Kantian attack against *Lebensphilosophie* is Heinrich Rickert's *Die Philosophie des Lebens. Darstellung und Kritik der philosophischen Modeströmungen unserer Zeit* (1920), where vestiges of the philosophy-of-life attitude are identified even in the thought of Husserl and Scheler, two thinkers of extreme importance to Bakhtin (see Rickert, 1922: 29–30); cf. Voloshinov's ambivalent attitude to Rickert's book (*MPL*, 32, n. 10).

6 Windelband's concessions can be seen as one of the reasons why in an innovative analysis of neo-Kantianism he is said, among others, to better deserve the prefix 'neo' rather than the definition 'Kantian' (Köhnke, 1991: 251); similarly, Paul Honigsheim, in an article discussing the Hegel renaissance in Heidelberg at the time Lukács was there, recalls that Georg Jellinek used to speak of Windelband as an exponent of of neo-Fichteansim rather than neo-Kantianism (Honigsheim, 1963: 299). Accounts of the gradual drift towards Hegelianism of two more neo-Kantian thinkers from the Marburg school, Paul Natorp and Nicolai Hartmann, can be found in Willey (1978: 118–20) and in Sieg (1994: 316–24) and Fleishman *et al.* (1996: I, 85, n. 213), respectively. It is, therefore, hardly by accident that in *Safe Conduct* Boris Pasternak recalls the Marburg neo-Kantians as people who were looking at history in a twofold way, one aspect of which was to look through 'Hegelian eyes' (Pasternak, 1986: 41).

7 On Cassirer's Hegelianism see Levy (1927: 47–9); Verene (1969); Lipton (1978: 70–82); Crois (1987). On Cassirer's impact on Bakhtin see Poole (1995a) and Brandist (1997).

8 For bibliographical references see Bonetskaia (1995b) and V. Liapunov's notes to *TPA*.

9 On the philosophical undertakings of the circle see Karádi and Vezér (1985) and Por (1984). See also Congdon (1983), Gluck (1985) and Kadarkay (1991).

10 Mannheim's strong debt to Simmel's well-known division of culture into objective and subjective is visible here.

11 No other book in Lukács's oeuvre has brought about a deeper divide among commentators than *Soul and Form*. Contemporaries, especially in Hungary, gave it a lukewarm reception stressing its opaqueness and chaotic verbosity; Emma Ritoók, later a participant in the Sunday Circle in Budapest (and later still the author of a *roman à clef* in which Lukács figures not to his best advantage), bluntly wrote that the genre of the essay cannot be used to convey *philosophical* messages about art (see Ritoók, 1912: 326). Lukács's numerous attempts to promote his book among leading German scholars yielded only very modest results. In keeping with good form, most recipients of the book were polite without, however, committing themselves to approval or even to a serious perusal (this situation is amply documented in Lukács's early *Briefwechsel*). Of those who embraced the book as innovative and rich, Lucien Goldmann deserves special mention for praising Lukács as the predecessor of Heidegger. (That Goldmann's linking of Lukács and Heidegger rests on assumptions of *Zeitgeist* unity rather than on facts has been established by István Fehér (see Fehér, 1997).)

12 G. Márkus is right to argue that Lukács's attraction to Hegel in this period was complicated and held in check by a competing sympathy for Fichte's moral

activism (see Márkus, 1977: 227–8). But it seems to me that Márkus's conclusion that the young Lukács was never a Hegelian thinker in the strict sense (Márkus, 1977: 228) prevents us from fully appreciating Lukács's dramatic move from undisputed reverence for Kant to a shared allegiance to Kant and Hegel, with the last of his early writings moving still closer to Hegel.

13 Lukács's regressivist interpretation was endorsed by the prominent Hungarian art historian Lajos Fülep who spoke of Cézanne as 'the firmest affirmation of the reality of the real world'. Fülep viewed his realism as a realism 'not in the modern sense of the word but in the medieval one'. Cézanne, he went on, 'represents a piece of the Middle Ages amidst the age of Impressionism' (quoted in Gluck, 1984: 141).

14 It is essential to realize that Bakhtin's criticism of Bergson as one of the main representatives of philosophy-of-life (*TPA*: 13) cannot be taken at face value (as has very often been the case). Bakhtin's discontent stems from the insufficient radicalism of Bergson's project, not from its essence and direction. While Bakhtin undoubtedly approves of Bergson's endeavour 'to include the theoretical world within the unity of life-in-process-of-becoming', he disapproves of the fact that all Bergson's efforts amount to is 'a certain aesthetisation of life, and this masks to some degree the obvious incongruity of pure theoreticism'.

15 An asterisk is used to signal modifications of the existing English translations of Bakhtin's texts.

16 More on this see in Tihanov (1998b).

17 For more on Kagan and Bakhtin see Iu. Kagan (1992a and 1992b), Poole (1995b and 1997b) and Coates (1998).

18 The aesthetics of the young Lukács and his analysis of form have already attracted a great deal of scholarly attention. Special mention should be made of Márkus (1977), Jung (1981), Keller (1984), Puhovski (1986), Bürger (1988), Kruse-Fischer (1991), Weisser (1992) and Machado (1997). My own analysis differs from these in its aims and structure and in the greater emphasis placed on Lukács's attempt to appropriate Hegel in the *Heidelberg Aesthetics*.

19 There are preparatory materials for the *Heidelberg Philosophy of Art* dating from 1910–11. The notebooks, which come from the magically inexhaustible Heidelberg suitcase, are soon to be published by the Lukács Archive in Budapest as *Die Heidelberger Hefte* (cf. Machado, 1997: 64, n. 25).

20 The question of the precise dating of 'Author and Hero' and *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* remains open. N. Nikolaev locates *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* in 1922–23 and 'Author and Hero' in 1923–24 (see Nikolaev, 1997); in support of this dating he claims a close textological connection between 'Author and Hero' and 'The problem of Content, Material and Form', which was written in 1924 (see N. Nikolaev's notes in Gogotishvili and Gurevich, 1992: 247–8, n. 6). B. Poole, on the other hand, suggests 1926 as the year in which the texts of both *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* and 'Author and Hero' were still being revised by Bakhtin (see Poole, 1997a: 2).

21 On Bakhtin's work in the light of reader-response criticism see Shepherd (1989).

22 On other aspects of Simmel's impact on Bakhtin's understanding of form

see Bonetskaia (1995a). Bonetskaia's article, for all its flaws, some of which we will point to later, remains the most serious study of the category of form in Bakhtin's works.

23 'Avtor-tvorets – konstitutivnyi moment khudozhestvennoi formy' (*Raboty*, 306); this sentence, whose importance Bakhtin has signalled by italicising it, is omitted in the standard English translation.

24 The Russian text reads: '*Forma est' granitsa*, obrabotannaya esteticheski' (*Raboty*, 160). Liapunov's translation, '*Form is a boundary* that has been wrought aesthetically', is very good indeed, but owing to the ambiguity of 'wrought' it stresses too much an element of evaluation, which, I feel, is only latent in Bakhtin's text. 'Wrought' could imply that form is material-ized only in those works of art in which it (form) is foregrounded and which display skilfulness and craftsmanship; while this assumption is not entirely at variance with Bakhtin's canonical view of art, it does not do justice to Bakhtin's use of the far more neutral 'obrabotannaia' and to the particular context of this use, in which there is no mention at all of talent, skills or degrees of craftsmanship. But we should not forget that form is after all only a specific type of boundary. Bakhtin's idea is that the existence of form as a boundary is inherent in human interaction with the world, but is brought to the surface and made visible only in the meeting between art and life, after receiving an 'aesthetic treatment'. In this interpretation, art does not generate the boundary; it only expresses it. This understanding of form is strongly reminiscent of Simmel's statement: 'a boundary is not a spatial fact; it is a sociological fact that has been given a spatial expression'.

25 Stressing the singularity of the deed, H. Cohen, one of Kagan's (and through Kagan also Bakhtin's) main teachers in philosophy, regarded it as the principle problem of ethics (see Cohen, 1904: 68). The interpenetration of the aesthetic and the ethical can often be seen in Cohen's work.

26 Commentators on Bakhtin's early works, fascinated as most of them are with Bakhtin's 'architectonics of responsibility', remain untroubled by this dualism. As a rule, they fail to discriminate between the ethical meaning of 'architectonics' in 'Author and Hero' and the neutrally phenomenological meaning of the term in 'The Problem of Content, Material, and Form'. Bonetskaia's article (cf. n. 22) furnishes one of the many confirmations.

27 The English translation weakens and unduly qualifies Bakhtin's criticism by adding a non-existing 'thus' before the last word of the sentence; cf. also pp. 270–1 where Bakhtin castigates the tendency of Russian Formalism to 'dissolve architectonic forms' into compositional ones.

28 The same phenomenon can be observed in 'Author and Hero': 'In the epic, this degree of visual actualization is higher: the description of the hero's exterior in the novel, for example, must necessarily be recreated visually, even if the image ... will be visually subjective with different readers' (AH, in *AA*: 95*). The English translation, on which the above text is based, unfortunately distorts the meaning of the passage by translating the Russian 'V epose' with 'In narrative literature'.

29 This attitude will later resurface in Bakhtin' essay on the *Bildungsroman*.

30 One of the most powerful critiques of the essentialist understanding of genre has come from Derrida's 'The Law of Genre' (Derrida, 1980).

4
Bakhtin, Marxism and Russian Populism

Craig Brandist

This chapter examines the vexed question of the relationship between the Mikhail Bakhtin and Marxism. The question is 'vexed' because for some years now there have been many rival attempts either to claim Bakhtin as a Marxist, or to present his work as fundamentally anti-Marxist. In the former camp have been such important commentators as Allon White and Tony Bennett, while the latter has included such specialists as Michael Holquist, Caryl Emerson, Gary Saul Morson and most Russian interpreters. The hostility of the last towards an ideology which was claimed by the Soviet state as its guiding principle is understandable, but even there important academics such as Vladimir Bibler, Leonid Batkin and Aron Gurevich have seen aspects of Bakhtin's work as quite compatible with Marxism. Despite the attempts of most Russian interpreters, echoed most vocally by Emerson, to cast Bakhtin as a religious or even theological thinker, having an attitude towards politics which is no further left than Western liberalism, the issue of Bakhtin's relationship to Marxism refuses to lie down. This is not surprising since many of Bakhtin's formulations find significant parallels in the work of the most significant Marxist theorists, from Lukács and Benjamin to Gramsci.[1]

Yet there are particular qualities about Bakhtin's work, especially in the 1930s–1960s, which sets him apart from most Marxist theorists contemporary with him: the championing of popular culture as the source of *Ideologiekritik* and radical artistic strategies aimed at undermining the ruling hegemony underlain by the vitality of 'the people' as a category that admits no class divisions. This formulation derives, I shall argue, from the traditions of Russian populism, which was itself formed under the powerful influence of the works of Marx and Engels. As a result, Bakhtin's work, while certainly not Marxist in the orthodox

fashion, would have been impossible without, and indeed presumes, a perspective one of the crucial elements of which was Marxism. Furthermore, just as the work of the 'classic' Russian populists raised, formulated and set before the founders of historical materialism questions that were fundamental in the development of their thought, Bakhtin's work has introduced into Marxist theory a set of issues which are crucial for the further development of Marxism itself.

It should be noted from the outset that to highlight the influence of the populists on Bakhtin's work is not to question the centrality of German idealist philosophy in understanding his thought. This has been demonstrated beyond all doubt. Rather, it draws attention to the fact that Bakhtin understood German idealism in a fashion which was shaped by the Russian populist tradition. Although there is little textual evidence that Bakhtin was familiar with the works of individual populists, the influence of populism in Russian social thought was so pervasive that it would be quite remarkable if someone so familiar with the works of major nineteenth-century Russian writers was oblivious to their general formulations.[2] Furthermore, most Russian sociology of the beginning of the twentieth century in one way or another combined the populists' conceptual framework with the very German traditions on which Bakhtin drew. Here I shall concentrate only on those texts whose authorship by Bakhtin is beyond dispute, despite the more overtly Marxist framework of those works published under the names of Voloshinov and Medvedev in the late 1920s. As we shall see, it is only following the attempts of these writers to marry Marxist categories with neo-Kantian philosophy and Simmelian social theory[3] that a populist amalgam comes to the fore in Bakhtin's work, an amalgam that was anticipated in much pre-revolutionary Russian sociology but which now took a rather distinct form. Where Voloshinov and Medvedev had striven to make Marxism the sociological element of their thought, Bakhtin returned to an older tradition of Russian sociology, a crucial element of which was the selective incorporation of Marxist tenets.

Marxism and populism

At the outset we must note that we are speaking about Russian populism as an ideological tendency rather than a political process represented by certain political organizations. The most famous Marxist definition of Russian populism, *narodnichestvo*, in this sense was given by Lenin in 1897. He outlined the following features:

1. Belief that capitalism in Russia represents a deterioration, a retrogression;
2. Belief in the exceptional character of the Russian economic system in general, and of the peasantry, with its village community, *artel*', etc. in particular;
3. Disregard of the connection between the 'intelligentsia' and the country's legal and political institutions, on the one hand, and the material interests of definite social classes on the other (Lenin, 1967 vol. 2: 528–9).

The last point pertains to the populists' alleged inability to differentiate between different layers within the intelligentsia, some of whom were integrated into the institutional structures of the state and capital. A little later Lenin strove to distinguish the term from general talk about democracy by noting that it supplements democracy with an advocacy of agrarian reform, with 'socialist dreams, with hopes of avoiding the capitalist path'. This, to a considerable extent, though with some reservations, captures the 'classical form' of Russian populism. This is not to say that we can find a single writer whose work embodies this classical form without any deviations, additions, revisions or particular emphases, only that it functions as a general characterisation of a somewhat diffuse current of ideas.

Treating the phenomenon of populism so broadly does not, however, mean that we cannot identify certain books as its classical documents. These are P.L. Lavrov's *Historical Letters*, N.K. Mikhailovskii's *What is Progress?* and V.V. Flerovskii's *The Condition of the Working Class in Russia*, all of which were published in 1869. The first two unequivocally rejected the notion of a unilinear developmental path which, in turn, undermined the notion that the Western path of capitalist development was inevitable in Russia. Meanwhile, Flerovskii vividly described the growing pauperization of the Russian countryside and the characteristically capitalist forms of exploitation that were emerging there. The conclusion, which was explicitly spelled out in the last book, was that the development of capitalism in Russia should be prevented if at all possible, with alternative developmental possibilities being inherent in the peasant commune. In saying this, however, the populists were not responding simply to the development of capitalism in Russia, but also to the development of capitalism and socialism in the West. The democratically-minded Russian intelligentsia had been preoccupied with theorizing the relationship between Russia and the West for many decades, and the development

of capitalism in Russia following the emancipation of the serfs in 1861 gave this preoccupation fresh urgency.

The chief factor in the formation of the intelligentsia's image of Western capitalism was Marxism in general, and the newly published first volume of *Das Kapital* (1867) in particular. So impressed were they that to Marx's own surprise the first translation of the book appeared in Russian in 1872, and it was the populists who were to play the largest role in the dissemination of the Marxist image of capitalism in Russia. As Walicki notes,

> It might seem paradoxical but it was Marx's *Capital* which caused the Russian democrats to conceive of capitalism as their 'enemy number 1', thus contributing to their idealisation of the pre-capitalist social relationships and, by the same token, making them full-fledged Populists.

The fact that most populists had, at best, a partial and second-hand familiarity with *Capital* does not in any way invalidate this observation because 'Marx's description of the atrocities of the primitive accumulation and of the industrial revolution in England, his theory of surplus-value and his criticism of the "formal" character of the bourgeois "political democracy" were immediately adapted to Populist thought and made part and parcel of it' (Walicki, 1969: 133).

Lavrov (1823–1900), who was already in exile, immediately contacted and befriended Marx and Engels, although he maintained a certain critical distance from their ideas. Nevertheless, he adapted his view to take account of the objective economic conditions for socialist transformation, which he had previously ignored. Mikhailovskii (1842–1904), who refused to leave Russia, began a dialogue with the two Germans which lasted many years. Criticising what he saw as Marx's adherence to a notion of a unitary process of development, he noted that 'the soul of a Russian disciple of Marx' would be torn apart by the confrontation between the horrors of capitalist industrialisation and its inevitability if socialism was to be a real possibility. Marx's doctrine, argued Mikhailovskii, meant that 'this collision between moral feeling and historical inevitability should be resolved, of course, in favour of the latter' (Wada, 1984: 61). Marx responded that his work should not be interpreted as a general philosophy of history and that analogous events in different historical environments led to completely different results, but he nevertheless amended certain sections of the French edition of *Capital* where reference is made to

Russian precursors of populism. Thus began a truly *dialogic* encounter between two different positions that led to the development, and a substantial convergence, of both trends of thought. The sharp polemics between the populists and those Russian Marxists who considered themselves 'orthodox' in the subsequent decades was not due to the mutual exclusivity of their approaches, but to the one-sided evolutionism which typified Second International Marxism in general and its Russian variety in particular. This mechanical approach was canonised at the height of the Stalin period. As Walicki and others have shown, however, Marx himself was deeply impressed by the populists and rethought his position on the economic and socio-political development of what are now called 'developing societies'. It is, of course, impossible to rehearse their arguments here, but it should be noted that the grounds for convergence lay in the assessment of the role and historical fate of the peasant commune.

To the populists and those academics who shared their perspectives, the peasant commune, which they had discovered during their 'going to the people' campaigns, represented a survival of what Marx called 'primitive communism', a positive relic of pre-class society. This, they argued, could play an important role in the transformation from present conditions and the establishment of a new socialist society without the intervening destructiveness of the rule of capital. Like Marx, they did not consider the commune unique to Russia, but argued that it was precisely in Russia that the best preserved example was to be found. When in the 1870s Marx and Engels began reading the anthropology of Mourer and Morgan, however, they too began to stress the ethnocentric (that is, concentration on human need) and inherently democratic aspects of primitive communities in contrast to the profit-centred, alienated and hierarchical aspects of contemporary capitalism. Although Marx continued to record the poverty-stricken and parochial limitations of the primitive commune, the recent experience of the Paris Commune's experimentation with post-capitalist democracy led Marx to consider the aspects of social organization which the two forms had in common. The philosophical rationale was easy to find in Hegel, for the post-capitalist commune would resemble the primitive form of organization, but dialectically reconstituted at a higher level, globally connected and based on material abundance rather than equality of scarcity. The new position came to the surface in a series of short pieces Marx wrote after *Capital*, but was addressed most extensively in the drafts of a letter Marx wrote to the Russian revolutionary activist Vera Zasulich in 1881.

Marx and Engels had been extremely excited by the prospects of revolution in Russia, especially in the event of Russia losing its war with Turkey, and began to rethink their position on the possibility of socialism there. Where they had previously argued that a revolution in Russia could take a socialistic direction only in the event of a revolution in the more advanced West, they now began to consider a Russian revolution as a possible trigger for a wider workers' uprising in Europe. Zasulich asked Marx whether he thought the commune was destined to perish, to which Marx answered that 'what threatens the life of the Russian commune is neither historical inevitability nor a theory but oppression by the state and exploitation by capitalist intruders whom the state has made powerful at the peasant's expense'. He then went on to assess the structural characteristics of the Russian commune, noting that the communal ownership of the land offers a natural basis for collective appropriation and production; that the peasant familiarity with the *artel'* could facilitate the transition from individual plot to collective agriculture, and that the communal exploitation of meadowlands shows that a limited form of communal production was already practised. He also noted that the transition to cooperative labour was essential to rescue Russian agriculture from its crisis, the technological preconditions for which had been developed by Western capitalism. The latter's crisis-ridden nature showed that such a development was globally necessary. The fate of the commune thus depended on certain historical conditions:

> Its constitutive form allows of the following alternative: either the element of private property which it implies gains the upper hand over the collective element, or the reverse takes place. Everything depends on the historical context in which it is situated … Both solutions are *a priori* possibilities, but each one naturally requires a completely different historical context. (Marx, 1984: 109–10)

These comments were not published anywhere until 1924, and in Russia only in 1926. They were finally debated in 1929 when the process of forcible collectivisation and centralised primitive accumulation had already begun. By that time there was no chance of an unrestricted debate, and the formuations were attributed to Marx's declining intellectual capacities at the end of his life. Such formulations too strongly echoed Trotskii's theory of *permanent revolution* to be treated in any other fashion. For Trotskii, the hegemony of the proletariat over the peasantry (the cities over the countryside) in a general

uprising could overcome the parochial limitedness of the isolated commune, thus launching the first stage of an international socialist revolution.

Thus populism and Marxism fertilized each other. As Walicki argues, Marxism should be considered 'the main frame of reference for the proper understanding of classical Russian populism' and, at the same time, classical populism 'should be recognized as one of the most important chapters in the history of a broadly conceived reception of Marxism' (Walicki, 1969: 132). In such a case we would be mistaken to consider elements of populism in Bakhtin's work without at the same time considering Marxism as an aspect of that, and vice versa.

Subjective sociology

It has become almost axiomatic for Marxist interpreters of Bakhtin to claim that while much of what Bakhtin has to say about cultural conflict, the struggle between socially positioned cultural practices, is conducive to Marxist interpretation there is a consistent neglect of questions dealing with the institutional context within which the 'novelist' and 'poet' operate.[4] After about 1934, the novelist is seen as the systematiser of popular conceptions, a role which strongly recalls the populist conception of the role of the progressive intelligentsia in their dealings with 'the people', a position which conforms to the third characteristic of populism described by Lenin (see above). Lenin was referring to the so-called *subjective sociology* of the populists developed, most notably, by Lavrov and Mikhailovskii. This developed in opposition to the supposed laws of historical necessity which the mechanical materialists had adapted from Hegel to justify the development of Capitalism in Russia regardless of its human cost.[5] As early as 1856, Lavrov had condemned the tendency in Russia to apply Hegelian categories directly to the material world:

> The analogy with the physical world permits, it seems, with considerable certainty, the necessity of all moral-historical phenomena rather than their fortuity. Indeed, it seems to me that one can assert in place of Hegel's 'all that is real is rational' another dogma: 'all that is real is necessary'. But the desire for a better life is one of man's spiritual phenomena. As a real, necessary, constant force this desire must produce results. (Cited in Pomper, 1972: 29)

'Subjective sociology', in contradistinction to logical necessity, the

inhumanity of the *Weltgeist*, emphasized the ethical dimension of social change. It had three main contentions, which, as we shall see, anticipated neo-Kantian historicism: (1) moral values cannot be eliminated or derived from facts, moral evil cannot be scientifically justified and moral protest against suffering is valuable whatever the 'objective' conditions; (2) the social sciences cannot be 'objective', but always involve emotional or ideological factors; and (3) human thought and will can effectively oppose the 'laws' of development and decisively shape historical progress (Walicki, 1969: 32).

Although it is couched in terms of German *Lebensphilosophie* and neo-Kantian ethics, in Bakhtin's earliest sustained work there is already a strong echo of the populists' moral protest against passive acceptance of the logic of development. At one point he argues that '[l]ogical clarity and necessary consequence, torn from the single, unique centre of a responsible consciousness, are dark and elemental forces precisely because of the law of immanent necessity inherent in logic' (*Raboty*: 33). The 'responsible consciousness' is a bulwark against inhuman logical development. In one of his only direct comments on Marxism, Bakhtin, like Mikhailovskii, above, argues that the strength and appeal of historical materialism lies in its provision of 'a place for the performance of determinate, concretely historical, actual deeds', but that it commits the 'methodological sin' of failing to distinguish between 'the given and the projected, the is and the ought' (*ibid*.: 25–6). Like Lavrov, Bakhtin argues that each event (*sobytie*) is unique and unrepeatable, only able to be considered a pattern (history) because certain phenomena are selected according to a definite social ideal. As Lavrov puts it: '[p]urposeful conscious activity provides, by its very posing of the question, the central thread around which the other varieties of human activity are grouped' (1967: 99). This extends to the creation of history as well as to the understanding of the past, for historical activity begins with the appraisal and conscious selection of an ideal, that is, with the emergence of critically thinking individuals. To be a critical thinker, the individual must be able to critically negate the 'false idealizations' (the presentation of hidden egoistic motives beneath claims of disinterested and noble aspirations) implicit in historically determinate social institutions through sceptical analysis, and posit a new ideal:

By revealing a natural need or natural inclination at the basis of a given social institution, critical thought thereby recognizes the legitimacy of these bases and demands the construction of social

institutions on the foundation of *sincerity* of feeling – on a foundation of sincere regard to the needs and inclinations inherent in the nature of man. This realization in social institutions of moral ideals which are rooted in the very nature of man is a legitimate and truly human idealisation of man's natural needs, in opposition to their *false* idealisation in the guise of historically generated cultural institutions that in no way correspond to them. (Lavrov, 1967: 202 emphasis in the original)

The 'critically thinking individual', that is, the member of the intelligentsia, is morally obliged to *fuse* his particular interests with wider social interests:

He must direct his activity toward bringing truth and justice into social institutions, because this is not some kind of abstract aspiration but is *his* most intimate personal interest. At this level individualism becomes the realization of the general welfare through individual strivings – but the general welfare simply cannot be realized in any other way. Sociality becomes the realization of individual goals within social life – but they simply cannot be realized in any other context. (*ibid.*: 1967: 151; emphasis in the original)

Lavrov's formulations were at the most abstract and westernising wing of the populist movement, having clear connections with individualist and rationalist humanism, but this did not prevent their gaining enormous popularity among the democratic intelligentsia. In his later, more sociologically developed work, Lavrov began to account for the economic aspects of social development in a progression of 'forms of sociation' from the 'unconscious solidarity of customs' to the 'conscious solidarity of emancipated individuals' (Walicki, 1969: 38) that strongly anticipates the sociology of Simmel. Nevertheless, Lavrov was to continue to insist that 'questions of sociology are always questions about the laws of phenomena of solidarity and exclusively these phenomena' (Kazakov, 1969: 30). It is no use looking here for the idealisation of agricultural labour that filtered through to Bakhtin's account of carnival, but one can find strong parallels with the role of the novelist who subsumes and yet realizes his own perspective within the novel as a sort of democratic cultural institution. Similarly, in Lavrov's account of the birth of the historical world as linked to the emergence of the individual, and in the contrast of false ideals, which

must be unmasked, with the affirmation of truly social values as a central aspect of popular skepticism we find significant parallels with Bakhtin's later views. Like Bakhtin, Lavrov adopted a generally Hegelian historicism while maintaining a neo-Kantian insistence on the importance of ethical philosophy in understanding the open-endedness of social development.

It is to Mikhailovskii, however, that we must look for the fusing of the cause of 'critically thinking individuals' with a retrospective utopianism which saw the progress of individuality being negated by contemporary social development.[6] He argued that while primitive society resembles an undifferentiated mass, those who comprise that mass are in themselves many sided and whole, their personality is *tselostnaia*, integral, rather than integrated into a larger social organism. The development of the social organism is simultaneously a process of the homogenization of its constitutive organs which become one-sided and specialised; the social abstraction develops at the expense of the concrete individual. The foundation of this homogenization, and of all social relationships, is the division of labour. Primitive society is characterized by *simple cooperation*, with no social differentiation, specialization or subordination, while more developed society is characterized by *complex cooperation*, with consequent differentiation, inequality and subordination. The division of labour leads to fragmentation of personality and the division of the perception of the world into a series of autonomous areas while the separation of mental and manual labour leads to a dichotomy of theory and practice. Mikhailovsky approvingly quotes Schiller's assertion that 'by eternally occupying himself with some fragment of the whole, man himself becomes a fragment' (Edie *et al.*, 1965: 179), and this is reflected in his spiritual creation. Mankind breaks up into antagonistic social groups as aims become complex and thus not understood by each other, each specialized group taking its own limited perspective to be adequate to the world as a whole. This period in human evolution Mikhailovskii calls *eccentrism*, 'the breaking up of man into independent and mutually hostile fragments', the most significant split being between thought and action. Yet 'however much history has done to fragment man he is still a single whole, and thought is connected with sense impressions by an indissoluble bond' (*ibid.*: 191). The social whole and the sundered individual are never completed. On this basis Mikhailovskii is able to deliver his celebrated definition of *progress*:

> Progress is the gradual approach to the integral individual, to the fullest possible and most diversified division of labour among man's organs and the least possible division of labour among men. Everything that diminishes the heterogeneity of society and thereby increases the heterogeneity of its members is moral, just, reasonable and beneficial. (*ibid*.: 187)[7]

On this basis it is easy to see the progressive role the populists bestowed on the peasant commune, however imperfect, in opposition to both the rigid feudal estates of the medieval system and the spread of capitalist productive relations which were viewed as its next stage. The commune was considered a relic of primitive society not feudalism. Though poor, the peasant was closer to the integral individual than the worker or the intellectual, hence the necessity for the peasant to exercise hegemony over the intellectual, for it was the remnants of primitive society which provided both the source for the critique of the contemporary world as well as the ideal for the transformation of society into a homogeneous whole and the concomitant diversity of integral individuals.

I shall argue that this formulation is a central aspect of Bakhtin's characterisation of the struggle at the level of culture in general and his conception of carnival in particular. However, before this, it must be noted that, as Walicki shows, Mikhailovskii's argument was to a large extent based on a specific reading of *Capital* and this in large part explains the striking similarities between *eccentrism* and Marx's early writings on alienated labour. It was, moreover, a selective reading of *Capital* that in significant ways resembled Simmel's neo-Kantian reading in which the division of labour underlies the establishment of an objective culture that becomes increasingly remote from the individuals who are both its creators and realizers. For Simmel, individual culture cannot keep pace with objective culture with the result that the former becomes a distorting and alienating incrustation over the vitality of subjectivity (Simmel, 1997: 103–7; Simmel, 1978). Mikhailovskii, however, combined this with an idealisation of the *communal* vitality of *the people*, by which he meant the peasantry. In *Capital* Mikhailovsky found an account of how the masses were wrenched from their land and thrown, unattached, onto the labour market; deprived of economic self-sufficiency and deprived of individual wholeness.[8] Furthermore, the negation of this form of society was shown to be a form of common ownership and control that led to the development of the 'whole' collective labourer. This was understood to

mean that the remains of communal ownership must be preserved in order to jump over the capitalist stage of development:

> The workers' question in Europe is a revolutionary question because its solution consists in giving the means of production back to the producers, that is in the expropriation of the present proprietors. The worker's question in Russia is a conservative question because its solution consists merely in keeping the means of production in the hands of the producers, that is, in protecting the present proprietors against expropriation. (Walicki, 1969: 60–1)

Inspired by *Capital*, Mikhailovskii read the works of Rousseau and Schiller on the effects of the division of labour on the integrity of the individual in a new light, incorporating their insights into his own retrospective utopia, while jettisoning the latter's idealization of ancient Greece.[9] As we shall see, however, Bakhtin equivocated between these two ideals.

Bakhtin and the populists

Bakhtin's familiarity with the work of the German neo-Kantian philosophers in the 1920s was to some extent due to the influence of his close friend Matvei Kagan (1889–1937). The Marburg (Hermann Cohen (1842–1918); Paul Natorp (1854–1924)) and Baden (Wilhelm Windelband (1848–1915); Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936)) school philosophers regarded themselves as ethical socialists and Kagan, who had studied in Marburg under Cohen and with Ernst Cassirer (1874–1945), drew explicit parallels between neo-Kantian ethics and Russian populism.[10] In an obituary of Cohen published in 1922, but probably written four years earlier, Kagan notes that 'Mikhailovskii's "truth is Justice" and the *fundamental law of truth* (*Grundgesetz der Wahrheit*) in Cohen's *Ethik des reinen Willens* (Ethics of Pure Will) grounds the problem of truth, fundamentally, in the concept of the Ought'. Indeed, Cohen was thought to have provided a clearer formulation of the populists' problem (Kagan, 1922: 118 emphasis in the original). For his part, although a champion of Kantian ethics, Cohen regarded his philosophy to be in complete agreement with the ethics implicit in Marx's writings, something which caused him professional difficulties at the end of his life. Kagan was certainly not the first to notice the way in which Lavrov and Mikhailovskii anticipated the work of the German neo-Kantians.

Indeed, both Lavrov and Mikhailovskii were not averse to quoting from the works of the early neo-Kantian and political activist Friedrich Lange (1828–75) (Vucunich, 1976: 39–40; Lavrov, 1967: 28), who also regarded *Capital* as 'an excellent work' and highly valued Marx as a radical critic of liberalism (Köhnke, 1991: 159). A convergence of the two trends was repeatedly posited by latter-day populists and their supporters. In 1907 the Socialist Revolutionary Party leader and neo-populist sociologist Viktor Chernov (1873–1952), for example, had noted the difficulty in drawing any principled distinction between Rickert's teleological conception of history and Mikhailovskii's identi-fication of 'subjective ideals' as the motive force of history and cited the work of Dilthey, Windelband, Simmel and Rickert in support of the populist contentions that the data of the social sciences were subjective, that human existence was distinctively ethical and that humanity had a freedom of will (Vucinich, 1976: 108–9). The acade-mic populist sociologist Nikolai Kareev (1850–1931) argued cogently that even the most vociferous neo-Kantian critic of subjective sociol-ogy Bogdan Kistiakovskii (1868–1920), who had studied under Simmel and Rickert in Germany before taking up an academic career in Russia, shared more fundamental similarities than differences with the work of Lavrov, especially in introducing notions of duty and justice into social phenomena (Kareev, 1917). The premises for a fusion of these two intellectual currents were therefore established before Bakhtin began his work.

Like the Populists, the neo-Kantians substituted Kant's ethics of freedom for Hegel's dialectical monism, but the political implications were quite different. Whereas in Germany this converged with the ethical, evolutionary character of Eduard Bernstein's revisionism,[11] in Russia it converged with the more radical traditions of agrarian social-ism. Marburg neo-Kantian socialism gained its political relevance by offering the apparent possibility of an intellectual alliance between liberal reformism and working-class socialism, while in Russia neo-Kantian ethics offered an alternative to the acceptance of the 'catastrophic' evolution of capitalism through a political alliance of the populist intelligentsia and the peasantry. In the developed capitalism of the German state, Kantian ethics found a natural place within a Marburg politics descended from bourgeois liberalism which advo-cated a gradual reform of the system in accordance with the rule of law, while in semi-feudal Russia it combined with a revolutionary-demo-cratic politics which denied the necessity of following a predetermined path. In Germany the rejection of the Hegelian dialectic meant the

rejection of the revolutionary road, while in Russia it implied the rejection of evolutionary change. In his notes for the reworking of the Dostoevskii study in 1961, Bakhtin explicitly takes the populist path by arguing that the violence against the personality which reaches its extreme under capitalism 'can be fought only from the outside and with such externalised forces (justified revolutionary violence); the goal is personality' (*SS*:357).

The first clear indication that Bakhtin's work would take such a course comes in 1929, when Dostoevskii's novel is presented in a way which strongly recalls the method of subjective sociology. Although one can find in the early works methodological parallels with the populists, it is only now that an incipiently populist political perspective can be glimpsed behind the methodological subtleties. The great novelist is shown to present a 'plurality of unmerged consciousnesses' as opposed to the subsumption of each perspective within the unitary language of the author that Bakhtin finds in Tolstoi's work and the philosophy of Hegel. Bakhtin clearly champions the cause of the integral, fully valid 'I' against any attempt to identify the individual as a fragment of a larger organic whole. This does not necessarily provide evidence for populist leanings in itself. However, in the context of the literary world in 1920s Russia, Bakhtin's argument had a very specific resonance for, as Robert Jackson has noted, the Dostoevskii study also represented 'an embodiment of the poetics of a sizeable portion of postrevolutionary writing' (1986: 306). That portion included the most important so-called 'fellow travellers' such as Pil'niak and Olesha. Ever the astute observer, Leon Trotskii, in *Literature and Revolution,* noted that although these writers all supported the revolution, they did so in a specific fashion:

> They are all more or less inclined to look hopefully at the peasant over the head of the worker … The literary work of the 'fellow travellers' is, in its way, a new Soviet populism, without the traditions of the old populism and – up to now – without political perspective. As regards a 'fellow traveller', the question always comes up – how far will he go?… The solution … depends not so much on the personal qualities of this or that 'fellow traveller', but on the objective trend of things during the coming decade. (Trotskii, 1991: 90)

The Dostoevskii study, written on the border between the so-called 'polyphonic twenties' and the First Five-Year Plan is almost the epitome of this tendency. When Bakhtin discusses the sociological

preconditions for the development of Dostoevskii's novel, he notes that conditions were uniquely apposite in Russia:

> where capitalism arrived almost catastrophically and came upon untouched varied social worlds and groups, not weakened in their individuality, as in the west, by the gradual encroachment of capitalism. Here the contradictory essence of the becoming of social life, not fitting into the frames of a confident and serenely contemplative monologic consciousness, had to appear particularly sharp, and at the same time the individuality of ideologically destabilised and colliding social worlds had to be especially full and clear. Such were the objective preconditions for the multileveledness and multivoicedness of the polyphonic novel created. (*PDAP*:29)

The 'catastrophic' arrival of capitalism in a society where 'integral' individuals had not been gradually absorbed into the social organism laid the basis for the 'polyphonic novel' and its interaction of 'unmerged consciousnesses'. Bakhtin goes on to criticize Otto Kaus's contention that Dostoevskii shows 'capitalist man' for directly reading artistic form from economic logic (*PDAP*: 27–9); rather, Bakhtin claims Dostoevskii's creative intervention managed to express the threshold between ages and social principles.

Such an interpretation of Russian history and the significance of the 'polyphonic novel' owes much to the traditions of populism, for the integral individuality of Dostoevskii's heroes, torn from their isolated and primitive communities, is a source of resistance to the 'catastrophic' logic of capitalism which transforms the individual into a fragment of the monologic whole. Such characters as the 'Underground Man' is shown resisting absorption, dialogically struggling against finalisation by the author. The 'little man' theme in Russian literature, which can be traced from Evgeny in Pushkin's *The Bronze Horseman* to the malcontents of the novels of Olesha and Pil'niak, are seen as resisting a unitary flow of history modeled in the narratives of traditional realism. Dostoevskii is shown to subordinate his plot to making his integral characters speak for themselves, he is an intellectual subject to the hegemony of 'the people' in his novels. This is what lies behind his 'form-shaping ideology'.

The implicit populism of the first Dostoevskii study is, in Trotskii's terms, 'without political perspective'. Dostoevskii is shown as an innovator, creating a new type of novel which discloses sociological conditions rather than linking up with a tradition of popular resistance,

but the foundations for a more explicit populism had been laid. The significance of this was to emerge in the mid-1930s, when Bakhtin turned to the question of the novel as a genre rather than the work of a single writer. The implicit structure of the earlier work now begins to crystallise into a more elaborate socio-cultural perspective. The 'objective trend of things' which Trotskii noted would determine how far the 'fellow travellers' would follow the the revolution now involved the systematic destruction of the peasant commune and a process of primitive accumulation so brutally executed that the depravations of the British Industrial Revolution, the descriptions of which in *Capital* had so moved the populists, were tame in comparison. Furthermore, the corresponding offensive in the cultural sphere, permitting artistic production only within narrowly defined professional orthodoxies, established a set of cultural values against which insurgent forms of art could be defined. Bakhtin began gradually and implicitly to correlate the two processes in a conspicuously populist fashion.

What Bakhtin variously terms *monologism, authoritative discourse* and *the poetic*, as I have argued elsewhere (Brandist, 1996), describes an authoritarian relationship between discourses, or an authoritarian *hegemonic principle* rather than a type of discourse. This principle closely resembles a discursive manifestation of the process of the homogenization of the individual in the organic development of society elaborated by Mikhailovskii. Bakhtin unambiguously ascribes this principle to official cultural practices, attempting to transform each integral individual into a mere fragment of an organic social whole. The 'unitary language', Saussure's *langue*, Aristotle's *Poetics* and the literary canon are all cultural expressions of this 'centripetal' force within society, striving to assure the dominance of the abstract social whole over the concrete parts, turning the individual utterance into a mere instance of an abstract social language. These static cultural forms are what Cassirer called 'mythical', exercising unquestionable authority over the individual who is reduced to 'a mere passivity, a being acted upon rather than acting and this receptivity stands in evident contrast to that kind of spontaneity in which all self-consciousness as such is grounded' (Cassirer, 1957: 75). For Cassirer the mythical consciousness is overpowered by the object of perception, the individual seeing all of nature as a single, fundamental 'solidarity of life'. For the populists, and for Bakhtin, this is considered not so much as a solidarity with nature, which lies somewhere back in pre-history, but as a fundamental homogenization of the individual 'organs' of the social organism. Thus here, as elsewhere, Bakhtin

adopted an aspect of Cassirer's work and interpreted it according to a populist logic;[12] man is not reabsorbed into nature but absorbed by the social organism, the individual language is incorporated into the social language as a mere constituent part, an imperfect instance: the *parole* of the social *langue*. The individual is assigned a role in the functioning of the whole, subjected to its authority and reduced to silence while the forms of what Simmel called 'objective culture' ossify, threatening to fix and standardise the social form.

Against the centralising forces of authority work the *dialogic* forces of critical decentralization, termed the *novelistic*, and *internally persuasive discourse*. Again, this is more a democratic *hegemonic principle* than a type of discourse. Agreement is now the linguistic corollary of Lavrov's 'conscious solidarity of emancipated individuals': critically selected discourses are tightly interwoven with one's own, inspiring 'independent ideological life'. The critical forms of culture at once undermine the false totality built in false ideals and in doing so establish a solidarity of truly social values. Like Lavrov, though not Mikhailovskii, Bakhtin was not opposed to the diversification of the social whole as such; indeed, such unfolding of unique but limited perspectives was the precondition for the third step in human becoming – the return to the point of origin, but now fully articulated through incorporation of its antitheses. Naive subjectivity, of the sort which Mikhailovskii saw in the peasant commune, and Schiller had seen in ancient Greece, was alienated and divided only to be reunited at a higher stage; thus argued Lavrov, 'the great law divined by Hegel, which seems to apply in so many spheres of human consciousness, was borne out' (Lavrov, 1967: 82).[13] The socially stratified national language, *heteroglossia*, becomes in and through the novel, heteroglossia *for itself*, the social *interestedness* (false ideal) of each speaker is unmasked and the world beneath the myriad of perspectives comes into view, the 'truly social ideal' lying not in any single perspective but in the interactive principle that constitutes the social world according to subjective sociology. What Bakhtin terms dialogism is ultimately a new form of 'subjective sociology'; as Mikhailovskii put it in terms that we find echoed in the work of Simmel, 'the object of the social sciences is human relationships' (Vilenskaia, 1979: 115), but these relationships can only be studied from the standpoint of a social ideal, a 'form-shaping ideology'.

Carnival and the negation of the social organism

As we noted, above, the classic populist definition of progress requires that the heterogeneity of society is reduced, that the allocation of strictly defined social roles is negated, and that the integral individual is approached to the maximum degree. This, I want to argue, is precisely the function of carnival in Bakhtin's conception, whether on the streets or mediated through literature by the figures of the clown, rogue and fool. In carnival it is above all the fixity of social roles that is effaced. The place of each figure in society is relativised, serious hierarchical figures have their parodic doubles, the king is replaced by the fool, the priest by the rogue or the charlatan, indeed the whole structure of society is for a time inverted, turned inside out and subject to ridicule. In the collective experience of carnival, the heterogeneity of society is suspended, and the primordial mass of primitive, pre-class society is revisited:

> Even the very crush, *the physical contact of bodies*, acquires a certain meaning. The individual feels that he is an inseparable part of the collective, a member of the people's mass body. In this whole the individual body to a certain extent ceases to be itself; it is possible, as it were, to exchange bodies, to be renewed (changes of costume and mask). (*RWR*: 281; emphasis in the original)[14]

The carnival crowd resembles an extreme version of Mikhailovskii's 'simple cooperation': the social group becomes *physically* homogenous, while the individual transcends all specific social roles. In carnival the individual changes his or her place, remaining many-sided, overcoming the one-sided, specialized and hierarchical aspects of an everyday society based on complex cooperation. Banqueting, feasting (harvest), death (winter) and rebirth (spring) constitute the symbolic structure of popular retrospective utopia very much akin to that outlined by Mikhailovskii. Idealized agricultural labour is the mode of 'simple cooperation' that underlies the carnival festivities, but it is a mode of activity that is temporally isolated from the everyday realities of a society organized on the basis of 'complex cooperation'. Despite the limits on carnival time, these islands of utopian communality can form the basis for a profound critique of the assumptions of the contemporary social order. Just as the survival of the peasant communes represented a hope for future socialist transformation of society for the populists, so for Bakhtin remnants of carnival culture

comprise an anti-hegemonic resource for the critique and ultimately the conquest of the ossified sociocultural order.

To bring about the transformation of society or the cultural arena on the basis of 'simple cooperation' requires the breaking-down of the parochial limitations of the commune. The populists bestowed this task upon the democratic intelligentsia who, under the hegemony of the peasantry, would generalize and systematize their experience. The intelligentsia were to be treated as a social group that transcended the limits of class affiliation while, as for Bakhtin, the peasantry's sheer numbers qualified their being thought of as 'the people' rather than as a class.[15] The expression of this relationship was to be the populist political party which Lavrov was particularly concerned to build. For Bakhtin, the task of generalizing the critical potential of carnival culture was played by the novelist who, under the hegemony of his characters, systematizes and elaborates the perspectives of hitherto isolated or subordinated individuals. In being woven into the social whole without any detriment to his or her specificity, individuals regain their integral nature and many-sidedness. The characters who originate in the carnival square – the rogue, clown and fool – function in the novel to remove certain perspectives from their assumed positions of authority, stripping them of their hierarchical ornamentation through carnivalesque exposure, ridicule and dismemberment. What is exposed is the limitation of each social role, the fragment of the whole available to the *krugozor* (field of vision, circle of interests) of the organ of heterogeneous society; the interestedness behind the 'false ideal' of the character is revealed, and the 'true ideal' emerges from the interaction between consciousnesses. The novelist is the architect of this structure, organizing popular scepticism into a critical cultural forum just as the populist political leader organizes the masses into a potent political force.

Although the conception of carnival has diverse sources, from Nietzsche's Dionyssian revel filtered through the work of Viacheslav Ivanov to neo-Kantianism and *Lebensphilosophie*, there is a distinctly populist cement holding the formulation together. Bakhtin's populist reception and interpretation of German idealism is most clearly visible in the equivalence he repeatedly attempts to draw between antiquity and rural socialism. Bakhtin in some respects resembled many democratically minded intellectuals who had attempted to project the ideals of classical art forms onto revolutionary culture. The majority of these grafted the conservative aesthetic of Wagner's *Art-Work of the Future* onto Marx and Engels's conception of primitive societies to

pose classical art as the ideal for the socialist future. Ignoring the slave-owning base of ancient Athens, Lenin's wife Krupskaia even termed Soviet Russia 'the new Athens'. Thus the image of the ancient world drawn by Herder, Hölderlin, Schiller and Hegel, renewed by Wagner and even accepted by the young Marx, was carried into Russian theory (von Geldern, 1993: 34–6). The idealised conception of Greek culture was fused with aesthetic theory to produce a model for the remaking of the modern world so that the wholeness, unity and spontaneity of social life typical of 'antiquity' could be regained, while retaining the benefits facilitated by the modern division of labour. While Bakhtin rejected Lukács's attempt to continue this project on the basis of the kinship between the epic and the novel, he still accepted the validity of the general enterprise. The distinctiveness of Bakhtin's approach lies in the populist assimilation of the tradition. In Bakhtin's conception of antiquity, the square constituted the state and highest court of society, as well as the whole of science and art 'and on it was the entire people' (*VLE*: 282).[16] The Greek square, for Bakhtin, was populated by integral individuals, everything was external:

> But this all-round exteriority of the individual … [existed] in an organic human collective, 'in the people'. For that reason this 'surface', on which the whole man existed and was revealed was not something alien and cold ('the desert of the world') – it was his own native people. To be on the surface is to be for others, for the collective, for one's own people. A man was completely exteriorised within a human element, in the human popular medium. Therefore, the *unity* of a man's external wholeness had a *public* character. (*VLE*: 285–6)

For Bakhtin, as for Schiller and Hegel, ancient Greece was a society predating the division between the different spheres of life, the official and the popular (state and society), art and life, and as such it was a society before the corresponding fragmentation of the individual into public and private selves. Bakhtin's literary heroes, Rabelais, Goethe and Dostoevskii, are those who attempted 'a new fully exteriorised person in world literature'. It was Rabelais's work that constituted the 'most remarkable attempt' (*VLE*: 286), however, for it consituted the peak of Renaissance novel.[17] Carnival, for Bakhtin, is the temporary and utopian resurrection of the ancient state from within divided class society on the basis of peasant culture. In his article on satire for the planned tenth volume of the *Literaturnaia Entsiklopediia* (*SS*: 11–38),

Bakhtin even goes so far as to trace a line of descent from Greek civic festivals to Rabelais's novel and beyond. Satire, for Bakhtin, is the '*image-borne negation* [*obraznoe otritsanie*] of contemporary actuality in its different moments, which necessarily also incorporates – in one form or other, with a greater or lesser degree of concreteness and clarity – a positive moment affirming a better actuality' (*ibid*.: 15). In carnival the official, heterogeneous society is negated and the homogenous, utopian society of integral individuals is affirmed; in the novel in general and in 'critical realism' in particular, 'image-borne negation' reaches its summit (*ibid*.: 37), for now popular festive laughter is no longer isolated in small islands of holiday culture but has also overwhelmed the world of 'serious' or 'mythical' culture. In the novel the division of the world is overcome in art, but the separation of art and life remains.

Conclusion

Bakhtin's work is marked by eclecticism, but an eclecticism which was shaped by specifically Russian conditions and traditions. In a manner typical of Russian intellectuals, Bakhtin absorbed philosophical ideas from Western Europe, particularly from Germany, and interpreted them according to his own predilections, attuning them to contemporary sociocultural problems. As we have seen, Bakhtin's early philosophical works, in which he drew heavily on contemporary German neo-Kantianism (idealist socialism) and *Lebensphilosophie*, is strikingly reminiscent of the Russian populists' turn to ethical philosophy in the 1850s and 1860s, while his later works share a distinctively populist sociopolitical orientation. Those commentators, mainly American, who celebrate Bakhtin as an 'apolitical philosophical populist' (Emerson, 1996: 120) fail to recognize that the Russian populists of the 1870s also considered themselves to be 'apolitical' in the sense of being indifferent towards 'political forms', and that this was a mark of the purity of their socialism. As the young Chernyshevskii had argued: 'It does not matter whether there is a Tsar, or not, whether there is a constitution, or not; what really matter are the social relations, that is how to prevent the situation in which one class sucks blood from another' (Walicki, 1969: 83). Uncontaminated by liberal constitutionalism, the populists posited socialism as the antithesis of 'political struggle' rather as the early Bakhtin posed conscience, unique obligation, as the essence of morality against conceptions of legal responsibility. For both it is history that is the

final court of judgement, rather than some ideal constitutional arrangement, while laws and conventions limit responsibility and conscience. It was to be their own revolutionary experience that led the populists, like Chernyshevskii, to radically rethink the relationship between their 'political' and 'social' goals while the work of Bakhtin, an isolated academic, remained relatively untouched by institutional concerns.

I use the word *relatively* here quite deliberately. For reading Bakhtin's work of the 1930s one is always conscious of political and institutional factors at work off-stage as it were, making their presence felt within formal terminology that seems strained almost to breaking point in an attempt to register that presence. Bakhtin is too closely wedded to the categories of subjective sociology and idealist philosophy to adequately account for the phenomena of hegemony, anti-hegemony and counter-hegemony he examines, but in focusing on the phenomenological aspects of discursive interaction, he developed this aspect of the semiotics of hegemony more significantly than other theorists without collapsing into the nullity of Derrida's '*hors-texte*'. Similarly, in applying this analysis to questions of literary genre and literary history, Bakhtin facilitated the development of a method of literary analysis than can register the presence of sociopolitical antagonism within cultural forms without excessive reductionism or ideologism. Bakhtin's analysis needs amendment, however. Many of the phenomena he treats as ethical concerns, such as the process of linguistic centralization, are in fact political questions; similarly, the phenomenon of linguistic stratification is not merely a product of the plurality of consciousnesses but, as Bakhtin only suggests indirectly, also has socioeconomic determinants. In these areas Bakhtin's analysis needs to be supplemented and in some cases rectified according to the principles of Marxism. The process of interaction between Marxism and Bakhtin's philosophy must, however, be as dialogic as that between the founders of historical materialism and the populists they helped to call into being.

Notes

1 On Lukács see, most notably, Tihanov (1997a and 1997b) and Acouturier (1983); on Benjamin see Eagleton (1981); and on Gramsci see Gardiner (1992: 182–8) and my articles (1996).

2 Bakhtin briefly refers to Mikhailovskii in both the 1929 and 1963 editions of the Dostoevsky book (1994: 52, 259).

3 Simmel's book *The Philosophy of Money* (1978) was itself enormously influential on Marxist theory and to some extent was 'an attempt to transform

Marx's theory of value into a [neo-Kantian] … theory of the objectivization and autonomy of validity, which has both "liberating" and "tragic" consequences in capitalist society' (Rose, 1981: 27)

4   This is another point at which the populist approach converges with that of Simmel which was also distinguished by a 'neglect of the institutionalised structures' for an analysis of 'how individual needs and goals create the very forms of sociality in spontaneous interaction' (Levine, 1971: xxxvii–xxxviii).

5   Reflecting upon the reception of Hegel in Russia, Lavrov commented that 'Hegelianism' became a 'religious teaching' and an 'unconditional dogma' rather than simply a 'scientific system' or a 'philosophical school' (Khoros, 1974: 169).

6   Lavrov, unsurprisingly, was not happy with this formulation. On this see Vilenskaia (1979: 124–8). Vucinich, however, regards this disagreement as inessential (1972: 36–7).

7   Lavrov's 'definition' was rather more general: 'The physical, intellectual, and moral development of the individual; the incorporation of truth and justice in social institutions' (1967: 111). By the heterogeneity (*raznorodnost'*) of the members of society, Mikhailovsky seems to have had in mind the manysidedness of the individual as championed by, amongst others, Schiller.

8   At one stage Marx quotes Urquhart approvingly: 'The subdivision of labour is the assassination of a people' (Walicki, 1969: 62). Later, Engels was to assert that 'Man himself is divided along with the division of labour' (Vilenskaia, 1979: 110).

9   On the relationship between Schiller and Marx's writings on this matter see Kain (1982).

10 To illustrate the importance the Bakhtin circle gave to this aspect of neo-Kantianism it is sufficient to note that of all the neo-Kantian tracts from the beginning of the century Kagan chose to translate Natorp's 1920 book *Sozial-Idealismus* (*Social Idealism*) which advocated an idealist socialism. The connections between this work and Bakhtin's early work is briefly discussed in the editorial notes to the publication of an extract of Kagan's translation (Natorp, 1995: 112–15).

11 On this see Willey (1978: 174–80). Bernstein was actually hostile to Kantian philosophy, but he felt that neo-Kantian socialism gave philosophical force to his demand for a revision of the central tenants of Marxism. In this sense his ecchoing of the 'Back to Kant' slogan was more a demand to go back to Lange.

12 On this see Brandist (1997).

13 On Lavrov's critical reception of Hegel see Khoros (1974).

14 Chikin (1978) notes that for Mikhailovskii, there is an important difference between 'the people' and 'the crowd'. The former is viewed as eternal, while the latter is a temporary manifestation at times of historical transition. The 'threshold' character of Bakhtin's conception is strongly reminiscent of Mikhailovskii.

15 In the Rabelais book Bakhtin speaks of the incompatibility of the 'philosophy' of the people, implicit in carnival culture, with class divisions. The 'interweaving' of these traditions with the 'class gluttony' of a differentiated

ruling stratum creates an imbalance in the images of that culture in world literature. Thus the classless culture of 'the people' becomes a powerful resource for the critique of class society (RWR: 321–2).

16 The refusal of any division between 'state' and 'society' was also viewed by Marx and Engels as the greatness of Athenian democracy, but they also recognized the slave mode of production on which it was based. As Perry Anderson notes: 'The classical *polis* was based on the new conceptual discovery of liberty, entrained by the systematic institution of slavery: the free citizen now stood out in full relief, against the background of slave labourers … The community of the classical *polis*, no matter how internally class-divided, was erected above an enslaved work-force which underlay its whole shape and substance' (1974: 36–7).

17 On Bakhtin's conception of the Renaissance see Brandist (1999, forthcoming).

5
Memories of Nature in Bakhtin and Benjamin*

Barry Sandywell

Introduction

This chapter pursues one thread of a complex skein of questions bearing upon the interrelationships between the concepts of nature, history and temporality in the thought of Mikhail Bakhtin and Walter Benjamin. Given the space available it has a limited set of objectives. First, to draw attention to the remarkable parallels between the speculations of Benjamin and Bakhtin with respect to what might be called the crisis of nature as this was experienced through the lens of the dialectical tradition from Hegel and Marx to Simmel, Lukács and Western Marxism. Second, to briefly indicate how Benjamin and Bakhtin deconstructed the *Natur/Geist* dualisms of German social thought as one way of constructing a nonlinear, heterogeneous and 'open' image of nature and temporality. Finally, to suggest terms of reference for a more extensive exploration of the post-theological conception of nature in the work of these two thinkers.[1]

Natur und Geist

At the outset it is necessary to recall Western civilization's dominant image of nature. In mainstream philosophy 'nature' has become synonymous with a categorially-determined objectivity (variously designated as 'the material world', 'external nature', 'brute nature' and so forth). Although the attitude is already prefigured in the materialism of ancient Greek atomism, it is only with the world-view of modernity that the totality of nature is seen as an Object of a spectating Subject.

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* In Memoriam Arthur Brittan (1929–98).

Nature then becomes an object of empirical method and scientific cognition. In accepting this perspective we approach the real as theorists striving to disclose the grammar of nature's lawfulness independent of all cultural processes. And since Galileo, this language has been written in mathematical figures and troped as the speech of God. Deciphering nature's voice is motivated by a desire to implement the Biblical imperative to name, master and possess the natural world. In its most recent incarnation, the signifier 'nature' falls on one side of a binary division between spirit and matter. The psychophysicalist ontology of *Geist* and *Natur* thus provides a conceptual blueprint for modern images of nature as the 'other' of spirit, the antithesis of the sphere of meaningful action. In the terminology of German idealism this attitude has been described as 'the naturalization of the spirit' (Husserl, 1970: 292).

The conceit of a monologic 'voice of nature' is usually traced back to the scientific world-view of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that was universalized by Enlightenment naturalism in the eighteenth century. 'Nature' relinquished its role as a symbol of transcendence to assume secular functions as a metonymic sign for a universe of law-governed spatio-temporal objects distributed into different regions of beings. The ancient participatory cosmos was replaced by a mathematical order of inanimate matter. Mathematical physics then assumed the task of uncovering the universal causes determining the totality of natural objectivity. In contemporary science, this image has been transmuted into a paradigm of dynamic development through the language of evolutionary thought.[2]

Clearly, the history of this conception of nature is interwoven with the emergence and development of modern culture. While modernity brought with it processes of objectification, rationalization, mechanization and standardization in the economic and political order, it also inevitably changed the ways in which nature was imagined. Classical German philosophy routinely traced the sources of objectivism to the one-sided rationalism and mechanical materialism of the Enlightenment (Husserl, 1970: 290). For many in this tradition, the world and life are reduced to a realm of spiritless matter and nature comes to be measured by technical interests. Thus the modern crisis is more fundamental than a loss of faith or scepticism about rationality. At root it represents a crisis of the very meaning of existence, threatening a global epoch of nihilism. The table of values grounding Western culture have been emptied of significance. While it appears that this epochal kenosis was already well-advanced before the last

decades of the nineteenth century, the concerted effort to think beyond the vacated space of traditional ontotheology was only seriously initiated by the *fin-de-siècle* generation born around 1880, only perhaps to be abandoned in the writings of a disparate group of thinkers that includes Freud, Bergson, Simmel, Husserl, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Freud, Spengler, Weber, Jaspers, Benjamin and Bakhtin.

Max Weber spoke of this process as the '*entzauberung*' of the world – literally, the 'de-magicization' of reality. The unremitting pessimism of Weber's sociological analysis of the 'iron cage' of modern culture made him an iconic figure for the generation of 1914. Rejecting the 'utopianism' of Marx's revolutionary vision of modernity, Weber articulated a dark view of the modern era that would resonate in the writings of such figures as Heidegger, Kracauer, Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin. From different intellectual traditions each of these thinkers formulated a response to what they took to be the desacralisation of nature under the impress of modern capitalist civilization and its 'law of value'. This sensibility finally crystallizes in a genre of civilizational critique focused upon the themes of the 'crisis of culture' and the 'domination of nature'. The late nineteenth-century anxiety about the 'death of God' darkened into the modern threat of the imminent 'death of nature'.

While Weber viewed the rationalization of Western culture as a determining cause of the spirit of natural objectification, the neo-Kantian philosopher, Georg Simmel, defined the modern sensibility in terms of a 'tragic' disjunction between subjective experience ('life') and the alienated and unassimilable realms of 'objective culture'. For Simmel forms are always forms of life. Life creates 'forms' which perversely both realize and constrain human freedom. Once established, they have a tendency to harden and impose their own logic upon individual thought and action. The irreversible growth of 'objective culture' – of extrinsic tradition – thus oustrips its possible assimilation by individuals. One reaction to this totalization is the revolt against form as such and the reversion to an imaginary state of formlessness – leading Simmel to the resigned conclusion that formlessness was itself the appropriate form of modernity.

From a different philosophical tradition, Husserl diagnosed the crisis of modernity as a loss of the vital roots of reason and truth in an occluded *Lebenswelt*. The notable successes of the physical sciences had been won at the high price of reducing nature and the world of life to objects of technical mathematization. His remedy lay in phenomenological recollection – through the straight gate of the transcendental

reduction – of the 'teleological' sense of European reason, a memorial recovery of the pre-theoretical typifications and intentionalities embodied in the fabric of everyday life. By reanimating the histor(icit)y of reason as an infinite ideal and task we might recover the spiritual roots of European culture (Husserl, 1970: 291–9). What the Galilean–Newtonian tradition had reified under the sign of 'object-ive nature' is to be recovered as one particular regional ontology of the life of Spirit. The 'death of nature' can only be averted by recovering – in a community of other like-spirited phenomenological co-workers – the 'absolute' life of the spirit. Only by reversing the amnesia of lived nature can we prevent the imminent conflagration of European civil-ization: 'The universality of the absolute spirit surrounds everything that exists with an absolute historicity, to which nature is sub-ordinated as a spiritual structure' (*ibid*.: 1970: 298). Writing in 1935, with the storm clouds of European fascism and the preparations for world war as a backdrop, Husserl anticipates the barbarism of the coming decades. There are but two paths for Europe: either a 'fall into hostility toward the spirit and into barbarity', or a rebirth 'from the spirit of philosophy through a heroism of reason that overcomes naturalism once and for all' (*ibid*.: 1970: 298–9).

Writing in the same decade as Husserl and his students, Horkheimer and Adorno came to an altogether more pessimistic conclusion. All pretence at finding a unifying moment to integrate subjective and objective *Kultur* has now been abandoned. The pursuit of a harmon-ious integration of nature and spirit is a myth sustaining a *declassé* and marginalized intelligentsia. The 'tragedy of culture' cannot be resolved aesthetically or spiritually – its real roots lie in politics and the dialectic of social existence. For the critical theorist, 'nature' is itself part of a global will to power with roots that date back to Greek antiquity. Correspondingly, transcending the crisis of global rationalization requires a wholly new mode of thought, a 'negative dialectic' with the power to disturb the infrastructure of Western identity thinking.

All of these critical voices share one basic premise: the binary oppo-sitions of Western philosophy are wholly inadequate to the task of articulating, let alone resolving, the nihilism of the modern world. Something like a fundamental shift of framework, a radical or decon-structive ontology was called for. The binary structure of *Natur*/*Geist* needs to be dissolved by the efforts of modern radical research and crit-icism. The theme is an insistent one in the writings of Husserl, Heidegger, Scheler, Buber, Rosenzweig, Max Geiger, Edith Stein, Theodor Litt, Jaspers, and others. Many of these philosophical

positions converged on the idea that a radical overcoming of the binary opposition of *Natur* and *Geist* could only be realized by returning to the concrete realm of material existence, social reality and 'histor(icit)y'. As Husserl would say, all knowledge arises from within our incarnation in a pre-theoretical life-world and is constituted through a complex synthesis of genetic 'meanings'. Heidegger expressed a similar thought by noting that we are always-already 'thrown' (*geworfen*) into an interpreted world with its existential concerns and temporal rhythms. As he announced in *Sein und Zeit*:

> Time must be brought to light – and genuinely conceived – as the horizon for all understanding of Being, and for any way of interpreting it … time needs to be explicated primordially as the horizon for the understanding of Being, and in terms of temporality as the Being of *Dasein*, which understands Being. (1962: 39; italics in original)

After Heidegger, questions of existence and nature will be grounded in the phenomenon of time – Being, in other words, is to be interpreted in terms of time (*ibid*.: 1962: 39–40).

These, then, were some of the intellectual currents that generated a sufficient head of water to power Benjamin's critique of progress in his *Geschichtsphilosophische Thesen* (Theses on the Philosophy of History, completed in spring 1940). It is within the apocalyptic context of breakneck socioeconomic change, preparations for total war, and cultural crisis that we need to situate the different responses of Benjamin (1892–1940) and Bakhtin (1895–1975). I will suggest that the speculations of both men can only be fully understood if they are seen as an attempt to formulate something like a 'hermeneutics of nature' as one way of addressing the spiritual crisis of modernity. In developing alternative interpretations of lived experience, both rejected the one-sided schemas of positivism and materialism; both men experienced the conceptual aridity of academic philosophy; and both pursued a historicized interpretation of the past in the service of the future. Before we examine Benjamin's and Bakhtin's contributions to the hermeneutic reformulation of nature (and 'nature' as a historical category), it is first necessary to turn briefly to the tradition that first historicized nature as a temporal dialectic of being and becoming.

The Nature of Spirit

> The philosopher's task consists in comprehending all of natural life through the more encompassing life of history. (Benjamin, 'The Task of the Translator', 1996: 255)

Although it is a manifest simplification of a much more complex story, we suggest that German philosophy after Hegel can be viewed as a series of speculative attempts to construct a post-theological concept of nature and culture.[3] If humanity is no longer rooted in a divinely authorised nature, how are we to interpret human existence without transcendent goals and foundations? Hegel (1770–1831) had already anticipated the project of a fundamental ontology of Being by recollecting and explicating *Dasein* 'in its temporality and historicality' (cf. Heidegger, 1962: 42; and 43–4, 44–9). Thus Hegel had realized that truth could only be realized in its temporal development – 'the true' designates a process of coming-to-be-in-truth. Simplifying, we can think of Hegelian discourse as an attempt to formulate one of the last ontotheological conceptions of nature as an intentionally animated developmental process.

Hegel had inherited the Romantics' problem of demonstrating that 'brute nature', the existential factum of natural being is part of the realm of Spirit. The central philosophical problem of both Kantian metaphysics and Romantic aesthetics was how to heal the enervating division between 'Nature' and 'Spirit'. Hegel's contemporaries were lured into an unmediated *Naturphilosophie* as the saving grace of philosophical reflection (for example in the speculative systems of Fichte and Schelling). Hegel's strategy was to argue that the factical realm of nature is only apparently independent of Spirit once we adopt the dialectical perspective of *Geist*. From this vantage point, 'nature' appears as a 'lower' incarnation of the self-moving spirit of the Absolute, a first-draft, so to speak, of Spirit's incarnation in and as natural consciousness. Nature and God, are no longer categorially discrete substances. Seen from the phenomenology of Spirit, nature is but one moment of the self-revelatory life of the Absolute, an 'objectification' of Spirit as it regathers itself in an odyssey of self-recognition. Natural existence is sublated (*aufgehoben*) by the incessant self-movement of Spirit. This is the divine logos pervading every sphere of existence which the philosopher seeks to interpret and render in abstract prose. Nature is thus subject(ed) to the process of Spirit's self-recollecting trajectory – dramatised in Hegel's narrative as

a teleological world process that embraces the 'genesis' of facticity as one 'moment' of the genesis of Spirit.

The philosophy of Spirit is thus literally founded on the idea of a re-collection of objectifications as congealed forms of spiritual life (literally, as objectifications of Spirit). In the pre-philosophical attitude of everyday life, nature appears inert and categorially distinct from the life of Spirit. Everyday cognition loses itself in its positing of material objects dispersed in space and time, oblivious to the informing role of mind and Spirit. The infinite whole of life – Spirit – is dispersed into fixed objects and discrete positive events. It is only through the memorial medium of philosophical reflection (*erinnerungen*) that the plenum of nature can be reclaimed as a declension of Spirit. In moving from the thinking self to thinking Spirit, philosophy recovers its ancient task of articulating the Word made flesh in and as nature, history, and culture. Spirit has, so to speak, prepared the categories that will mediate its own process of self-recognition through the ashes of negated, sublated forms. The outcome of Hegel's speculative construction is a radically relational conception of becoming as one moment of the 'cunning of Reason'. Heraclitus's Logos is reframed as the Logic of the Concept consubstantial with the evolution of the world-process.

While Hegel resisted the idea of a 'history of nature', his ontocosmology of interminable change did place a renewed emphasis on reciprocity, transformation, and conflict and concentrated the minds of his successors on the idea of 'contradiction' as a constitutive feature of the intrinsic logic of natural processes – suggesting the thought that the rationality of nature is subject to historical transmutations and dialectical 'laws' of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Many of the so-called left-Hegelians in the 1840s would be content to launder Hegel's philosophy of its theological trappings and salvage its realistic and 'existential' content. Was it not Hegel's Logic that first suggested the idea of interpreting the life of the Spirit in terms of temporality, and explicating time as 'the transcendental horizon for the question of Being' (cf. Heidegger, 1962: 63–4)? If we can find adequate hermeneutic keys, history reveals a heroic narrative of transcendence and emancipation. The grand title for this cosmic drama is, of course, dialectics.

One outcome of the intellectual experiments of post-Kantian and post-Hegelian philosophy from around 1840 to the last decades of the nineteenth century was the correlated naturalization of consciousness and the historicization of nature. 'History' was typically interpreted as a linear or spiralling structure working its way through the fabric of

human experience and culture. Notational variants can be found in the unifying life of the Spirit (the hermeneutical and teleological account of world-historical epochs and peoples in Herder's historicism and Hegel's Philosophy of History), the linguistic relativism of writers such as Wilhelm von Humboldt, the Schlegel brothers, and histori-cally-minded scholars like Ranke, Savigny, Schleiermacher and D.F. Strauss, the developmental schema in the sociology of Comte and Saint Simon, Durkheim and Weber, popular positivist accounts of natural and social differentiation governed by deterministic laws, and even in the existence-intoxicated thought of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. All of these perspectives share a common presupposition, identified by Walter Benjamin:

> The concept of the historical progress of mankind cannot be sundered from the concept of its progression through a homo-geneous empty time. A critique of the concept of such a progression must be the basis of any criticism of the concept of progress itself. (Theses, XIII, Benjamin, 1973: 252)

Benjamin did not also record that many of the resultant 'resolutions' of the Cartesian dualism of mind and body and the Kantian division of nature and spirit are linked to ideological images of 'nature's body'. A rough inventory might include the following: the man-machine of Enlightenment materialism; the image of the objective, physical body of modern biological medicine (precursor of the 'clinical gaze' depicted by Foucault); the organic body of the Romantic movement; the dual spirit/body in Cartesian thought; the collective body of 'evolving humanity' in neo- and social-Darwinian theory; the differentiated 'social body' of classical sociology (Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, and so on); the sublimated body in many currents of idealist philosophy; and the situated body-in-milieu (of Marxism, phenomenology, and modern sociology). We should also note the pervasive phallogo-centrism of these images (for example in their uncritical assimilation of the gendered dualism of masculine mind and intellect set against feminine body and materiality – an opposition that harks back to some of the oldest mythological images of 'mother Nature').

The spirit of nature

The problematic of historical materialism is well known. Rejecting the Hegelian *Geist* as the moving force of history, Marx turned to the

material and productive processes of labour: productive activity is the origin and matrix of society; 'nature' and 'labour' enter into complex dialectical relations shaped by the prevailing mode of production; consciousness – including consciousness of nature – is a social product; histor(icit)y is shaped by the dynamics of the forces of production and with the advent of modern capitalism, comes to be organized around the logic of industrialism and revolutionary rationality; the riddle of history, as Marx says in the *Paris Manuscripts*, is solved through the messianic promise of the proletariat, the subject of history.[4]

Marx's central insight is that essence should be sought in the phenomenon of social existence, interpreted in terms of collective activity embedded in the concrete economic relations of society. To counter metaphysical conceptions of nature he located the vital nexus between nature, society, and history in human existence as a natural potency realized through cooperative, productive work processes. Nature enters the fabric of human history (*menschlichen Geschichte*) through the mediation of these specific modes of production (*Die Produktionsweise des materiellen Lebens*). 'Nature' is thus respecified as the sustaining horizon of the objective world (die *gegenständlichen Welt*) of social labour. Marx posits the ontological primacy of practical activity (*menschliche Tätigkeit*, *Praxis*) or, in the famous formula, framed in scare quotes in the original, 'practical-critical' activity ('*praktisch-kritischen*' *Tätigkeit*) as the source of all values. Given that the life of praxis provides the transmission belt between history and nature, the epistemological problem of how the 'subject' can come to know the external world is seen as a practical question (*eine praktische Frage*). The conflict over the existence or non-existence of thought abstracted from praxis is grasped as a purely scholastic question (*'Der Streit über die Wirklichkeit oder Nichtwirklichkeit eines Denkens, das sich von der Praxis isoliert, ist eine rein scholastische Frage'*, Thesis 2). In returning to practical, social life

> subjectivism and objectivism, spiritualism and materialism, activity and suffering … lose their antithetical character, and thus their existence, as such antitheses in the social condition; it will be seen how the resolution of the theoretical antitheses is only possible in a practical way, by virtue of the practical energy of men. Their resolution is therefore by no means merely a problem of knowledge, but a real problem of life, which philosophy could not solve precisely because it conceived this problem as merely a theoretical one. (Marx, 1988: 109; cf. 122–3, 135–6)

It is important to appreciate the multiple and shifting meanings of the term 'nature' (and its conjugates) in Marx's early manuscripts. Many of these meanings draw upon the vocabularies of German Idealism and Romanticism (for example, Leibnizian ideas of natural forces and drives or the Schellingian concept of 'nature' as the dialectical upsurge of energy and creative potential (*potence, Potenz*)). Among the more recurrent formulae are: nature as sustaining horizon ('earth'), nature as means of life/subsistence (*Lebensmittel*), nature as a latent power (the 'slumbering powers of nature'), nature as force (*kraft* as in *Arbeitskraft*, power of work or *Naturkräfte*, the power of nature), nature as a 'free gift' or exploitable reserve, nature as *phusis*, a vast power of 'productivity' contained, so to speak in potential ('the potentialities slumbering within nature'), nature as the second nature of human existence ('the humanization of nature and naturalization of man'), nature as individuating process, nature as a domain of law ('laws of nature'), nature as law-governed (the 'lawfulness' of nature). These multifarious meanings are condensed in the chiasmic formula of the labour process as the naturalization of man through the humanization of nature. The 'sensuous world' of nature is no longer 'a thing given directly from all eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of Industry and of the state of society' (*German Ideology*, Marx 1975, 39). Nature designates both 'nature-in-itself' and 'nature-for-man'. Both intersect in the idea of emergence or nature-as-event. By foregrounding the potential of nature Marx argued that the history of nature should be included in the hist(oricit)y of human praxis.

The dialectic embraces 'human nature'. By acting in concert, by transforming the natural world '[man] at the same time changes his own nature. He develops his slumbering powers [*schlummernden Potenzen*] and compels them to act in obedience to his sway' (Marx, 1961: 177). As Marx observes:

> For not only the five senses but also to the so-called mental senses – the practical senses (will, love, etc.) – in a word, human sense – the humanness of the senses – comes to be by virtue of its object, by virtue of humanized nature. The forming of the five senses is a labour of humanized nature. The forming of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present. (Marx, 1988: 108–9)

In sum, Marx deconstructs the image of a fixed 'nature' confronting a closed 'human nature'. In its place he posits a field of reflexive

creativity in which human beings actively construct a second nature in producing the conditions of their own activities. In this context 'nature-for-man' is a boundary of transactions (a 'metabolism') that allows nature's powers to be made manifest. Nature should be thought as event and process – as *phusis* – rather than substance and subject. Marx frequently describes this phenomenology in the Romantic idiom of a self-formation through the forms of cultural objectification (what later neo-Kantian philosophers like Dilthey, Simmel and Cassirer would redescribe idealistically as the dialectic of subjective and objective culture). In the *Paris Manuscripts* (*EPM*), Marx (1988) himself expresses this transaction or dialogue with nature in the idealist idiom of 'universality':

> the universality which makes all nature his inorganic body – both inasmuch as nature is (1) his direct means of life, and (2) the material, the object, and the instrument of his life-activity. Nature is man's inorganic body – nature, that is, insofar as it is not itself the human body. Man lives on nature – means that nature is his body, with which he must remain in continuous intercourse if he is not to die [*Der Mensch lebt von der Natur, heisst: Die Natur ist sein Leib, mit dem er in beständigem Prozess bleiben muss, um nicht zu sterben*]. That man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature. (1988: 76)

One corollary of this thesis is that there are many 'natures', each corresponding to different historical modes of production. If the humanisation of nature is 'the coming-to-be of nature for man' (*ibid*.: 113), then the world-historical processes of capitalist production can be troped in anithetical terms as both the alienation of natural and human possibilities and as a promissory 'resurrection of nature'. Marx encodes the latter by means of the term 'communism'. Communism represents the practical transcendence of the alienation of man from nature, from himself, and his fellow men. It is the abolition of the false objectification of earlier modes of production, and the institution of a state of affairs in which life ceases to be a mere means to life (*ibid*.: 75).

Benjamin and Bakhtin

> During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence. The manner in which human sense perception is organized, the

medium in which it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well. (Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', 1973: 216)

The Bakhtinian circle inherited the shared antipathy of post-Hegelian, Marxist and neo-Kantian philosophy towards abstract, postivistic and disembodied conceptions of nature, reason and human existence. Something like an 'existential turn' was the common pursuit of this whole tradition of thinkers. Although pursuing different intellectual interests, the projects of Benjamin and Bakhtin intersect with Marx's desire to 'brush history against the grain'. But their 'Marxism' is filtered through the prism of late nineteenth-century German philosophy, in particular by the *Lebensphilosophie* of Bergson, Dilthey and Simmel and the Marburg school of neo-Kantian philosophy. Inspired by the work of philosophers like Hermann Cohen, Simmel, Jaspers and Cassirer, each rejected the abstract schemata of progressive enlightenment and vulgar materialism for more reflexive images of spiritual creativity, cultural expression and *Bildung*. Where Benjamin traced the metaphysics of linear history in its commitment to an empty, homogeneous continuum of time, Bakhtin pursued a concrete phenomenology of historicity through the chronotopical processes of situated, concrete speaking consciousnesses inscribed in the heteroglot life of culture. Both men were profoundly influenced by Marx's conception of historically situated human existence, but were wary of its potential to traduce the life of the spirit and cultural traditions to economic interests. Yet for many of this generation, some kind of 'synthesis' of Marxian historicism and Kantian apriorism appeared to offer a way of transcending the rigid language of German idealism. Simmel and Lukács, would return to the Hegelian source in critiquing reification and legitimating their 'romantic anti-capitalism' in terms of the demands of 'streaming life'. For thinkers like Ernst Bloch and Benjamin, some form of messianic transcendence of 'the tragedy of culture' remained a real possibility.

   In countering the deterministic eschatology of Marxism, Bakhtin borrowed insights from neo-Kantian thinkers like Cohen, Simmel and Cassirer to develop a heteroglossical concept of agency, knowledge and historicity grounded upon the unfinalizable past and undetermined future of human 'becoming'. Before Bakhtin introduced his theory of the chronotopic organization of experience, Simmel had spoken of the 'great forms' of spiritual life – the empirical, religious, practical, aesthetic, emotional and conceptual realms or world-forms,

Scheler had introduced the idea of a sociology of knowledge formations, Jaspers had published his *Psychology of Worldviews* (1918/19), Nicolai Hartmann was constructing a regional ontology of the human, and Cassirer was elaborating his 'philosophy of symbolic forms' (the first volume of Cassirer's *Erkenntnisproblem* (*Problem of Knowledge*) was published in 1906, his *Substanzbegriff und Funktionsbegriff* in 1910, and the three volumes of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* completed and published between 1923 and 1929). All insisted upon seeing the forms and contents of human consciousness in symbolic terms.

Indeed, for these thinkers, each province of meaning is subject to its own immanent 'legality' and historical conditions (Simmel, 1977: 207). The work of these thinkers all adumbrated a more comprehensive 'philosophy of human culture'. Where Marx had theorized nature-as-event, Bakhtin commended a dynamic view of historic emergence or being-as-event. Benjamin launched a similar polemic against dialectical materialism as a monologic 'voice' that unerringly deciphers the meaning and ultimate significance of every historical event. Critical materialism had been perverted into a 'labour metaphysic' representing the life of spirit as an epiphenomena of the progressive development of the productive forces. Determinism presupposes a technocratic view of man and nature (which Benjamin, like his contemporaries, Simmel, Lukács and Bloch, associated with the doctrinaire Marxism of the Second International). Against the image of a causally ultimate 'base' – the economy – all of these thinkers oppose an image of history as a discontinuously interwoven fabric, a texture of living relations. Man was not first *homo oeconomicus*, but *homo symbolicum*.

As Simmel 'textualised' history as a skein of discontinuous processes of 'sociation' (*Vergesellschaftung*), as Bakhtin's carnivalised time, so Benjamin argued that the linear idea of historical progress (including the idea of 'natural evolution') presupposed a thinly disguised theology that repressed the contingency and emergent possibilities of singular temporalities – the heterogeneous time he would call *Jetztzeit* (1973: 252–3). *Jetztzeit* involves moments of time where the world order is disrupted, revealing gaps in which 'the messianic' might appear and shatter the continuum of historical experience. *Jetztzeit* is history's own heteroglossia and, as such, cannot be reduced to any a priori schema. In Benjamin's phrase: 'History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now [*Jetztzeit*]' (Theses, XIV, 1973: 252–3).

The reasoning of both men is the same: If freedom is to be possible

then nature must be 'open'. If nature cannot be reduced to a closed totality, then history (including the history of nature) cannot be reduced to abstract law (Enlightenment), the logic of Spirit (the Hegelian Concept), or the class struggle (Proletarian Revolution). Nature – like history – must be theorized as an unfinalizable constellation of processes. Its analogue in the realm of culture is, in fact, the multilayered polyphonic novel, the exemplary genre of heteroglot possibilities. In criticizing the will-to-totality, Bakhtin pluralized time and framed the resultant temporalities as different cultural topographies (articulated by the concept of the 'chronotope'). Parallel to Simmel's critique of historical materialism, Bakhtin aimed to restore the value-saturated 'textuality' of history. For both thinkers there are only histories, but no history as such.

Benjamin pursued an analogous trajectory in formulating a concept of nature and history that would engender forms of messianic agency robust enough to 'blast open' the continuum of historical time. The faultless interpretation machine called 'historical materialism finalises heterogeneous process, monumentalizing the past and predetermining the future. In its implacable determinism, materialism 'naturalizes' history – a naturalization that presupposes a deterministic image of nature. By contrast Benjamin sees the topography of social spacetime as shot through with the transgressive presence of the now (*Jetztzeit*). Rather than seeing history as an analogue of a continuous natural evolution, Benjamin approaches nature from the perspective of discontinuous historicity.

Bakhtin and Benjamin thus concur in problematizing the category of redemptive time. Both are hostile to any theory that posits an escape clause from history, an 'alibi' from existence. As members of the *fin-de-siècle* generation they inherited the neo-Kantian critique of apriorism which relativized the Kantian categories and pure forms of intuition as concrete 'forms' corresponding to different social and cultural systems; both understood the philosophical significance of non-Euclidean geometry (Lobachevsky), the seed-bed of relativity theories of space-time (one of the key sources of Bakhtin's 'Einsteinian' category of the chronotope and, perhaps of Benjamin's theory of constellations), and both were implacable critics of dogmatic epistemology and historiography.[5]

Yet it is evident that the historicizing framework of dialectical thought provided an indispensable medium for their respective theories of dialogue and translation as processes that reach into the anonymous past and extend into the unbounded future. In Benjamin's

work this theme is broached under the sign of the past as a site of redemption – of the 'weak Messianic power' that speaks to the present from the past. The semantic potential of the past shatters the linear image of a continuous line linking past, present and future. The past is still resonant with unrealized possibility. As Benjamin observes, 'nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past – which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments' (Theses, III, 1973). Bakhtin's doctrine of the chronotope effected a profane revision of the three moments of Hegel's concrete universal. The particular, the general, and the singular are all preserved within the generic capital of language, soliciting the dialogic recognition and commemoration of contemporary discourse. What first emerged in the particular utterance sediments into the generality of common usage and finally sinks into the past as a singular text can only be reactivated through responsible dialogue. Like Benjamin's resonant past seen from the perspective of a redeemed humanity, Bakhtin's past only becomes 'citable' and 'renewable' through the restorative powers of dialogue which organize what he calls the culture of 'great time'. The theme of 'great time' holds open a promise of spiritual self-recollection (*erinnerungen*):

> There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) – they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival. The problem of great time. ('Methodology' in *SG*: 170)

Benjamin cites a profane messianic text from Hegel as an epigraph to Thesis 4: 'Seek for food and clothing first, then the Kingdom of God shall be added unto you' (Hegel, 1807; presumably from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*). Benjamin had also translated Hegel's description of history as a slaughter bench into the image of the 'angel of history', face turned towards the past, propelled into the future by the storm of progress:

When we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress. (Theses, IX, 1973)

This fragment should be read in the context of Benjamin's observations that the record of human civilization is one of uninterrupted barbarism and that if a revolutionary break with this history fails then not even the dead will remain safe from the victors (Theses, VII). His idea of rescuing the dead from anamnesic violence hinges on the redemptive promise of recollection. For those clinging to the raft called 'progress' the past can only be glimpsed in evanescent traces and schematised in images. The work of critical reminiscence is to 'seize' the past as an 'image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again' (Theses, V). The memorial chronotopes of spirit are the only means we have of recovering the past and saving the dead from oblivion. This again is the weak Messianic power of critical speech: 'For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably' (Theses, V). If the ravages of capitalism have dehumanised society, Benjamin foresees an even more catastrophic future – in which history (including the history of nature) will suffer reification on a global scale. The coming barbarism will even demolish the vital instruments of recollection – the anamnesic power of the dialectical image and critical thinking. And even those who would 'redeem' the past must countenance the possibility that the 'good tidings which the historian of the past brings with throbbing heart may be lost in a void the very moment he opens his mouth' (Theses, V). This scenario of mineralised existence would terminate any possible encounter with the past, turning the spirit into an inert relic, a fossilised object-world cleansed of all alterity.

Bakhtin and Benjamin were both acutely aware of the politics of memory. The loss of a vital relationship to past spheres of experience threatens to destroy forms of action that might shape the future as one in which the repetitive structure of class violence have been ended. But what else is monologue in Bakhtin than a synoptic index for all

the forces that induce amnesia in individuals and collectivities? For Bakhtin the realm of spirit is a site of critical traces, of 'embers' saved from the ashes. It is these shards of unfinished dialogue that form the 'material' for a genuinely dialectical criticism. To understand the past does not mean to recognize it 'the way it really was'. Benjamin describes this as historicism's 'eternal' image of the past (Theses, XVI). Rather, it means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger' (Theses, VI). Its time is the present 'which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop' (Theses, XVI). It is a time when the world is reconfigured, where contemporaries are prepared for 'a unique experience with the past' (Theses, XVI). The dialectical constellation is thus a site of shock and change and not merely a screen memory of the past.

Here the most destructive form of amnesia is the forgetting that occludes the possibility of a living encounter with history and nature. Marx's critique of commodity fetishism needs to be extended across the widest range of value spheres – including the commodification of culture (Simmel) and the reduction of all qualitative relationships to relations of quantity (Lukács). Culture obeys its own logic, sediments into alien forms, which 'alienate' their producers and future generations. Time itself is also drawn into this fetishism of culture. What began as a lived praxis ends its life as a reifying objectivity. While agreeing with Simmel's diagnosis of the tragic fate of cultural objectification, Benjamin's particular target was the homogeneous time of universal history in which every discordant image and contradictory meaning is flattened into insignificance. With the eclipse of historicity the past is abstracted from the flow of history and 'monumentalised' as tradition. This represents the true tragedy of modern culture. For here the work of ideology is not only to obfuscate contemporary class domination, but to 'aestheticize' the past and thereby to occlude a vital encounter with its dissonant voices and unredeemed alterities. This amnesia is, perhaps, the critical equivalent of the 'forgetting of Being' mystified by Heidegger. Where the philosopher of Being depicts an epoch of being-forgetfulness and prescribes an equally mythical 'primal' solution,[6] Benjamin confronts his readers with a history of violence and terror. We are to be shocked out of reification. Against both Simmelian pessimism and Heideggerian primalism he opposes the dialectical image that shatters the flow of thought:

Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes

into a monad. A historical materialist approaches a historical subject only where he encounters it as a monad. In this structure he recognizes the sign of a Messianic cessation of happening, or, put differently, a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past. He takes cognisance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history – blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework. (Theses, XVII)

Benjamin's history is intended to disclose the memories of occluded experience as the secret histor(icit)y of the oppressed. It seeks to shatter the inherited forms of a congealed past, to reactivate the movement of life that oscillates between 'resurrection and death':

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the 'state of emergency' which we live is not the exception but the rule. We must attain to a conception of history that is in keeping with this insight. (Theses, VIII)

In this single gesture Benjamin politicizes the memory of nature and raises the stakes for those that would attempt to 'redeem' the past and inaugurate a more authentic dialogue with history. This is the productive anger that motivates the critical historian 'to brush history against the grain' (Theses, VII).

Bakhtin's theory of the stratigraphic 'layers' of time, each ordered chronotopically as 'meaning contexts' of individual and collective self-interpretation belongs to an analogous polemic against historicism. Where the traces of an unredeemed history for Benjamin are condensed into constellations of repressed experience, for Bakhtin history is an echo-chamber of voices and cultural potentialities. The task of the interpreter is not to traduce the past into the forms of the present, but to recombine the fragments into new configurations through the medium of thought. Bakhtin also speculates about the continuous and vital 'presence' of 'remote contexts', of the unanticipated intrusion of the distant past into the present as a fecund and productive event:

Contexts of understanding. The problem of remote contexts. The eternal renewal of meanings in all new contexts. Small time (the present day, the recent past, and the foreseeable [desired] future) and great time – infinite and unfinalized dialogue in which no meaning dies. The living in nature (organic). Everything inorganic is drawn into life in the process of exchange (only in abstraction

can things be juxtaposed by taking them separately from life). ('Methodology', in *SG*: 169)

Like the polyphonic novel the variegated threads of history are discontinuously interwoven into the texture that we call 'real life'. We must positively embrace the 'otherness' of the past if we are to enter into a productive dialogue with alien texts. By recollecting and respecifying such discontinuous elements from the past we help to keep open the possibility of a more vital and regenerative relationship to the present and future.

Bakhtin gives the hermeneutic image of 're-living' a more radical accent. To re-live is not to 'go native' and be absorbed into the mental environment of another time and culture; it is rather, the more exacting task of entering into a productive dialogue with an alien logosphere. 'One cannot understand understanding as a translation from the other's language into one's own language' ('Notes from 1970–71' in *SG*: 141), Rather, understanding is the responsible act of taking up an unfinished conversation begun in the past. It is an act of translation between past and present, an intervention in what he describes as 'a unified and continuous structure, an open (unfinalised) totality' (*ibid*.: 134). Understanding 'supplements the text: it is active and creative by nature. Creative understanding cointinues creativity, and multiplies the artistic wealth of humanity' (*ibid*.: 142). Understanding and translation are thus processes crossing the limits of different spatial and temporal contexts. Understanding the other is reframed as the problem of opening up a creative dialogue between the past and present, and thereby transgressing the artificial boundaries that secure individuals in their pregiven forms of life. As Bakhtin continually reminds his reader, 'to be' means to communicate, to enrich our involvement with spatially and temporally distant others by embracing the 'shock of the old':

The world of culture and literature is essentially as boundless as the universe. We are speaking not about its geographical breadth (this is limited), but about its semantic depths, which are as bottomless as the depths of matter. The infinite diversity of interpretations, images, figurative semantic combinations, materials and their interpretations, and so forth. We have narrowed it terribly by selecting and by modernising that has been selected. We impoverish the past and do not enrich ourselves. We are suffocating in the captivity of narrow and homogeneous interpretations. ('Notes' in *SG*: 140)

Memories of nature

I have suggested that we might think of the shift of consciousness at the turn of the century as a movement away from the idea of 'nature' as a wholly extrinsic, self-contained, determinable objectivity towards a historicized image of nature as one participant in an interpretive social process, a shift from regarding nature as a manifold of spatially extended objects to seeing nature as bound up with intersubjective practices and institutional processes. Nature is troped as a non-authored 'text' soliciting different acts of production, appropriation and translation.

Bakhtin's account of the intersection of heterogeneous orders of time – 'small time', 'recent past', 'mediate pasts' and 'great time' – returns us to the question of the temporal dialogue with 'nature' as a process of translation with the inorganic and organic worlds that form the condition of all 'meaning' and 'dialogue'. Benjamin had already anticipated what we might term an 'ecological' understanding of time, a temporality shaped by the slow movement of natural forms and forces:

> 'In relation to the history of organic life on earth,' writes a modern biologist, 'the paltry fifty millennia of homo sapiens constitute something like two seconds at the close of a twenty-four-hour day. On this scale, the history of civilized mankind would fill one-fifth of the last second of the last hour'. The present, which, as a model of Messianic time, comprises the entire history of mankind in an enormous abridgement, coincides exactly with the stature which the history of mankind has in the universe. (Benjamin, 1973, Theses, XVIII)

What form would 'dialogue' take in the light of this cosmic horizon? How can we be prepared for the shock of the old with respect to the inanimate world of nature? In what sense can we read their work as contributions to 'ecological thinking'? Bakhtin's response would no doubt have been to see the stratifications and configurations of nature in polyphonic terms – to reconceptualize the temporalities of nature in a heteroglot idiom: 'I hear voices in everything and dialogic relations among them' ('Methodology' in *SG*: 169). This leads us to ask whether Bakhtin's speculations about the primacy of the 'voices of others' can sustain a more radical account of the dialogue of human/nature transactions, and whether this constitutes an advance beyond the fixed positions of post-theological philosophy?

In general, dialogism proposes that the paradigmatic relation between human beings and the world is not a one-sided cognitive relation to objects or texts, but a social relationship between persons. The focus is thus not upon objects and texts at all, but upon relations to objects and texts, and, reflexively, upon relations to these relations. This transactionality constitutes the basis for any radical understanding of nature and existence:

> Human consciousness does not come into contact with existence directly, but through the medium of the surrounding ideological world … In fact, the individual consciousness can only become a consciousness by being realized in the forms of the ideological environment proper to it: in language, in conventionalised gesture, in artistic image, in myth, and so on. (*FM*, 1991: 14)

This thesis of the primordial sociality of human relations, of course, would be entirely compatible with Marx's understanding of the dialectic of nature and human nature. To preserve Bakhtin's concern for openness and unfinalisability, this relational standpoint should also be framed in terms of multiple spacetime manifolds – the disjunctive 'times' of different human/nature transactions, of varied chronotopic organizations of the human experience of nature. The times of nature would thus already be socially mediated and symbolically 'accented'. Thus if we are still to speak of a 'dialectics of nature', it would not lie in the direction taken by Engels and later Soviet materialism, but would be framed in terms of the situated human-nature dialogue of ecological co-creativity, of the contextual determination of significance through discursive relationships that are already profoundly historical, cultural and dialogic (the idea of 'alien nature' would thus be a kind of limit-concept in a continuum of dialogical configurations and their corresponding chronotopic organizations of experience).

Whatever the particular content of such a post-theological concept of 'nature', it would necessarily have to be formulated in situational and dialogic terms in terms of 'experienced nature' or existence mediated through context-dependent chronotopes. The metaphysical image of the 'unity of nature' would give way to a more reflexive image of a polyphonic ecology of natural capacities and possibilities. 'Nature', so to speak, would regain its potential for multiple manifestations and 'voicings' with respect to the imaginary practices of different societies and historical cultures. In this respect nature's voice can be heard only through the mediations of socially and institutionally

specific dialogic encounters (nature 'speaks' differentially in the different chronotopic systems and 'languages' that concretely facilitate or occlude this exchange in particular historical situations). Bakhtin suggests such an Heideggerian accent in one of his late notes, where he writes that 'Existence itself speaks through the writer, through his mouth (Heidegger)' ('Notes' in *SG*: 149). The historicity of nature, in other words, is possible only through what Bakhtin elsewhere calls the 'event of Being'.

This speculation about the manifold meanings of 'nature' would complement the image of 'meaning' as a kind of latency that can be activated by later dialogic encounters (whatever enabled us to 'hear' the voices of nature – art, poetry, narrative, science, philosophy, and so on – being sites of dialogic transaction rather than 'mirrors' of reality). The dialectical image of transaction shifts from the reflectionism of dialectical materialism – canonised in Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* – toward a more dynamic process of active mediation, recontextualization and unfinalizable significance (the 'endless' processes through which we interpret nature are ones in which nature appears as an active 'agency' and where the outcome of the dialogue are reflexively consequential for future transactions). This is where a Bakhtinian hermeneutics of nature coincides with the phenomenology of nature/culture transactions sketched by the young Marx and Benjamin's image of the histor(icit)y of nature. The result is to return thought to the collective activities of 'reading' and cultural inscription as central to any adequate account of emergent significance.

Such a dialogical ecology would be extended across the entire spectrum and stratifications of organic and inorganic life. What we have previously defined as 'nature' – framed, that is, in the given ontological and theological paradigms of the Western metaphysical tradition – is seen as a (mis)interpretation of an open field of historically specific text–context exchanges (what a given society, governed by its dominant ideological and dialogical conventions, has objectified and designated as 'nature' – for example, nature as the unchangeable conditions of physical existence – now appears as a kind of culturally-specific reification of the dialogic process of symbolic exchange). Like Benjamin's philosophy of nonsynchronic temporalities, the Bakhtinian paradigm emphasizes the dynamic encounters across the borderlines of nature/culture. Bakhtin's 'dialogism' would thus not only historicize the text–contextual configurations of 'nature', but would reframe these configurations as active, constructive, gendered, sociological formations. 'Nature', in other words, becomes an

achievement of context-specific modes of decipherment, of historically particularised ways in which communities and societies – perhaps whole civilizations – have symbolically imagined and represented the natural order (understanding, of course, that these imaginary representations have been embedded in patriarchal belief systems and become historically effective in specific social institutions).[7] We thereby shift from an essentially asocial image of 'nature' as an inert objectivity to the cultural idea of nature as a symbolic construction.

In concluding we need to ask how this Bakhtinian–Benjaminian dialogic might be fruitfully continued? I will address this question under the headings of essentialism, constructionism, and dialogism.

Essentialism

The dialogue between Benjamin and Bakhtin is one way of deconstructing the mimetic, promethean and essentialist metaphysics of nature in Western culture. To explore this further we would need to examine how these thinkers came to reject Western mimeticism that projects nature in terms of the subject/object idea of representation and to endorse the image of nature/culture in hermeneutic and dialogic terms. How the opposition of 'Nature' and 'Spirit' in their work came to be reformulated as a texture of reciprocal relationships needs to be reconstructed across a wider range of comparative texts. We also need to explore some the limitations of the hermeneutic view of forms of life inhabiting the 'borderlines' of nature/culture. The risks, for example, of lapsing back into a messianic hermeneutics or eschatology of redeemed significance will be all too obvious.

Constructionism

From the dialogical perspective as there is no 'outside' of history and social being, no escape clause from histor(icit)y, so there can be no 'outside' called 'nature'. The implications of this simple thesis are quite radical. Representations of nature need to be seen as heterogeneous symbolic formations – involving, for example, conflicting class, gender, 'racial' and ethnic interests and their attendant images of natural order (embodied in the world-views and ideologies coded into chronotopic typifications and schemas). It also follows that any critical understanding of a culture will inevitably require explorations of the dominant, marginal or contestatory images and representations of nature in play in a given historical period or conjunctural situation. Dialogism, in other words, would facilitate questions and research into the way in which these representations are materially inscribed in

ideological discourses and social processes. A more reflexive and ecological theory of significance would in principle have to engage in a critical dialogue with dominant representations of nature across the whole range of their 'world-work' in different sites of social practice. In sum, the upshot of these historicist, sociological, and constructivist readings is to facilitate an account of the multiple 'constructions of nature' as inseparable from the situated 'hermeneutic' work of texts and social practices.[8]

Dialogism

What then becomes of the signifier 'nature'? From a dialogical perspective 'nature' is displaced by the transactional category of 'nature/culture'. This raises a number of difficult questions. In what sense can we claim that 'nature' has polysemic, heteroglot and un-finalizable qualities? Is the idea of nature's `textuality' not simply a rhetorical figure? Should we not confine hermeneutics to the 'method-ology of understanding recorded expressions'? Given Bakhtin's conception of meaning ('With meaning I give answers to questions. Anything that does not answer a question is devoid of sense for us'; 'Notes' in *SG*: 145) is the 'text of nature' simply an inappropriate and misleading 'anthropomorphism'? What are the precise relationships between the time of nature, the temporalities socio-historical time and the time of human action? How can the textualization of nature advance our understanding of natural causality, determination, complexity? And to what extent is the 'nature' that appears in Benjamin's and Bakhtin's texts still shaped by the categories of German Idealism, particularly refracted through neo-Kantian and phenomenological traditions? While there are no ready-made answers to these questions, we suggest that a dialogue between Bakhtin and Benjamin is one place where we might search for illumination.

Notes

1   The phrase 'memories of nature' can be read literally as indicating that the concepts of nature, history and temporality all converge on the theme of collective memory as a culture's ways of recollecting nature, or it can be viewed more analytically as an allegory of loss following the critique of 'nature' as a product of ontotheological discourse. In this latter sense the deconstructions of theorists like Bakhtin and Benjamin create an active memory trace – like a watermark in paper – which continues to energise the secular alternatives that are drawn into the space left by the vacated concept – for example in the form of screen memories of transcendence, of nostalgia, and profane analogues of the lost object.

2   I trace the 'specular' basis of this alienated rhetoric of nature to its Cartesian

roots in 'Specular grammar' in Heywood and Sandywell (1999).

3 For the 'post-theological' moment as an energizing and active element in modern European philosophical culture see Steiner (1992: 156).

4 See Marx (1988), *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (EPM).

5 See Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', in *DI*: 84 n.1. For Information on the physiologist, Aleksey Alekseevich Ukhtomsky (1875–1942) whose research on biological space-time provided Bakhtin with the term 'chronotope' in the the summer of 1925, see Holquist (1986: 67–9).

6 George Steiner speaks of Heidegger's 'primalism' in 1992: 149.

7 For a speculative generalisation of the theory of chronotopes to all social and textual practices and relations see Sandywell (1998).

8 On the semiopraxis made possible by a society's imaginary practices see Sandywell (1996), vol. 1.

6

'A Very Understandable Horror of Dialectics': Bakhtin and Marxist Phenomenology[1]

Michael Gardiner

> 'Philosophy must give ear to an older wisdom that speaks in a living language.'
>
> Hans-Georg Gadamer[2]

> 'Lamentably, almost everyone in the world today is a Marxist – even if they don't know it themselves. They continue to have Marxist ideas.'
>
> *Generalissimo* Augusto Pinochet[3]

Introduction

Two of the more unexpected events of 1998 included the *New Yorker* magazine naming Karl Marx as the most significant thinker of the dawning millennium, and the prominent display of a new, 150th anniversary edition of *The Communist Manifesto* in upscale Wall Street bookstores, rendered in eye-catching design by the leftist publisher Verso. Yet despite such flashes of interest in Marx – call it 'radical nostalgia,' as opposed to 'radical chic' – one would be hard-pressed to describe the last two decades as favourably disposed towards Marxism. In particular, postmodernist theories have been exceedingly hostile towards the philosophical inheritance of Hegel and Marx, especially the dialectical method. Recourse to dialectics is generally associated with grand, totalising social theory and a 'foundationalist' epistemology, of an approach that assumes arrogantly that the essential structure of society, and the overarching sequence of historical development, can be described and analysed with what Marx himself called the 'precision of the natural sciences'. For the postmodernists, the dialectical method claims a privileged insight into the underlying

mechanisms of social change, and is likened to crystal-ball gazing, a form of sociological mysticism that, along with other misbegotten Enlightenment metanarratives, should be dumped unceremoniously into the trash-bin of history. As Gianni Vattimo suggests, the Marxian system 'situate[s] the truth of science within an historico-dialectical horizon oriented towards an emancipatory *telos*', with deleterious results (Vattimo, 1992: 106).

In its stead, the postmodernists propose an alternative way of conceptualising social reality. Drawing upon linguistic analogies, as well as metaphors drawn from biology (rhizomes, flow) or politics and warfare (strategies, mobilizations), they view the social as an inchoate field constituted by the ineluctable play of differences, perpetual agonisms and criss-crossing forces that never coalesce into stable structures or discernible patterns of historical progression. Much like the endless play of signifiers within a text – what Félix Guattari calls a 'semiotic polycentrism' (Guattari, 1984: 77) – the social world is felt to exist beyond the pale of rational, systematic analysis. Just as there is a perpetual 'slippage' of meaning in language, that is to say, there is no final reading of the 'text' of social life. In this brave new postmodern world, notions like 'totality' or 'dialectics' seem positively antediluvian, even dangerous, because they are implicated with the reductive logic of 'identity-thinking' and the modernist desire to expunge otherness and heterogeneity. The very idea of a postmodern dialectic would, as Flynn and Judovitz put it, seem to be *contradictio in adjecto* (see Flynn and Judovitz, 1993: xvi).

All this is by now rather familiar. Indeed, it can be argued that what Ben Agger has called 'establishment postmodernism' has so successfully stormed the ramparts of modernist theory that it has assumed the mantle of the new orthodoxy over wide swathes of the humanities and social sciences in Europe, North America and beyond (see Agger, 1992: 73). What is important to note is that such an anti-dialectical stance is echoed strongly within Bakhtin studies as well, even by commentators who would undoubtedly blanch at the appellation 'postmodernist'. Bakhtin is typically characterized as a thinker who developed a 'dialogical' approach to sociocultural analysis and philosophical inquiry, with its metaphorical resonances of orality/aurality, open-ended communicative interchange, and an ethics of 'personalism', as opposed to dialectics, which is burdened with mechanistic and necessitarian lawfulness and its sordid association with 'really existing socialism', or at least when it really existed. In staking out such an interpretive position, based mainly on a few scattered and often

ambiguous comments Bakhtin made about dialectics, there is arguably an implicit political agenda at work. The depiction of Bakhtinian thought as wholly incompatible with dialectics is part of a pronounced desire to demonstrate his hostility towards Marxism *per se*, and hence to discredit, merely by dint of association, every aspect of the Marxist emancipatory project, particularly the notion of collective sociopolitical agency.[4]

It has often been said that politics makes strange bedfellows, but the realm of scholarly debate would seem to make for even more anomalous *mésalliances*. In this case, we are witness to an odd convergence of perspectives regarding the dialectic, in which views expressed by the most *avant-garde* (and ostensibly still leftist[5]) of the Parisian postmodernists dovetail neatly with some rather conservative voices within the North American academy. I shall return to this issue in due course. For the time being, however, I should make my position clear: that Bakhtin's stance is not incompatible with dialectics *tout court*, but only a crude and rather caricatured version that can be explained mainly by the omnipresence of official Soviet Marxism in the Russian intellectual milieu during his lifetime and his apprenticeship in German philosophical idealism, especially neo-Kantianism. Beginning with a brief review of Bakhtin's comments on dialectics, I shall then consider how these remarks have usually been interpreted. Since his apparent dismissal of dialectics is often marshalled rhetorically, and often quite effectively, as evidence of his fundamentally anti-Marxist stance, I want to demonstrate that there are alternative versions of the dialectic that circumvent postmodernist criticisms no less than those of the liberal humanist wing of Bakhtin studies. Although thinkers as diverse as Adorno and Lefebvre are of relevance to this debate, considerations of space will confine my remarks to the work of the French phenomenologist and Marxist Maurice Merleau-Ponty. A subtext of this discussion is that there are two major strains in modern dialectical thought – the logical and objectivistic on the one hand, and the corporeal, intersubjective and 'dialogical' on the other[6] – and that theorists like Merleau-Ponty have been concerned to deflect Marxist thinking away from the former towards the latter, in a manner that parallels Bakhtin's own theoretical trajectory.

Bakhtin and dialectics

Bakhtin's explicit remarks about dialectics are nowhere presented systematically. The most extensive examination can be found in two

places: in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (*PDP*), and in the late writings included in the posthumous anthology *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (*SG*). In the former, his discussion is framed by the argument that Dostoevsky was the first genuine exponent of the 'fully polyphonic novel', which, as both a description of literary form and an ethical ideal, had hitherto been only partially realized in marginalised genres within European literary history. According to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky's text contain a plurality of unmerged consciousnesses that are not completely subordinated to unified authorial intentions. Each character's voice is equally as important and 'fully weighted' as the author's own; as such, every hero's word 'sounds, as it were, *alongside* the author's word and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters' (*PDP*: 7). The result is an endless, unscripted clash of 'unmerged souls,' involving the architectonic construction of a multiplicity of diverse yet continuously interacting ideological worlds. Bakhtin feels this is a principle that inheres in every element of the polyphonic text – indeed, it is constitutive of social life itself. 'When dialogue ends, everything ends', he writes. 'Thus dialogue, by its very essence, cannot and must not come to an end' (*PDP*: 252). Dostoevsky's utilisation of multi-voicedness is the centrepiece of a dialogical principle which subverts the monological point of view, wherein the matrix of ideological values, signifying practices and creative impulses of sociocultural life are subordinated to the hegemony of a single, transcendental consciousness. Bakhtin argues that monologism has been encouraged by what he terms the 'cult of unified and exclusive reason' promulgated by Enlightenment thought, in which the other is treated as 'merely an *object* of consciousness, and not another consciousness' (*PDP*: 292–3).

Bakhtin notes that many scholars have been preoccupied with understanding the *content* of the ideological positions espoused by the various characters in Dostoevsky's novels to the neglect of their *dialogical* qualities. This has resulted in a denial or objectification of the 'plurality of unmerged consciousnesses' that are central to Dostoevsky's 'multivoiced world', and hence a failure to recognize the distinctiveness of his artistic vision. One central obstacle to a proper understanding of this polyphonic experiment is due to the popularity of Hegelianism amongst Bakhtin's contemporaries, which encourages the reduction of a plurality of voices to moments within an overarching process of evolutionary maturation. Hence, open-ended and unfinalized discursive interaction is supplanted by the ultimate resolution of abstract ideas within the purview of a unified transcendental

consciousness. Bakhtin is adamant that all logical or conceptual links between various ideological positions expressed within Dostoevsky's works are subordinate to their embodiment in the form of distinct personalities. In genuine dialogue, there is an endless clash of contradictory consciousnesses that never merge into the higher unity of an evolving 'Spirit' moving towards a state of greater integration, unification or transcendence. Dialogic interaction cannot be understood in terms of an abstract sequence of thesis, antithesis and synthesis that develops teleologically through time. By projecting a spurious dialectical schema onto Dostoevsky's verbal universe, Bakhtin claims that the influence of the dialectic transforms living, open-ended communicative interaction into a lifeless 'philosophical monologue'. 'The idea in Dostoevsky is never cut off from the voice. For this reason it is radically wrong to claim that Dostoevsky's dialogues are dialectical', writes Bakhtin. 'And there can be no talk here of any sort of synthesis' (*PDP*: 279).

The second major commentary on dialectics can be found in the collection *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (*SG*). During a discussion of the overly formalistic character of semiotics, which he contrasts with the unfinalised and palpably incarnate nature of 'living discourse', Bakhtin advances the following, oft-quoted distinction: 'Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualising ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgements from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness – and that's how you get dialectics' (*SG*: 147). This general proposition is reaffirmed in the brief, programmatic essay 'Towards a Methodology for the Human Sciences'. Here, Bakhtin explicitly describes Hegel's dialectics as monological because it removes speaking subjects from the picture and tears concepts out of their appropriate sociological and linguistic milieux. Dialogue does not concern the confrontation between ephemeral 'ideas' in isolation from the persons who generate the utterances in question and the sociocultural environment within which they are produced; rather, it involves 'a contact of personalities and not of things' (*SG*: 162).

Bakhtin's treatment of dialectics, although fragmentary, has received a fair amount of attention in the secondary literature. However, the main body of commentary has been produced by Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, and, given their stature within Bakhtin studies, I will focus upon their contribution. In *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, Morson and Emerson take great pains to

catalogue what they view as the stark differences between the Bakhtinian notion of dialogue and other approaches that also theorize the phenomenon of relationality – particularly, of course, dialectics.[7] They assert that Bakhtin's use of the concept of dialogue is entirely unique, and that 'Least of all does it resemble Hegelian or Marxist dialectics' (Morson and Emerson, 1990: 49). According to the dialectical model, Morson and Emerson argue, pre-constituted entities come into contact, oppose each other, and, out of this contradictory encounter, form a higher synthesis that incorporates aspects of each of the entities formerly in opposition, but in a manner that effectively destroys them in the ensuing consummation. This process is objective and rule-governed, and therefore predictable, because driven by a kind of inner logic of necessity that propels this interaction between entities towards a predetermined end-point, in which there is a fixed sequence of progressively higher syntheses. Hence, the dialectical model is a form of 'theoretism,' because it abstracts from the terrain of human embodiment, subjectivity and face-to-face social interaction, and projects an inexorable *telos* that occurs 'behind the backs' of actual social agents. This is an aspect of Hegel's 'cunning of reason,' in which history evinces an intrinsic rationality, but which is only faintly comprehended by actual human beings, if at all.

By contrast, Bakhtin's dialogical approach renounces the imposition of abstract theoretical schemas onto the concrete sociohistorical world. It begins the task of inquiry by assuming the absolute integrity of real, flesh-and-blood human beings and the symbolic exchanges that occur within the realm of the everyday. Real dialogue is ultimately open-ended and 'unfinalizable'. It does not conform to an inherent logic of development; it does not unfold temporally in a given predetermined manner in any necessitarian sense. Rick Bowers usefully characterizes this stance as 'a refusal of closure, a celebration of difference, an insistence on socially-inscribed discourse' (Bowers, 1994: 569). Insofar as social life involves at its core intersubjective communication, and dialogue itself is constitutively open-ended, it follows that human beings, and the sociocultural practices they engage in, are bound up in a continual process of non-teleological 'becoming'. 'In fact', Morson and Emerson contend, 'all social and psychological entities are processual in nature. Their unfinalizable activity is essential to their identity' (Morson and Emerson, 1990: 50). This helps to explain Bakhtin's apparent lack of tolerance for nomothetic social science, in which human behaviour, particularly communicative acts, are squeezed into a Procrustean bed of rigid, abstract explanatory

systems. Another key Bakhtinian principle – which Morson and Emerson also construe as thoroughly anti-dialectical – is that there are, ontologically speaking, no monads in the world. All entities are formed in and through their dialogical relations with other things, a process that is on-going and without closure or finality. Dialectics, again, mistakenly assumes that all entities are separate and pre-formed when they come into contact, and that such interaction is oppositional in nature, out of which is generated new, but equally fully-constituted wholes or totalities. By contrast, for Morson and Emerson, all things in the world are 'messy', porous; they exist on the border between self and other, subject and object: 'entities are, in effect, *all* boundary' (*ibid.*: 51).

Dialogism, according to Morson and Emerson's interpretation, is fundamentally antithetical to Hegelian or Marxian notions of amalgamation or synthesis in which contradictions in the world are overcome through dialectical movement towards a new, higher totality. There is no sublation of opposing forces in the dialogical model, no ultimate resolution of differing perspectives or points of view. Dialectics, on the other hand, is reductive, dismissive of the cardinal principle of difference, and fails to respect the integrity of each individual subject and the non-repeatable contexts of language-use. It is, simply expressed, monological in its inspiration, and, more ominously, in its effects. 'Dialectics abstracts the dialogic from dialogue. It finalises and systematises dialogue. Individual agency, particular evaluations, the rootedness in the world that creates real potential for the unforeseen are reified and die', assert Morson and Emerson. 'Dialectics is a typical product of the old, Newtonian, monologic view of the world' (Morson and Emerson, 1990: 57). Dialecticians such as Marx are 'the great synthesizers, who shape apparently disparate insights and propositions into a coherent, all-encompassing system' (*ibid.*: 236). No matter how rigorous or comprehensive these grandiose intellectual constructs might be, ideologies like Marxism fail the litmus test of 'answerability.' Because they do not recognize the inviolate presence of real subjects and their affective and bodily needs, they are bereft of ethical content. This explains the vast difference between Marx's 'will to system' and what Morson and Emerson characterize as Bakhtin's 'prosaic' outlook. Their conclusion is straightforward: Bakhtin's *oeuvre* is diametrically opposed to 'the entire tradition of "dialectics"' (*ibid.*: 28).[8]

Merleau-Ponty, dialogue and the 'open dialectic'

In responding to such comments made by Bakhtin about dialectics and his more prominent interpreters, there is a careful path to be followed. In the context of this chapter, it would be manifestly impossible to disentangle, in anything resembling a satisfactory fashion, Bakhtin's relationship to Hegel, never mind Marx.[9] This is compounded by the fact that it is not always clear whether Bakhtin is referring specifically to Hegelian or Marxist dialectics, or both simultaneously. In turn, this raises extremely intricate, perhaps insoluble questions about Marx's own transformation of the Hegelian dialectic, and the precise nature of his attitude towards Engels's attempt to develop a dialectics of nature. These debates have been played out within both Western Marxism and 'official' Marxist–Leninism during the course of the twentieth century, and show no sign of immediate resolution.[10] I am inclined to think that there is a strong argument to be made for an essential congruity between the young Marx's attempt to oppose idealism and to premise social inquiry upon what he called 'real, living individuals', and Bakhtin's desire, particularly in his early, phenomenological texts, to reposition philosophy as a meditation on the 'event of Being'. However, as has been argued forcefully by Albrecht Wellmer (see Wellmer, 1971), amongst others, we can accept that there are certain deterministic and positivistic residues in Marx's mature economic writings. Marxism was, after all, conceived by its founders as a 'natural science' of society, a stance that is largely explicable by the enthusiastically pro-scientific and naturalistic tenor of the period. In contradistinction to purely speculative philosophy, it sought to locate immanent tendencies within the objective socio-historical process that heralded the transition to socialism, and eventually 'true' communism. As such, Marx set out to repudiate what he saw as the ideological fantasies of his predecessors, the utopian socialists, who lacked this scientific insight into the nature of history and society.

As is well-known, such reductive and mechanistic tendencies within Marx were reinforced, first by Engels' later writings (such as *Anti-Dühring* and *Dialectics of Nature*), and then by other interpreters. The subsequent elaboration of this viewpoint in Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* and *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, as well as in Stalin's own catechisms, helped to guarantee its incorporation into the official Soviet version of dialectical materialism (*Diamat*). This resulted in a codification of Marx's thought into a general world-view with

pronounced scientistic and naturalistic overtones. Consequentially, since the death of Marx in 1883, there has been a profound schizophrenia at the heart of the Marxist tradition – between a radical humanism that is reflexive and critical, and a 'scientific socialism' that tends towards a deterministic and objectivistic social science, or what Alvin Gouldner has astutely called the 'two Marxisms' (see Gouldner, 1980).

The widespread perception amongst the left-wing European intelligentsia during the early twentieth century that there was a demonstrable positivist drift occurring within Marxism is what helped to precipitate what Merleau-Ponty was the first to call 'Western Marxism' in *Adventures of the Dialectic*. By this term, he meant a suspicion of the totalizing dialectic, and a conscious return to the themes of humanism, alienation, and self-realization to be found within the formative writings of Marx. As Scott Warren chronicles in *The Emergence of Dialectical Theory* (see Warren, 1984), theorists such as Bloch, Gramsci and Korsch were motivated to look beyond the existing Marxist corpus, to such contemporaneous trends within hermeneutics, linguistics, phenomenology and psychology, as an antidote to economic reductionism and an uncritical deification of the natural sciences. In particular, the Western Marxists sought to focus more explicitly upon the experience of human subjectivity and embodiment, on language and other 'superstructural' phenomenon, and the role played by reflexive critique and hermeneutical analysis with respect to the foregoing. These were concerns that Marx himself was not uninterested in (as witnessed by the *1844 Manuscripts*), but which he had never explored systematically, mainly because he did not develop a philosophical anthropology suitable to the complexity of the human subject and the lifeworld. As Jürgen Habermas has repeatedly pointed out, although Marx was ostensibly concerned with the sensuous, concrete human subject, his comments on subjectivity and praxis were largely confined to the labouring process and the reproduction of the material life of society (see Habermas, 1978 and 1979). Accordingly, these sorts of issues were progressively marginalised within the orthodox Marxist tradition.

In order to overcome these perceived limitations, one such source of inspiration was existential phenomenology, developed primarily in the interwar years by Husserl, Heidegger and Sartre. Arguably, the most successful attempt to wed elements of phenomenology and Marxism can be found in the writings of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. In a separate article, I have chronicled some of the remarkable parallels between the

respective theoretical projects of Bakhtin and Merleau-Ponty (see Gardiner, 1998). Here, however, I have a different agenda in mind. My central goal will be to examine Merleau-Ponty's own critique and transformation of the Marxian dialectic, leading to the development of what he calls, variously, the 'open dialectic' or the 'hyperdialectic'. My intention will be to demonstrate that his conception of the open dialectic is entirely compatible with Bakhtin's dialogism. Yet this must be understood as an exercise in theoretical reconstruction that occurs *within* the Marxist tradition. Merleau-Ponty's efforts represent a concerted attempt to rehabilitate Marxism as a critical, reflexive philosophy which retains certain Utopian (in a non-pejorative sense) and emancipatory characteristics, and that is concerned precisely with the interrogation of what Bakhtin calls the 'event of Being'. Within this enterprise, the task of reconceptualising the dialectic plays a crucial role.

Historically speaking, 'dialectics' has two primary sources in ancient philosophy – first, in Heraclitus of Ephesus' attempt, in the sixth century BC, to counter the static monism of Parmenides by arguing that the fundamental nature of the cosmos is bound up with continuous change and flux; and, secondly, in the conversational model oriented towards the co-discovery of truth, traceable ultimately to the writings of Zeno, but exemplified by the iconoclastic figure of Socrates, as rendered in the early dialogues of Plato. It was primarily the former source that was taken up by Hegel and converted from a rather sensible ethos of immanent change into an all-embracing cosmology of global historical development propelled by an inexorable logic. The Hegelian system, as George Woodcock points out, is a strange admixture of Platonic idealism and process philosophy, which acquires its ultimate meaning from 'revealing and fulfilling the purpose of the absolute'. As such, Hegel 'transformed the laws of logic into the laws of History' (Woodcock, 1992: 80, 82). This line of thinking was reflected in the orthodox Marxist tendency to speak of the inevitable breakdown of capitalism and the proletariat ultimately fulfilling its predestined 'historical mission'. Thinkers like Merleau-Ponty were concerned to return dialectics, and hence the Marxist tradition in its entirety, to its Socratic, dialogical roots, by placing the phenomenon of language at the centre of philosophical inquiry – in much the same fashion as does Bakhtin himself, as evidenced by the following line from the latter's 'Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences': 'Dialectics was born of dialogue so as to return again to dialogue on a higher level (a dialogue of *personalities*) (*SG*: 162)'. In so doing,

Merleau-Ponty reaches certain conclusions that, in many respects, anticipate the more interesting insights of the poststructuralists and postmodernists, but at the same time supersedes their ethical and political blind-spots and shortcomings.

In order to understand properly how and why Merleau-Ponty set out to correct what he saw as the errors of the orthodox Marxist dialectic, however, some background comments are in order. He began his intellectual career attempting to rethink Husserlian phenomenology as an investigation into the nature of human embodiment and our sensory connection to the world, rather than a contemplation of the essential structure of consciousness *per se*. The German invasion and occupation of France in 1940, his first-hand experience of the brutalities of Nazism, and the emergence of a largely communist-organized resistance movement, catapulted Merleau-Ponty into the arms of the militant left, along with so many other intellectuals of his generation. During the early postwar years, Merleau-Ponty largely adhered to the strictures of party discipline demanded by the French Communist Party (PCF), accepting the main tenets of Soviet hegemony over the international communist movement, progressive capitalist breakdown, and the ultimate triumph of socialism. He participated in a broad coalition of committed leftist intellectuals, playing an integral role along with Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir in the administration of the radical publication *Les Temps Modernes*. However, Sartre's increasing rapprochement with the foreign and domestic policies of the Soviet Union and his drift towards an ultra-leftist political stance, together with his selective and controversial use of Marxist theory that would later come to fruition in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, led to a definitive break between him and Merleau-Ponty. Increasingly, Merleau-Ponty began to question the mechanistic and teleological tendencies within official Marxism, and the moral costs engendered by blind subservience to official party dogma, which, in turn, prompted a sustained reflection on the meaning and implications of the dialectic. This was a topic that occupied Merleau-Ponty in his more straightforwardly political tracts like *Humanism and Terror* and *Adventures of the Dialectic*, but also in such dense, cryptic philosophical works as *The Visible and the Invisible* and the essay 'Eye and Mind,' both unfinished before his untimely death in 1961 and published posthumously.

I want to examine briefly each of these tendencies within the later writings of Merleau-Ponty, beginning with his political interventions of the mid-1950s. On the surface, *Adventures of the Dialectic* is a survey of the genesis and development of the Western Marxist tradition. A

more veiled purpose, however, is to challenge communist orthodoxy regarding the issue of historical inevitability, and to query the role of the *engagé* intellectual in a morally ambiguous context of superpower struggle. Orthodox Marxism, he suggests, adopts what Martin Jay characterizes as a 'God's eye view of a transcendental, monological metasubject able to grasp the whole from a presumed point exterior to it' (Jay, 1988: 5). As such, it arrogates to itself a privileged insight into objective revolutionary conditions that provides the rationale for political actions on the part of the working class and its surrogate, the communist party. However, claims Merleau-Ponty, this sort of justification for political and ethical praxis has no basis in the actual practices and experiences of real, interacting flesh-and-blood human subjects. Our knowledge of the world is generated from within the lifeworld that we must inhabit, and not from some external, Archimedean point of pure logic and objective certitude. Any understanding we can have of our existential milieu is provisional, fallibilistic, and open to future revision. We are, he asserts, 'never able to see the whole directly' (Merleau-Ponty, 1973b: 4). This is why the writings of Max Weber became so important for Merleau-Ponty. Far from being a 'bourgeois apologist', Weber is of crucial significance precisely because he draws our attention towards the pervasive contingency that lies at the heart of the historical process, and forces us to confront the sobering realization that even the most comprehensive plans for progressive social transformation can have wholly unintended consequences – indeed, they can turn into their opposite, as Adorno and Horkheimer also argue in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. The path that Weber chose 'lies precisely between history considered as a succession of isolated facts and the arrogance of a philosophy which lays claim to have grasped the past in its categories and which reduces it to our thoughts about it' (Merleau-Ponty, 1973b: 19) – between, that is, the twin errors of facile positivism and 'high-altitude' rationalism, or a crude empiricism and an inexorable Hegelian logic.

The 'arrogant' philosophy that Merleau-Ponty is alluding to here is orthodox Marxism. Throughout *Adventures of the Dialectic*, Merleau-Ponty is concerned to sensitize us to this monstrous conceit – not as an elaborate justification of political impotence, to convince us of the innate moral superiority of the academic's disinterested, ivory-tower view of the world. On the contrary, he submits that we cannot 'keep our hands clean'. In this, Merleau-Ponty would be in full agreement with Henri Lefebvre's stricture that 'To rise above the world by pure reflection is in reality to remain imprisoned in pure reflection' (Lefebvre,

1968: 31–2). Our desire to improve the human condition, and move society in the direction of enhanced freedom and a deeper moral awareness, lacks any guarantees that our aspirations will be fulfilled. Marxism, despite its reversals and failures, still has much of value to say about this project. However, if we reflect carefully on the 'high-altitude thinking' of Lenin, for instance, an individual who maintained a quasi-theological faith that he and his party were on the winning side of history, and consider the catastrophic failure of the Russian Revolution, then we must cultivate an entirely different notion of what this project consists in and what role we can play in accomplishing it. In particular, we must jettison the belief that all human problems and contradictions can be solved 'at a stroke', that some sort of ultimate and final transcendence from human suffering and alienation can be achieved suddenly, and that we have access to an objective theory that makes this all possible.[11] Even if history and society does exhibit a certain structure or coherence, it does not mean that as situated, 'partial' creatures we can have a magical insight into the nature of this process; nor does it rule out the possibility of unpredictable change within any system. This realization, in turn, forces us to rethink the very meaning of the dialectic itself. The dialectic, Merleau-Ponty asserts,

> is not the idea of a reciprocal action, nor that of the solidarity of opposites and of their sublation. Dialectic is not a development which starts itself again, nor the cross-growth of a quality that establishes as a new order a change which until then had been quantitative – these are consequences or aspects of the dialectic. But taken in themselves or as properties of being, these relationships are marvels, curiosities, or paradoxes. They enlighten only when one grasps them in our experience, at the junction of a subject, of being, and of other subjects: between *those* opposites, in that reciprocal action, in *that* relationship between an inside and an outside, between the elements of that constellation, in *that* becoming, which not only becomes but becomes for itself, there is room, without contradiction and without magic, for relationships with double meanings, for reversals, for opposite and inseparable truths, for sublations, for a perpetual genesis, for a plurality of levels or orders. There is dialectic only in that type of being in which a junction of subjects occurs, being which is not only a spectacle that each subject presents to itself for its own benefit but which is rather their common residence, the place of their exchange and of their reciprocal interpretation. (Merleau-Ponty, 1973b: 203–4)

Merleau-Ponty's central claim here that the dialectic must be under-stood, not as an abstract, mystical force that propels history inexorably down a preordained path, but rather as an 'intra-ontology' that helps us to think of relationality as a complexly-mediated and mutually-conditioning process that occurs simultaneously at a number of different levels of reality and orders of being, and that evinces no inherent *telos* or ultimate resolution. To resort to the static formulae of *Diamat* in an *a priori* fashion is evidence of a failure of political will and moral imagination. It is to confuse the *effects* of the dialectic with its instantiation in social relations and lived historical circumstances, an inability to recognize its real, existential characteristics – as Bakhtin would say, its 'eventness', or concrete qualities and accents. However, in a work like *Adventures of the Dialectic*, Merleau-Ponty is still struggling to locate an appropriate metaphorical framework to concep-tualise his alternative interpretation of the dialectic. He eventually begins to uncover the rudiments of such a vocabulary by turning his attention more explicitly to the phenomenon of language. The topic of language is, admittedly, something that had occupied Merleau-Ponty throughout his writings. By the late 1950s, however, his thinking about language and intersubjectivity had undergone some-thing of a Copernican revolution. This was largely prompted by his confrontation, paralleling Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (*MPL*), with the structural linguistics of Saussure. Merleau-Ponty accepts Saussure's key argument that language is a complex system 'structured in difference,' and that the production of meaning involves relations between diacritical elements that are not reducible to the intentions or actions of individual speakers. Yet he rejects the *langue/parole* distinction, arguing that language exists only in and through its instantiation in pragmatic communicative acts undertaken by embodied subjects within a shared lifeworld. 'Speech', he writes, 'is the operation through which a certain arrangement of already avail-able signs and significations alters and then transfigures each of them, so that in the end a new signification is secreted' (Merleau-Ponty, 1973a: 13).

Merleau-Ponty asserts that in speech there is a ceaseless production of new meanings, a semiotic effervescence that is a central aspect of the experience of being human, which cannot possibly be captured in the static, undynamic terms of Saussure's *langue*. What Merleau-Ponty is saying here is that language is neither objective system, nor merely an externalisation of inner, subjective states, a position that recapitu-lates fully Bakhtin and Voloshinov's theory of the utterance. Linguistic

expressions are not completely subjective because mental states are composed of semiotic material that are linked to public communicative acts via a continuous and unbroken 'verbal chain'.[12] What this implies is that language and consciousness are profoundly social, and that they have a coherence, which Merleau-Ponty describes as a 'moving equilibrium'. However, the 'incarnate logic' that language displays never coalesces into a fixed, univocal structure; it must be understood in terms of its pragmatic and ever-changing 'use-value', not as a static, synchronic system. Language is an 'open totality', a concept that Merleau-Ponty will return to in his reconstruction of the dialectic.

Language is an open totality in part because of the inherently *temporal* character of dialogue, in which every word recapitulates implicitly the entire history of a language and culture, and is therefore a 'fragment of universal discourse' (Merleau-Ponty, 1973a: 144). All concrete speech-acts are responses to previous articulations, and anticipations of future rejoinders; every utterance 'bears the traces of another past and the seeds of another future' (*ibid*.: 37) – which, as students of Bakhtin will note, bears more than a passing resemblance to the latter's notion of 'great time'.[13] Thoughts, ideas and linguistic expressions do not 'belong' to anyone in particular: 'We really inhabit the same world and are open to truth precisely because there arises this diffusion among thoughts, this osmosis which makes the cloistering of thought impossible and deprives of all meaning the question of to *whom* a thought [*belongs*] asserts Merleau-Ponty (*ibid*.: 94). Each time one of us formulates an utterance, we put our personal stamp upon the words and expressions that we use – because each moment of enunciation, and every context of language-use, is in an important sense unique and non-repeatable, but also in that we give a distinctive inflection to our words in a fashion that involves body as much as mind. Hence, language is a bodily phenomenon, an expression of the inter*carnal* relation between self and other, which explains Merleau-Ponty's comment 'There is a presence [of] the flesh of speech' (Merleau-Ponty, 1974: 88).

In essence, Merleau-Ponty views language as a 'confrontation of open significations, an exchange of anticipation and metamorphosis' (Merleau-Ponty, 1973a: 109). Human communication is a dynamic, unpredetermined process generating constant surprise, astonishment, and 'wild meaning'. Indeed, Merleau-Ponty says, the very idea of a final word, of a 'finished expression', is a chimera born out of the deluded fantasy of a completed and hermetically self-contained

language. Insofar as living language is constitutively open-ended and incapable of semantic closure, so human existence must be understood as a zone of ambiguity, non-completion and 'unfinalisability'. But more than this: speech represents the solicitation of another subject, an invitation to participate in the shared construction of meaning, and by extension the lifeworld itself. As the most significant medium through which we co-participate in the 'flesh of the world', language allows us to reflect on our own status as sentient creatures and our primordial, incarnate relation to the world, because speech is *in* the world and *of* the world, not merely *about* the world. Language is a dense, organic medium that we necessarily inhabit, and which constitutes the unsurpassable horizon of our Being-in-the-world. This helps to explain why Merleau-Ponty became enamoured with Heidegger's suggestion that language is the 'house of Being'. In the co-mingling of a 'plurality of spirits' through speech, the boundary between individuals is eroded and rendered permeable, because language allows for the reversibility of perspectives, a decentring of the Cartesian *cogito*, which blurs but does not erase altogether the distinction between self and other. Speech 'summons and grips me; it envelops and inhabits me to the point that I cannot tell what comes from me and what from it', asserts Merleau-Ponty. 'Rather than imprisoning it, language is like a magic machine for transporting the "I" into the other person's perspective' (*ibid*.: 19).

This conception of dialogue also extends to Merleau-Ponty's notion of truth, which he insists is not about the ability of our words or phrases to reflect unambiguously the object-world that surrounds us. There will always be more 'world' than our words can possibly capture. Language cannot 'possess' the world, not least because our world, as well as our language, can only exist in a state of continuous change and transformation. Truth must be understood in an intersubjective manner, not as 'adequation' to the world, but as 'anticipation, repetition, and slippage of meaning' (*ibid*.: 129). In this sense, a multiplicity of perspectives gives us better insight into the nature of our world than a singular, monological viewpoint ever could. To assert that a given language and a particular point of view is sufficient to understand our world is to deny the fundamental insight that our lived environment is constructed physically and symbolically in a profoundly *collective* sense, a process in which we all participate. This is part and parcel of our common membership in a shared lifeworld, an 'anonymous corporeality' which binds us together in a complex, mediated whole, but, again, without sublating

the difference between self and other, or transcending our unique positioning in time and space. Merleau-Ponty's 'dialogical' theory of truth is one that is fully compatible with Bakhtin's, because it turns on the incorporation of a multiplicity of different, overlapping perspectives and experiences. 'Speaking is not just my own', writes Merleau-Ponty, 'because as speaking subjects we are *continuing,* we are resuming a common effort more ancient than we, upon which we are grafted to one another and which is the manifestation, the growth, of truth' (*ibid*.: 144).

In essence, Merleau-Ponty is saying that concrete speech is constituted pragmatically, and hence marked by a high degree of semantic indeterminacy and flux. This accounts for what he calls its 'lurching gait' – its protean, wild and untamed quality, the ability of untrammeled conversation in the Socratic mould to defy dogmatic expectations, to allow for an endless 'loophole' or reversal of perspectives between self and other that facilitates the 'will to dialogue'. At the same time, it also retains a semblance of systematicity 'structured in difference' – an open totality that echoes firmly Bakhtin's concept of 'speech genres', as articulated in the latter's postwar essays. What is important to realize here is that in his final, unfinished philosophical writings, Merleau-Ponty's attempt to sketch out the framework of what he calls an 'interrogative philosophy' and to rethink the dialectic, the nature of dialogue becomes his primary source of both literal and metaphorical inspiration. The eponymous text to consider here is *The Visible and the Invisible*, a sustained meditation on our 'openness' to the natural and social worlds that has an ulterior purpose: to challenge resolutely the 'formulas of a totalising thought' (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 88). And to comprehend such aspects of human social experience, the dialectic – properly understood as a 'situational thought' – is an essential tool, because it enables us to realize that Being is not atomized and self-contained, a simple 'positivity,' but rather what he terms a '*self-manifestation*, disclosure, in the process of forming itself' (*ibid*.: 91). In other words, the dialectic introduces the notion of *difference* and negativity into our understanding of the world. This is not a negativity that surpasses and destroys, an antithesis that gives birth to a new totality through the brute force of implacable contradiction and the sublation of opposites into a reconstituted, 'higher' whole. Rather, it is a mediating force that is inextricably intertwined with its other, an unresolvable tension that facilitates and enables rather than transcends, and that remains an integral component of the process of endless 'becoming'. Dialectical thinking, he writes, is

that which admits that each term is itself only by proceeding toward the opposed term, becomes what it is through the movement, that it is one and the same thing for each to pass into the other or to become itself, to leave itself or to retire into itself, [because] each term is its own mediation, the exigency for a becoming. (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 91)

In the absence of the dialectic, Merleau-Ponty suggests, there would be no possibility of change, of transformation or movement. However, this 'situational' dialectic must be contrasted with what he calls the 'bad dialectic': that which 'imposes an external law and framework upon the content and restores for its own uses the pre-dialectical thought' (*ibid*.: 94). The bad dialectic – Merleau-Ponty's barely-disguised code for official Marxism–Leninism – is a relic of a earlier age dominated by 'high-altitude' rationalism, in which abstract theoretical schemas are articulated and imposed arbitrarily upon the lifeworld, thereby smothering concrete particularity under a blanket of mono-logic conceptual rigour. What Merleau-Ponty is striving to accomplish here is the simultaneous conceptualization of identity *and* difference, unity *and* diversity – to grasp, in short, the fundamental ambiguity of human existence. For him, negative and positive, thesis and antithesis, represent a tangled skein; they cannot be separated arbitrarily into binary oppositions that will inevitably resolve themselves into a new, finished system. Whereas the bad dialectic 'becomes autonomous, and ends up at cynicism, at formalism, for having eluded its own double meaning', what Merleau-Ponty understands by hyperdialectic is a form of thought that

is capable of reaching truth because it envisages without restriction the plurality of the relationships and what has been called ambiguity. The bad dialectic is that which thinks it recomposes being by a thetic thought, by an assemblage of statements, by thesis, antithesis, and synthesis; the good dialectic is that which is conscious of the fact that every *thesis* is an idealisation, that Being is not made up of idealisations or of things said, as the old logic believed, but of bound wholes where signification never is except in tendency, where the inertia of the content never permits the defining of one term as positive, another term as negative, and still less a third term as absolute suppression of the negative by itself. The point to be noted is this: that the dialectic without synthesis of which we speak is not therefore scepticism, vulgar relativism, or the reign of the

ineffable. What we reject or deny is not the idea of a surpassing that reassembles, it is the idea that it results in a new positive, a new position. In thought and in history as in life the only surpassings we know are concrete, partial, encumbered with survivals, saddled with deficits; there is no surpassing in all regards that would retain everything the preceding phases had acquired, mechanically add something more, and permit the ranking of the dialectical phases in a hierarchical order from the less to the more real, from the less to the more valid. (Merleau-Ponty, 1968: 94–5)

To unpack what Merleau-Ponty is saying here: the dialectic is not simply random movement born out of pure negativity or opposition, ceaseless change without meaning or purpose. But nor does it represent inexorable development towards a predetermined *telos*. Positive and negative forces interpenetrate each other, are contained as 'seeds' within their ostensive opposites, in a manner that will eventually germinate into something unexpected. Moreover, dialectical moments represent contingent transformations that can only occur in and through the medium of concrete human bodies, minds and actions, in concert with other individuals, within the context of a shared lifeworld. In the movement of the dialectic, as in the vicissitudes of living language, there is no possibility of reassembling the interacting components into a final synthesis. In dialogue, each interlocutor

borrows from the other, takes from or encroaches upon the other, intersects with the other, is in chiasm with the other. In what sense are these multiple chiasms but one: not in sense of synthesis, of the originally synthetic unity, but always in the sense of *Uebertragung*, encroachment, radiation of being. (*Ibid*.: 261)

Similarly, in the dialectic there always remains the possibility of a sudden shifting of polarities, surprising reversals and transformations, inexpressibly complicated crossovers, overlappings and imbrications – none of which we can ever fully anticipate, or exert complete control over. Reflexivity is really about understanding and accepting this openness, the realization that life is about a continual encounter with otherness, with irreducible complexity and contingency. 'We are interrogating our experience', suggests Merleau-Ponty, 'precisely in order to know how it opens us to what is not ourselves' (*ibid*.: 159). The interrogative philosophy that he envisages helps to inaugurate the passage from the purified, egocentric and transcendental subject of the

Western philosophical tradition to a 'wild being' that is incapable of closure or finalisation. Merleau-Ponty's hyperdialectic is dialogical in the Bakhtinian sense that it thematises a process of continual 'decentring,' the endless deferral of final synthesis, rather than annihilation or destruction: 'Against the doctrine of contradiction, absolute negation, the *either or* – Transcendence is identity within difference' (*ibid*.: 225).

'Identity within difference' – this telling phrase helps to explain why Merleau-Ponty cannot be assimilated easily to the postmodernist attempt to replace notions of holism, universality and determinism with an equally unidimensional vision of endless dissensus, fragmentation and flux – what he (unwittingly) identified above as 'scepticism, vulgar relativism, or the reign of the ineffable'. As Fred Dallmayr (1993) usefully points out, such a reversal does not necessarily constitute a 'royal road' out of the aporias of Western metaphysics – rather, it may well represent a new, and not necessarily improved foundationalism; namely, the 'foundational status of particulars, of language-particles, of separated agonistic contestants or contending antagonists'. 'In the absence of mutual bonds or constitutive relationships,' he continues, 'the contending parties are liable to lapse into self-centeredness and unrelated fixity, that is, into the very kind of self-enclosure (or egocentrism) that [postmodernism] is supposed to undermine' (Dallmayr, 1993: 119). Hence, Merleau-Ponty's stance should not be construed as compatible with the postmodern abandonment of ethico-political praxis, a loss of faith in the capacity of collective human action to foment progressive social change. Change requires solidarity, and some sort of provisional consensus regarding goals, means and tactics. But the purposive collectivities thus formed must be understood as temporary coalitions, voluntarily and democratically constituted, and unburdened with a privileged, mystical insight into a future Utopia articulated by a cadre of self-appointed experts. In such a 'dialectic without synthesis', any given emancipatory project cannot represent the end of history, but will only result in unstable, 'probationary' social institutions and practices. 'Whether it bears the name of Hegel or Marx, a philosophy which renounces the absolute Spirit as history's motive force, which makes history walk on its own feet', writes Merleau-Ponty, could 'not postulate a final synthesis resolving all contradictions or affirm its inevitable realization' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 81–2).

Conclusion

As noted in the introduction, this is not an auspicious time for dialect-ical theory. A broad spectrum of the Western intelligentsia, from postmodernist left to neo-liberal right, would appear to agree with Karl Popper's suggestion in *The Open Society and its Enemies* that the dialectic is akin to a totalitarian mysticism. And, by and large, the work of Mikhail Bakhtin has been enlisted in this crusade, even though his rela-tion to the dialectical tradition of Hegel and Marx is complex and not always unambiguously hostile. By investigating Merleau-Ponty's vision of the dialectic, as filtered through his own 'linguistic turn' – by which I mean his attempt to understand dialogue as an 'intra-ontology' that places such phenomena as relationality, embodiment, and change at the centre of philosophical inquiry – I have argued that the dialectic is not necessarily synonymous with totalising Reason, intellectual arro-gance, or profound metaphysical error. In returning dialectics to its source; to wit, the conversational model inspired by Socrates (the same well-spring, it should be noted, as Bakhtin's dialogism), Merleau-Ponty aspires to situate the dialectic in the lifeworld, in the utterances, activ-ities and normative aspirations of people engaged in an endless series of individual and collective projects that do not, and indeed cannot, tend towards ultimate resolution. Marxism, he suggests at one point, is 'simply the idea that another history is possible, that there is no such thing as fate, that man's [*sic*] existence is open-ended' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964: 119).

This quotation neatly parallels Bakhtin's assertion in his study of Dostoevsky that '*nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future*' (*PDP*: 165–6; italics in original). If Bowers is correct to construe Bakhtin's dialogism as a 'refusal of closure, a celebration of difference, an insistence on socially-inscribed discourse', then it is clear that this equally characterizes Merleau-Ponty's hyperdialectic. Both thinkers place considerable emphasis on embodied sociality and the open-ended character of linguistic interchange; both decline to fetishise pure difference or otherness, as do so many of their post-modernist counterparts. They prefer to stress the principle of 'identity within difference', wherein individual subjects retain their distinctive-ness and capacity for autonomous moral judgement and action, but at the same time must be understood as entities that are constituted in and through their communicative exchanges, or dialogues, with others, in the context of everyday sociality. As such, dialogical subjects

remain open to a multiplicity of viewpoints, to otherness, and they can potentially resist the monological pull towards semantic or ideological closure. In so doing, Merleau-Ponty and Bakhtin raise the possibility of an 'incomplete synthesis', a partial and pragmatic consensus out of which can emerge forms of collective agency oriented towards progressive social change, but that are not wholly subordinate to Hegel's 'cunning of reason'. In short, prognostications from diverse quarters heralding the 'end of history' are perhaps somewhat premature.

Although this is a position that can be clearly identified in the writings of Merleau-Ponty, most commentaries on Bakhtin have tended to overlook such a possibility, preferring to read Bakhtin as either a proto-postmodernist or as an (ill-defined) liberal thinker – interpretations that, as I have stressed here, tend to dovetail in many key respects. Thankfully, however, there are a few signs that this situation is beginning to change. For instance, the feminist writers Bauer and McKinstry argue that dialogism, properly understood, 'is not just agonistic or oppositional; it also suggests an identity in dialectic response, always open and ongoing' (Bauers and McKinstry, 1991: 3). With the realization that there is a strong ethos of solidarity and communitarianism in Bakhtin's writings, and that we are not, *à la* Merleau-Ponty, compelled to maintain a 'very understandable horror of dialectics', then perhaps a sustained and productive interchange can yet occur between what remains of value in the critical and reflexive Marxist tradition and the sort of dialogical approach inspired by the work of Mikhail Bakhtin.

Notes

1 The title is taken from Marx and Engels' 1852 essay 'Heroes of the Exile'. The actual reference is about Arnold Ruge (1802–80), a Young Hegelian whom Marx and Engels felt had a rather poor grasp of the dialectic. I wish to thank Barry Sandywell and the editors of this volume for their very useful comments on an earlier draft. This chapter is dedicated to the memory of Arthur Brittan, an incomparable teacher, scholar and dialogist.
2 Gadamer (1989: 99).
3 Pinochet, cited in Anderson (1998: 44).
4 This has been noted by Iris M. Zavala as well (see Zavala, 1988).
5 Terry Eagleton's phrase 'libertarian pessimism', however, probably captures the postmodernist *Zeitgeist* better (see Eagleton, 1995: 61).
6 On this, see Kearney (1991: 112).
7 In this, however, Morson and Emerson tend to overlook some of Bakhtin's references to dialectics that are less overtly hostile. In the lengthy essay 'Discourse in the Novel', Bakhtin suggests that in the sphere of linguistic

heteroglossia, the 'dialectics of the object are interwoven with the social dialogue surrounding it' (278). Elsewhere in the same essay, he makes use of the Hegelian-inspired distinction 'heteroglossia-in-itself' versus 'heteroglossia-for-itself' (400).

8   Lest I give the impression that Morson and Emerson are alone in their assessment, there is ample evidence for sort of interpretation elsewhere in the literature on Bakhtin. In his study *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*, Michael Holquist argues despite some superficial similarities in Bakhtin and Hegel's respective views on cultural history, that 'Bakhtin was a thinker with little sympathy for Hegelian dialectics' (Holquist, 1990: 73). Similarly, Tzvetan Todorov suggests that 'Instead of a "dialectics of nature" Bakhtin puts forward a "dialogics of culture"' (Todorov, 1984: 104). This general position seems to hold true not only for commentaries on Bakhtin, but also in the literature on dialogical theory more generally (see Bergman, 1991: 218–19).

9   For a brief account of the relation between Bakhtin and Marx, see Gardiner (1992: 76–81) and Dentith (1995: 13–19). An attempt to uncover the Hegelian residues in Bakhtin can be found in Brandist (forthcoming); see also Tihanov (1999). They both convincingly argue, in rather different ways, that Bakhtin was not adverse to using Hegelian categories and concepts in his 1930s essays on literary and cultural history.

10 A useful commentary on these issues can be found in Norman and Sayers (1980).

11 For more on this, see Gardiner (1997: 102–3).

12 Note the similarity here between Merleau-Ponty's argument and Voloshinov's *Freudianism*.

13 On Bakhtin's notion of 'great time', see Sandywell (1998).

7

Looking Back on the Subject: Mead and Bakhtin on Reflexivity and the Political[1]

Greg Nielsen

> '… crimes committed with extraordinary boldness are more likely to succeed than others.'
>
> Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

The idea for this chapter comes out of a larger work that seeks to introduce Mikhail Bakhtin into a dialogue with classical and contemporary sociological theory. It is also stimulated by invitations from three recent books to participate in the renewal of general sociological theory – Jeffery Alexander's collection of essays *Neofunctionalism and After* (1998); Hans Joas's *The Creativity of Action* (1996) and Donald Levine's, *Visions of the Sociological Tradition* (1995). Recent generations of theorists continue to articulate the classical dilemma of the separation of micro levels of understanding and macro levels of explanation. Though each author referred to here adopts a different approach to this, each shares a common commitment to addressing it through diverse strategies of convergence and critical synthesis. Alexander reconstructs Parsons contribution and reviews a host of different schools and traditions that have lead to a neofunctionalist revival. He warns that the risk of the current trend in synthesising macro and micro theories is that levels of generality get muddled and that this leads to a widening of the gap between theoretical propositions and empirical applications. While covering some of the same ground from a quite different tact, Hans Joas, reviews the long history of utilitarian and normative theory. He concludes that while several promising attempts have been made to point general theory in the direction of the creative dimension of action, in the main, creativity is relegated to a secondary order. Donald Levine concludes his book by suggesting that of all the ways of recounting the history of social

theory, the dialogical narrative has the greatest chance of maintaining the creative dimension (Joas argues for) and of absorbing various traditions without damaging them and without committing unbridled acts of eclecticism (that Alexander warns against).

Unlike these latter writers, I do not propose a history of theory nor do I propose a new general theory. I add to the argument for developing the option that places dialogue and creativity in cultural and political action at the centre and not on the periphery of theoretical and historical understanding. More specifically, I am looking to draw out this argument from a comparison of the self–other relation as discussed in the works of George Herbert Mead and Mikhail Bakhtin. In the first sections of the chapter I distinguish between the micro level of reflexivity or the self-consciousness of the subject in the context of the specificity of moral community (*ethnos*). In the final section I look to connect the micro level of *ethnos* to the macro level of *demos* or the political. I argue for a dialogical theory of the relation between *ethnos* and *demos* rather than for their separation into monologic opposites.

Suggestions for a comparative discussion of these two thinkers have been growing in recent years as Bakhtin's elaborate interdisciplinary scholarship and special place in Russian intellectual history becomes better known and as philological and theoretical studies of Mead's place in American philosophy and sociology continues to evolve.[2] Bakhtin's project shifts from a personalist ethics of action to an aesthetic theory of self–other relations as a problem of authorship and to a general dialogic theory of language and culture. Mead's project begins in an encounter with idealist philosophy out of which he helps contribute to the founding of American pragmatism and goes on to build a sociological theory of the self in opposition to behaviorist psychology.[3] My argument is that while Mead and Bakhtin differ in terms of disciplinary and philosophical orientations, their theories of reflexivity are mutually reinforcing and as such provide an interesting theoretical basis for a discussion on the dialogical nature of the political.

Each approach is built on the concepts of sympathy and dialogue that are in turn rooted in both libertarian and communitarian traditions. For Mead the self becomes itself by learning to put itself in the place of others. For Bakhtin, the self steps across to co-experience the other's subjectivity and then returns to its own interior position to consummate the act. For Mead the 'I' becomes a 'Me' by internalizing the general attitudes of others. For both, the community is a source of solidarity and a threat to individuality. Only the community can

provide the linguistic resource for a symbolic or dialogical under-standing. From their position, to say the self is social or that the personal is political risks the error of the most vulgar sociological reduction if we do not define the social and the personal as processes occurring through dialogue. As Bakhtin defines it: 'Only a dialogic and participatory orientation takes another person's discourse seriously, and is capable of approaching it both as a semantic position and as another point of view' (*PDP*: 64). The community is the source for a variety of points of view but it can also fuse the word of the one with that of another and become closed-off, monologized. The search for a balanced understanding of the community as a source of political difference and as a source of solidarity underlies Mead's theory of radical democracy and informs the background assumption of Bakhtin's signature concept of dialogism, that is, the hybrid semantic infrastructure that comes out of the clash of different voices or points of view.

Mead's and Bakhtin's projects can thus be seen as making a unique contribution to the reflexive theory of the subject as an actor in a political community, that remains useful to contemporary theorists provided three kinds of problem motifs implicit in the title of our chapter are taken into consideration:

1. Looking back on the subject of the subject is itself a theoretical posi-tion that needs to be clarified;
2. Looking back on the subject also suggests that the experience of the subject can only be referred to as something that has already happened and yet remains unfinished; and
3. This same aspect of unfinalizability needs to be theorized when looking back on the subject of the political.

The first problem motif refers to the assumption that not all aspects of classical theories are coeval or transgenerational and therefore we need to describe something of the contemporary theoretical sensibility around the concept of the subject and make an argument regarding the appropriateness of joining it with Mead's and Bakhtin's work. The second motif refers to the various difficulties related to theorizing the subjects immediate experience. The second section of the chapter compares how Mead and Bakhtin theorize reflexivity or how the actor becomes aware of his or her own subjectivity by looking back on action. Put another way, looking back on the subject is the only way one can become aware of one's own subjectivity and that awareness in

turn is rooted in shared solidarity or intersubjectivity. To get at this question of reflexivity and intersubjectivity, I show how each thinker might analyse a fictional narrative regarding murder, confession and the paradox of the individual–community relation from Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. This is done in order to help facilitate the comparative discussion of the way each defines how the subject comes to be self-conscious. The story of Father Zosima's encounter with the confessor is summarized followed by a discussion of how each thinker might explain the story. The final section of the paper poses the third problem motif regarding the theoretical implication involved in the shift from the micro level of reflexivity to what a macro dialogical theory of the political might look like. Here we propose a dialogic theory of the relation between the particularities of *ethnos* and the universality of *demos* as opposed to their reduction into closed mono-logical opposites. It is argued that looking back on the subject of the political carries traces from the same paradox of the self–other rela-tion, that is, the political relation needs to be thought through as being open-ended or unfinalizable. But before we present a compari-son of the two thinkers in these three overlapping problem motifs, a few preliminary remarks concerning the disciplinary and philosoph-ical differences between them needs to be stated.

Philosophical and disciplinary orientations

In considering the different philosophical backdrop of each theorist's position it is helpful to keep in mind that pragmatism and phenome-nology traditionally share a common interest in bringing theory closer to the subjects experience on both the real and imaginary planes.[4] On the other hand, the two approaches tend to differ over how to go about constructing the explanation and understanding of experience. Mead constructs explanations of practical experience by emphasising cognitive solutions. Bakhtin constructs explanations of practical experience by emphasising ethical and aesthetic solutions.[5] He asks the question – how should I act – not because of *a priori* postulates or formal expectations of my duty or role – but how should I act given the imaginary but not fictional subjectivity of another who can answer me back – however radically different that subjectivity might be from my own. The question of what should I do becomes, for Bakhtin, how should I act toward this other 'I', this other emotional–volitional orientation and in what aesthetic form can we consummate this action? Mead defines action as thinking through practical problems by

using significant symbols that arouse the same response in the other as they do in the self. The question what should I do becomes, for Mead, how do the I and the Me (the interiorized attitudes of the group) think through this action and how might we find agreement between the self and the other regardless of subjective experience in order to consummate the act?

For Mead, thinking is a response to immediate experience. The normative logic, the emotional–volitional content of thought and the ethical significance of experience is found in the act alone. Intelligence or thinking is seen as an interiorized dialogue in which 'the passage from percept to concept, is by way of attentive selection and the source of this attentive selection must be found in the act. Knowledge predicates conduct, and conduct sets the process within which it must be understood' (Mead, 1968: 118). Hence, the definition of the subject who is conscious of his or her immediate experience is ambiguous. As Mead says many times, the subject only appears to itself as an object. A key question for Mead is how does the subject become self-conscious? His response is that the subjective 'I' can only be grasped as an objective 'me' (Mead, 1964a: 142). The 'I' can only be known after an act is already carried through. As we discuss the 'I' we are discussing a theoretical concept and not the experience of the 'I'. For Mead, we can only ever know the subject by referring to action.

In his essay on 'The Author and the Hero in Aesthetic Activity' (AH), Bakhtin presents the cognitive image involved in the shift from the perception of an object to the formation of a concept as a key aesthetic problem. The condition of outsideness [*vnenakhodimost'*] or the ability to see all around, is a practical condition in which it becomes possible for us to offer a loving axiological position to another; a teacher to a student, a father to a child, a friend to a friend, a lover to a beloved, an author to a hero (see AH, in *AA*: 34). Aesthetic value is derived from the synthesis of the inner and outer body and its external appearance and actions. The synthesis is seen in the creative value that constitutes the self–other gift relation. Only a gift derived from a sympathetic understanding of the hero's 'forward looking life' can free the self so we can experience the hero's I-for-herself.

Mead's sense of creativity is also fundamental to his approach but he does not theorize the question of aesthetic value. For Mead, creativity lies in the intelligent solutions derived from the tension between the I and the me in a given situation. For Bakhtin, a solution to the self–other relation can never be fully achieved as there is always the

loophole created by subjectivity. One can never be co-natural with objects. Mead's social definition of the self helps define how a subject becomes a subject, which is to say how the subject becomes an object, but it does not get at the aesthetic process of 'authoring' that Bakhtin pursues. Although Mead sees the fact that we can distinguish our self from our body, it should be remembered that pragmatism does not develop a mind–body dualism nor does it posit an ontological gap between appearance and reality. Bakhtin does not embrace the former position but he does engage the latter.

Between consciousness and language: the ambiguity of experience

Keeping in mind the differences in emphasis and in philosophical orientation I would like to turn attention to the first problem motifs proposed in the introduction. The first problem motif has to do with looking back on the subject from the point of view of theorists who did not face the radical erasure of the concept that has come to be common place. Poststructuralism is often credited with the original pronouncements concerning the death of the subject. The paradox though is that studies in the archaeology of knowledge, discourse and power always return to theories of subjection (*assujetissement*). The paradox is that a theory of subjection assumes the prior existence of a subject otherwise power could not be exercised. Nicolas Luhmann, picks up on this point in his critique of the concept of intersubjectivity. He speaks of his embarrassment with this 'dead end way of thinking' and questions all those who continue to speak of intersubjectivity when there is no longer any empirical basis for a theory of a unified subject? (See Luhmann, 1995: xxxvii–xliv.)

Critical theorists continue to use the concept of intersubjectivity but argue that the modern subject is decentred. Habermas suggests that modern social divisions overburden individuals with conflicting demands leading to the disintegration of conventional identity creating both the condition for emancipation and the loss of self (see Habermas, 1992). Michael Walzer argues we need to contrast thick hierarchical theories of the self developed in moral philosophy, psychoanalysis and social criticism with thinner, less-stratified theories that problematise the subject as internally divided by its interests and roles, different identities and ideals and values that belong to each of its parts. Charles Lemert presents an equally compelling plea for a dark and light distinction in the theory of the self so that new kinds of

subjectivity might be brought into the view of sociological analysis (see Walzer, 1994; and Lemert, 1994).

Mead and Bakhtin theorize a dialogical relation between subjects in a way that is posited in the early phase of the linguistic turn. Consequently their theories of the subject and of action maintain a relation to the philosophy of consciousness that makes contemporary social theorists nervous. Strictly speaking, Mead and Bakhtin rarely used the word subject and never used the word intersubjectivity or identity.[6] Nonetheless their work is very much rooted in the post-metaphysical transition that these theorists are referring to. They both contributed to the original definition of the subject as being impossible without language acquisition. They are therefore both thinkers who helped lead a clear break into the philosophy of language, as Habermas and Joas correctly argue in the case of Mead, but they are also thinkers who could still listen much more intensely to the nineteenth century philosophy of consciousness than their contemporary interpreters. After all, Mead thought he was adding a theory of the self to sociology that was underdeveloped because of the bad start it got when Comte skipped over psychology in defining the stages of scientific development – skipping as it were from chemistry to sociology. Bakhtin is not a sociologist though his theory of culture and of the self provides a potentially important support to sociologists who seek to continue this in-between kind of theorizing. Both developed a theory of the subject that could be thought of as falling between the decentred-thin-light version, and the centered-thick-dark variety. Following William James, Mead unpacks the definition of the self as containing an 'I' and a 'Me' and adds the concepts of the significant and generalised other. Following Max Scheler, Bakhtin divides the self into the I-for-the-self, I-for-the-other, the-other-for-me and later adds the concept of the superaddressee.[7] Both understood that the subject takes on multiple roles or identities as he or she becomes herself or himself in a particular community or across different communities.

There are, however, some important differences between Mead and Bakhtin regarding the way they develop their respective concepts. As we mentioned above, Mead posited a theory of the self that could be distinguished from the body even though it is of the body. Bakhtin preferred the Latin word *subiectum* precisely because it does not distinguish between the soul and the body. To some extent Mead is most famous for his adaptation of the thick Hegelian argument that the subject becomes an other to itself in becoming conscious of itself. He succeeds in synthesizing the idea with pragmatism and posits an

original sociology of intersubjective communication.[8] Again, Bakhtin also follows a path flanked by philosophical idealism and the linguistic turn. His interests shift from a early engagement with philosophical anthropology, ethics and aesthetics, to a study of the polyphonic novel, a theorization of the social stratification of discourse or heteroglossia, a study of carnivalisation or the transposition of popular culture into art and a general dialogic theory of the utterance and of speech genres. It helps, then, to keep in mind that Mead and Bakhtin were part of a generation that steered a narrow path between the philosophies of consciousness and of language touching base in both but belonging to neither. But because they do partly develop their theories of the self in the philosophy of consciousness, a second problem implicit in the chapter's title also has to be addressed. I am referring here to the difficulty of analysing the unmediated content of consciousness as experience other than through a description of its most peripheral external aspects. Both thinkers solve this by situating the question of consciousness and its content in a philosophy of the act rooted in discourse or gesture. Both Mead and Bakhtin caution against theories of experience that do not take this distinction into consideration. Both argue that the subject cannot be directly represented or communicated in its actual state of experience.

This is quite an important point and in order to get a clearer explanation of what is being said here I would now like to introduce a comparative discussion of how each might analyse the question of how the subject becomes reflexive in a story told by the elder Zosima from the *Brothers Karamazov.* Thinking through how each thinker might interpret the story will hopefully help gain insight into some of the ways in which they thought about the place of the subject in the community. Dostoevsky's stories often lend interesting insight to the paradox regarding the individual–community relation. Is the murderer's personal and moral crisis about an individual act or is it about the communities inability to create a good subject? Mead helps us understand the impossibility of directly knowing the subject and how the murderer in the story comes to an intense level of self-consciousness, whereas Bakhtin helps us understand how the character comes to know himself by maintaining his outsidedness to the community and by finding a threshold that allows him to become himself and a member of his community simultaneously. Bakhtin is drawn to Dostoevsky's art because it provides a sophisticated example of how to create a self-conscious hero however radically deviant his subjectivity might be. According to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky's small

Copernican revolution was to create a hero who could be completely separate from the author. In Dostoevesky's novels not only does the hero have an opinion on the world, but also on himself. It is not possible to create this kind of character by abstracting out elements from types of personalities. The self-conscious hero absorbs the surrounding socio-characterological features. He looks at himself through other peoples worlds. The other's consciousness is not merely a prop that lies alongside the hero. The author and hero are not part of the same representation, they are represented on different non-coinciding planes.[9]

Murder, confession and community

In Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, Zosima, the elder Monk, tells the story of his life as a young man in the army and the event that inspired him to choose a religious life. The event includes the realization of his own humility and a selection he makes for life over death. After making a public confession in which he breaks all codes of conventional military honour (he deliberately misfires in a dual and places himself at the mercy of his opponent) another man in the crowd is so moved by the act that he came forward to ask Zosima if he would agree to see him in his quarters, so he to could confess his secret.

That night he received the mysterious guest and the story he tells gets very involved. The visitor whose name is Mikhail reveals his secret only after several visits and many long hours of recounting. His secret is that he killed the woman he loved after she chose another man. He tells the story of how he killed her and what has happened in his life history very slowly and in great detail over these nights. Slowly Zosima is convinced as the details begin to outweigh his doubts about the credibility of the story. He is struck by the idea that 'crimes committed with extraordinary boldness are more likely to succeed than others' (Dostoevsky, 1990: 305)

The night of the murder, Mikhail climbed up the back of the house. He knew the servants to be lazy and suspected they would forget to lock the door inside the house that he could access through an open window. He sneaks across the garden, climbs over the fence, crawls up the back of the house and along the roof until he enters the attic window. From there he quietly, without making a sound, walks down the narrow staircase to the unlocked door. He was right about the servants. He entered a hallway leading to her bedroom. The two maids had gone to a party without their mistress's permission. Mikhail finds

her asleep alone. With each step he takes towards her, his rage over-takes him and finally he plunges a dagger into her heart.

He carefully arranges the evidence in the room so the servants will be suspected. He takes only trinkets a servant might take, leaving more valuable items untouched. Her male servant was immediately suspected because the mistress had made it known that she intended to send the servant to the army to fill the quota for the manor. This was assumed to be the motive. The servant had also been seen falling down drunk in the street in front of the house that very night. The police arrested the servant but, shortly after, he died in prison.

Mikhail was never suspected and now no one ever could suspect him. He gets away with murder but has to live with the fact that the woman he loves is dead. He feels no remorse for the murder but does feel remorse for the servant, and for the trinkets he stole to make it look like the servant was the murderer. Some time passed and Mikhail married a much younger woman and had three children. He also became a highly successful member of the community well-known for his acts of philanthropy and participation in civic affairs. But he began to have doubts about his own ability to raise children given his secret. Gradually he falls into a deep remorse for the crime. As each year goes by he thinks more and more about the horrible act. Then he begins to have a recurring dream of publically confessing the crime. Finally, one day after his talks with Zosima and roughly 14 years after the crime, he attends a public gathering of his towns citizens and blurts out a confession of what he did. But none of the authorities believe him. They could not imagine how such an upstanding, long-time fellow member of their community could possibly have committed such an act. He comes back to see the assembly again and shows them the artefacts he stole from the murder scene to make it look like the servant did the deed and convinced them that only the killer could be in possession of such things. Finally, the authorities agree to a process and that would review the case. But Mikhail dies of natural causes five days after the proceedings begin.

Why the subject is behind us

What is the story about? Is it about the personal moral crisis of the murderer? Is it about the Monk's fascination with his own reflexivity? Is it about the communities ability to create both a good and an evil subject? Is it an allegory on alienation? Is it about the legacy of the most horrific elements of patriarchy? It could be argued that if Mead

and Bakhtin were here with us today, they would argue that Dostoevsky's story is about all these issues. For both Mead and Bakhtin we could say that the murderer is a deviant whose act is possible because he has momentarily lost the 'me' that acts as a representative of his community. The pure violent impulse of his 'I' is only part of the subject of experience. Mead argues that the subject also includes the organized response to the community or the 'me'. But as we discuss the 'I' in Mead's sense we are discussing a theoretical concept and not the experience of the 'I'. We can only have sympathy for the murderers moral suffering by putting our self in the place of the murderer and his life history. This is part of what the story is about. The murderer's 'I' came to be after his act. We know little of his history other than his motive for murder. The story is about what happens in the act and what happens during and after the act as a way of revealing the characters life history. His 'I' cannot be a habit any longer because it is caught in the moral struggle between the 'I' and the 'Me' to such an extent that his very presence now leaves the moral order of the whole community in doubt. How could such a community not have a procedure in place that would protect its innocent members from such harm?

For Mead, understanding and explaining moral crisis and crime are not fundamentally different because the ethical self is not a neutral self but social and even political. The 'Me' disciplines the 'I' by holding it back from breaking the law of the community. But the law of the community is not a transcendental universal. The self interiorizes the attitudes of the generalized other across the stages of its development. The shift from playing light games to darker adult forms of interaction involves developing the capacity for sympathy of the other's position. The good in the act is derived from a practical situation not a transcendental norm. Each act needs to be seen in terms of the mutual conditioning between the individual and the community. As Mead puts it: 'The good does not depend on transcendental ideals of perfection of the self … nor on the sum of happiness for all but on the effectiveness of the actor's deeds in the community' (Mead, 1968: 77). For Mead there are only two possible solutions to an ethical dilemma. Either the subject adapts to the cues in the situation or creates a new solution. The interpretation of an ethical act is found in the practical situation. While the 'I' and the 'Me' are never actually separated here, it is the creative 'I' that acts against the generalized other or the community.

For Mead, looking back on the subject means looking after the act is

achieved. The murderer comes to see himself gradually as he looks back on his action. At a certain point in the story it is clear that each moment the murderer does not commit to an act of confession, his conscience (his awareness of himself as an object) refuses to allow him to act out of habit. But if he chooses to confess, his children and wife will be destroyed. Action and non-action are intimately connected. The act is the 'I''s response to the organized attitudes of the group that constitutes the 'me'. The non-act is the 'me' thinking about the yet-to-be action. As Mead put it in one of his lectures:

> If you ask where directly in your experience the 'I' comes in, the answer is that it comes in as an historical figure. It is what you were a second ago, that is the 'I' of the 'me'. It is another 'me' that has to take that role. You cannot get the immediate source of the 'I' in the process. (Mead, 1934: 175)

Hence, we only look back on the subject from the point of view of a second 'I', a slightly removed 'me', a spokesperson for the self as a type of other.

Action inside and outside the subject

For Bakhtin, we also look back on the subject from a second position. On the other hand, Bakhtin sees the ambiguity of consciousness in the space between ontology, ethics and aesthetics rather than between cognition and logic. Action is more than an intelligent reasoned response to a problem or situation. The act or deed has a two-sided form of answerability. This is a dimension that is very familiar to and yet also distinct from Mead's discussion of answerability. In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (*TPA*), [10] where Bakhtin's project begins, an act is seen to include any thought or deed or sign that is both a once-occurrent and an open-ended event. The act is seen to be composed of a two-sided form of answerability that includes both a reference to its uniqueness as an event and a more general moral reference that situates the act as an emotional–volitional orientation in the actors entire life history – as a non-alibi in Being, to use his phrase. It follows that, for Bakhtin, we might say that the murderer's suffering is a result of his inability to reconcile the horrific uniqueness of his act with any general moral reference.

   For Mead, too, the murderer suffers because of the struggle between the self and the community or the 'I' and the general attitudes of the

group carried by the 'me'. In the last instance, however, the values of the community are what are most important. For Bakhtin this is not necessarily the case. His triadic definition of the I-for-the-self, I-for-the-other and the-other-for-me helps explain that, at another level, the murderer's moral suffering is about his inability to join the uniqueness of his act with a general moral content for his overall life history. As a result he can only join the superaddressee or the chorus of the community in a superficial sense. In the community the 'I' lives 'in the other and for the other. In my lived life, I participate in a communal mode of existence, in an established social order, in a nation, in a state, in mankind, in God's world.' In each of these contexts, Bakhtin argues, the 'I' lives life in the category of the other: 'I experience, strive and speak herein the chorus of others. But in a chorus I do not sing for myself; I am active only in relation to the other and I am passive in the other's relation to me' (AH, in *AA*: 121).

Acts are performed in a context that is relative to day-to-day life, to a universe of social and political values, and to aesthetic and ethical values. Self-consciousness is derived in these contexts but is not reducible to them. Self-consciousness is both the part of the self that seeks autonomy and the part of the self that longs to join the me (I-for-the-other). The I-for-the-self seeks to be an other for others, as Bakhtin puts it, and 'to cast from itself the burden of being the only I in the world' (AH, in *AA*: 116).[11] This is an internal relation of subjectivity that Mead appears to withdraw from in developing his theory of self-consciousness as the subject reflecting on itself and becoming an object. In other words, for Mead the 'I' is an immature version of the 'me'. Bakhtin, though, has a way of including both the externally objective and internally subjective relations so as not to reduce the one to the other.

In Bakhtin's I-for-myself, the 'I' sees an object from the standpoint of a future inner experience. But the I can never see itself except through the mediation of the I-for-the-other (Mead's 'me') or through the other-for-me (Mead's significant other); that is, self-consciousness is only possible in light of how I think others might look on me or how I might want them to look back on me. The murderer sees the woman he murdered through an objective calculation. For him she is gathered and fitted as a whole into her outer image, as an object. He responds with rage at her outward actions (her marriage to another). In the beginning, he has no quilt for the act he has committed only a heartbreak from being separated from his beloved. Seeing another come forward and confess his secret gives the murderer the ethical clue to

come forward and begin to transform his I-for-himself into an other-for-others. The act of confession momentarily releases him from moral suffering but it also engenders a new moral dilemma in that he is well aware that harm is going to be visited on his new wife and children because of his act. Here, the murderer experiences his own exterior image through the community (Mead's generalised other). Yet, he cannot experience all of himself as an object of his community. His outward image cannot be completely cleansed because he cannot join his own life history to a general moral content. In other words, his I-for-himself is not co-natural with the world. 'There is always [his] subjectivity which cannot be seen as part of the outside world, [he] always has a loophole to save (him)self from being a natural given' (AH, in *AA*: 40).

In his essay on 'The Author and the Hero in Aesthetic Activity', as we saw above, Bakhtin linked the cognitive image involved in the shift from the perception of an object or an action to the production of aesthetic value. The latter is derived from the synthesis of the inner and outer body as well as external actions and appearance. The inner body is the site of a complete self-conscious awareness, whereas consciousness of an external image remains incomplete given that it relies on others to measure an aesthetic value:

> The plastic pictorial value of my outer body has been as it were sculpted for me by the manifold acts of other people in relation to me, acts performed intermittently throughout my life: acts of concern for me, acts of love, acts that recognize my value. (AH, in *AA*: 49)

The I-for-the-self resides in the inner body which 'represents the sum total of inner organic sensations, needs and desires that are unified around an inner core' (AH, in *AA*: 47). The I-for-the-self looks back on its 'inner core' from the point of view of another.[12] The murderer gradually comes to look back at his 'inner core' from the point of view of the community, and his self-consciousness is transformed into a self-hatred. In the end, his self-conscious 'I' seeks to be annihilated by the generalised other-for-others (the law of the community).

If we withdraw from our analysis to a more general level, a series of convergences and differences between the two approaches to reflexivity are easily identified. For Bakhtin, action is more than a reasoned response to a problem or situation. To recap, the act or deed has a two-sided form of answerability. For Bakhtin, an act is seen to include any

thought or deed or sign that is both a once-occurrent and an open-ended event. The act is seen to be composed of a two-sided form of answerability that includes both a reference to its uniqueness as an event and a more general moral reference that situates the act in the actor's entire life history. Mead, on the other hand, is concerned with explaining the process in which symbolic action seeks to arise the same response in the addressee as it does in the self. To do this he makes an analytic distinction between cognition and its emotional content in a way that both contradicts and complements Bakhtin's approach. For both Mead and Bakhtin, the other-for-me or simply the 'me', is an ethical dimension of the self. While both might agree on this point, each draws quite different conclusions. For Bakhtin, on the level of action, it reverses the Golden Rule back on to the self. He argues that 'we must not love others as ourselves, we must love each other and remain ourselves' (Morson and Emerson, 1989: 21). Mead, for one, states: 'We cannot be a self without being an other.'[13] Both are right, given their respective definitions of the self–other relation and thus they offer mutually reinforcing ideas given that each definition is built on the concepts of sympathy and dialogue.

Mead constructs explanations of practical experience by emphasising cognitive solutions, Bakhtin constructs explanations of practical experience by emphasising ethical and aesthetic solutions. Bakhtin asks the question how should I act given the imaginary but not fictional subjectivity of another who can answer me back. Mead defines action as thinking through practical problems by using significant symbols that arouse the same response in the other as they do in the self. The question what should I do, becomes for Mead, how do the 'I' and the 'me' find agreement between the self and the other regardless of subjective experience? Mead argues that thinking and emotional–volitional attitudes do not seek the same kinds of responses. 'Thinking', he says, 'always implies a symbol which will call out the same response in another that it calls out in the thinker' (Mead, 1934: 147). The emotional part of the act does not always call out in us the response we seek. As he puts it: 'the person who is angry is not calling out the fear in himself that he is calling out in someone else … We are not frightened by a tone which we may use to frighten someone else' (*ibid.*: 149). The paradox for Mead lies in the assumption of the innocence of reason in thought and its capacity for undistorted communication. The paradox for Bakhtin lies in the relation between the absolutely individual character of the act and its universal moral significance.

On the dialogue between *ethnos* and *demos*

To this point, I have tried to flesh out and contrast Mead's idea of reflexivity as an objectification of the subject, and Bakhtin's idea of two-sided answerability as a non-finalisable externally objective and internally subjective process. The final point I want to draw attention to is the comparison of the way each might theorize a shift from the micro level of the self–other relation, to the macro political level. I say would, because Bakhtin has not left us a text on political theory. Still, it is often argued that his approach is compatible with a particular version of political theory. Indeed, Mead's preference for direct democracy and mutual transnational forms of recognition could be seen to accommodate Bakhtin's concepts of dialogue and dialogism or the ongoing mixtures of multiple simultaneous values that modern individuals as well as groups must navigate. Yet, the question of political theory remains underdeveloped in both their approaches.

Bakhtin introduces the concept of dialogue in the 1929 version of *Dostoevsky's Poetics* (*PDP*). The concept can be seen to contain many elements of previous concepts discussed above, most notably the notions of answerability as a norm and of the loophole or non-finalisability of subjectivity that were first introduced in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (*TPA*) and the essay 'The Author and the Hero in Aesthetic Activity'. Words, phrases, books and genres of discourse can now be seen to also anticipate rejoinder in dialogue. Double-sided answerability becomes double-voiced discourse. The transgredient relation between the inner and outer body returns in the concept of counterpoint that he defines as 'how one point of view passes over into another completely incompatible with it' (*PDP*: 69).[14] The earlier study of actions inside and outside the subject and of transgredient relations presented in the Author–Hero essay are strengthened by deepening the interest in the ethical relation as a norm of answerability in dialogue.

What then would a dialogical theory of the cultural and the political, of *ethnos* and *demos* look like? To begin at the level of culture, in any dialogue between subjects the speaker's words and phrases anticipate rejoinders from the animated other. Monologic utterances eliminate response. In dialogue I recognize the other's idea as he or she engages the utterance. In monologue I exclude the other's idea as the object of my reflection. In dialogue, the other's response is anticipated and in this sense is included in the speakers reflection. 'Like the word', Bakhtin argues, 'the idea wants to be heard, understood, and answered by other voices from other positions'. Monologue assumes it has the

last word. Dialogue assumes no last word, no finality and so it must adjust with ideas and concepts as they come up (see *PDP*: 88).

On the most universal political level, the level of the *demos*, political events can also be understood as dialogical in that they both conclude deliberations between groups in the public life of society and at the same time open up new questions and rejoinders. But the dialogical approach to the political contains the same paradox we found in Mead and Bakhtin's approaches to the self–other relation, that is, the paradox between a pure form of undistorted communication and the universal moral consequences of individual acts. If we think about the political as dialogical we can no longer decontextualise political acts. In Dostoevsky's story, a man has killed his lover and then became an outstanding member of his community. How is this possible? The shift to a theory of the macro-political or societal level carries the same element of paradox present in the reflexivity theory of the self-other relation. A dialogical theory of the political cannot universalize *demos* and eliminate the particular pathologies of *ethnos*. *Ethnos* or the specific uniqueness and autonomy of peoples needs to be understood as if it were in dialogue with the universalizing themes of *demos* – of the multiplicity, of the diversity and of the cohabitation of individuals and groups within modern societies. Dialogical theory would argue then for a thicker mix between *ethnos* and *demos* as opposed to their further thinning out into monologic opposites.

However, the dialogism, or the as-yet-unknown political and cultural accommodation that might be created from the clash of utterances in the encounter between *ethnos* and *demos* can only be accomplished by recovering some of the cultural specificity that liberal and republican political theory tends to shun. What I am saying here is that theorists engaged in a dialogical understanding of societal events need to adjust for the over-shift in concepts like social solidarity. This concept needs to be understood under the sign of culture as well as under the sign of the political. By over-shifting from the micro level to the macro level of the political, social solidarity, is perhaps to be easily explained as a function of civil society rather than as a dialogised life-world creation. In such an over-shift the national question, for example, ceases to be explained as a dialogue in social solidarity and cultural creation, and is instead recategorised under the sole domain of political and sometimes by extension under economic and military society. Genocide, war and poverty are possible because social actors can reduce the status of other actors to the status of what Herman Cohen called 'just the next man'. The shift from a micro

theory of reflexivity to the political public sphere thus quickly encounters the often painful adjustments to new issues that arise with dialogized societal events: the struggles over recognition, over definitions of popular sovereignty, over inclusion and exclusion, over citizenship, over transcultural communication and the coexistence of individual and collective rights for different communities who inhabit a common territory.

As in any set of conceptual readjustments, though, there are advantages and disadvantages. If the questions of 'fellowship', of peace and good government and of international cooperation were pressed solely on the grounds of accommodating *ethnos* without separating the political framework, no new conceptual tools would be available to draw actors and intellectuals into dialogue. On the other hand, if we were to insist on over-determining *demos* we would risk misrecognising the meanings of the cultural dimension of nations, regions and peoples. It is important to keep these two extremes in mind not in order to carve out a middle ground but for practical dialogical reasons.

Unfortunately, I have only been able to scratch the surface of the works of Mead and Bakhtin and have only been able to point to a direction where a dialogical theory of the political might begin. I started this chapter by trying to limit the discussion of the subject and of subjectivity in terms of three problem motifs implied in the title of the chapter. It was argued that looking back on the subject of the subject means in part that what was appropriate for theorists in another context may or may not be appropriate for us. Next we considered the definition of an actor's awareness of his or her subjectivity as resulting from looking back on the subject of action. I flushed out and contrasted Mead's idea of reflexivity as an objectification of the subject and Bakhtin's idea of two-sided answerability as a non-finalizable externally objective and internally subjective process. The choice of the Dostoevsky story as an example of reflexivity admittedly biased the comparison towards Bakhtin. Perhaps it was because of his personal circumstances as a thinker out of line with a totalitarian regime that Bakhtin preferred stories about morally corrupt or ethically dubious characters. In contrast, Mead preferred analogies to American Baseball when developing his theory of reflexivity.

Bakhtin remained apolitical throughout his career, and yet his approach could be argued to be compatible with a particular version of politics. Mead's preference for direct democracy and mutual transnational forms of recognition could be seen to accommodate Bakhtin's concept of two-sided answerability and the ongoing mixtures of

multiple simultaneous values that modern individuals as well as groups must navigate. The brief imminent reading and comparison of Mead and Bakhtin has revealed that neither develops the theoretical shift from the level of reflexivity to a normative politics. The point about imminent criticism, though, is not to demonstrate what a theory does not do but to show what it does do and suggest how it might be taken a step further. In the third problem motif, I argued, finally, that the general theories each develops within his own disciplinary and philosophical orientation direct us to a much needed dialogic theory of the open-ended and unfinalizable relation between *ethnos* and *demos* that contemporary debates about citizenship and the role of civil society tend to separate into closed monologic opposites.

Notes

1 This chapter is based on a presentation made to a session on *Theorizing Subjects and Agents* organized by Hans Joas for the XIVth World Congress of Sociology held in Montreal, 1998. I thank all those who offered criticism or comment on the paper at that occasion. Please send all correspondence to Greg Nielsen, Sociology and Anthropology, Concordia University, 1455 de Maisonneuve Oeust, Montréal, Québec, H3G 1M8. E-mail: nielsen@vax2.concordia.ca.

2 The history of Bakhtin's long internal exile, his return to Moscow in the early 1960s, his discovery first in the West and more recently his complex domestic Russian reception is recounted in Emerson (1997). The most comprehensive study on Mead is Joas (1985); for an important source for understanding the philosophy of dialogue that Mead shares with the idealist tradition, see Pfuetze (1954), whose book stimulates the thinking about the difference between Mead and Bakhtin's more secular approach to dialogue as opposed to Buber's more theological definition of the I–Thou relation. In fact, Bakhtin was more influenced by Hermann Cohen's post-metaphysics. Cohen was one of Buber's professors and the founder of the Marburg school.

3 The issue of authorship for both Mead and Bakhtin remains complicated from the point of view of the close study of their texts. All four of Meads books were published posthumously and the most influential of them, *Mind Self and Society*, was put together from students' notes. The problems of authorship concerning works by Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Medvedev have been given ample attention before to deserve a special discussion here.

4 On the many misunderstandings and possible convergences between phenomenology and pragmatism see Rosenthal and Bourgeois (1980).

5 Both present arguments against Kant's *a priori* formalism; on Bakhtin's critique see Nielsen (1998). Against Kant, Mead argues that concepts are not dependent on *a priori* conditions of the mind itself. Conditions of space and time, ethical postulates, aesthetic judgements, the categories of quantity and quality that allow thought to occur in a wide variety of

modalities (possibility, necessity, etc.) are not dependent on forms that logically pre-exist experience in transcendental form. Following the romantic reaction of the Enlightenment in general and Hegel's response in particular, Mead situates thought in the unknowable in-itself place of sensuous experience. Forms work out solutions in experience rather than the other way around. 'Logic as the romanticists conceived it', says Mead, 'was a dynamic not a static affair, not a simple mapping-out of judgements which we can make because of the forms which the mind possesses, but a process in which these very forms themselves rise' (Mead, 'Evolution Becomes a General Idea', in Strauss, 1956: 4).

6 Though the term practical intersubjectivity, as Hans Joas points out, is not used by Mead, it is a term that perhaps best characterizes 'the core of Mead's thought' (Joas, 1985: 14). The same could be said of Bakhtin, though following Max Scheler he uses the term *sobytie bytiia*, or the co-being of being, instead of Husserl's transcendental concept of intersubjectivity (see Poole, 1999).

7 According to Brian Poole, Bakhtin's theory of outsidedness (exotopy) and the expressions *Ich für mich selbst* and *Ich für den anderen* came from one of Scheler's disciples, the Marburg philosopher Nicolai Hartmann, in particular from his *Ethik* and *Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis* (see Poole, 1999).

8 On Hegel and Mead see Honneth (1996: 71–91).

9 The self-conscious hero must have the final word on himself. As Bakhtin puts it: 'All the stable and objective qualities of a hero – his social position, the degree to which he is sociologically or characterologically typical, his habitus, his spiritual profile and even his very physical appearance … "who he is" becomes in Dostoevesky the object of the hero's own introspection, the subject of his self-consciousness, and the subject of the author's visualisation and representation turns out to be in fact a function of this self-consciousness' (*PDP*: 48).

10 Both Mead's and Bakhtin's ethical theories can be seen to share a common source when read through Georg Simmel's radical replacement of Kant's universal absolute (Categorical Imperative) with an absolute individual law. Simmel argues that the ought does not come from a universal Subject but from the individual 'I'. He argues that subjectivity is as different for each individual as is the content of happiness or sadness that might be felt. He also argues that the terms individuality and subjectivity need to be separated because as an ethical ought the individual is also objective. Simmel uses the word 'individuality' not to express uniqueness but to express the origin of the ought in the individual (see Simmel's essay 'Das Individuelle Gesetz', first published in *Logos* (1913) and translated into the Russian in *Logos* (1914). The editors of the otherwise richly annotated and philologically sound English edition of *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* seem unaware that Bakhtin's argument against formal and content ethics and the discussion of the 'once-occurrent-uniqueness of the act' as well as life-history as a continuous act rather than the addition of individual acts are taken directly from Simmel's original essay. While Mead and Bakhtin share the common neo-Kantian suspicion of Kant's doctrine of the inability to ever know the thing-in-itself, their reactions to Kant's theory of practical

reason are quite different. Both distance themselves from *lebensphilosophie* and other intuitivist approaches, and yet with Simmel both reject outright the formal notion of the 'ought' (*sollen*) as having a status that transcends intersubjective relations; for an explanation of Simmel's critique of Kant, see Joas (1997: 110–33). Both Mead's and Bakhtin's work can be read as an attempt to move beyond Kant's formal theory of practical reason by incorporating the assumption of the existential animateness of other egos and the implications such an assumption has for normative actions. Again though their steps differ in important ways, a subject I will have to take up in a separate work. I thank Christine Schwartz and Tapani Laine for helping me sort through the German and Russian texts referred to here.

11   This is a distinctly Hegelian grain in Bakhtin's phenomenology. In *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* Hegel writes: 'Love means in general the consciousness of my unity with another, so that I am not isolated on my own [*für mich*], but gain my self-consciousness only through the renunciation of my independent existence [*meines Fürsichseins*] and through knowing myself as the unity of myself with another and of the other with me … The first moment in love is that I do not wish to be an independent person in my own right, and that if I were, I would feel deficient and incomplete … The second moment is that I find myself in another person, that I gain recognition in this person [*dass ich in ihr gelte*], who in turn gains recognition in me (Hegel, 1991: 199).

12   As Bakhtin puts it: 'I am not alone when I look at myself in the mirror: I am possesed by someone else's soul' (AH, in *AA*: 33).

13   Mead argues: 'The human individual is a self only insofar as he takes the attitude of another toward himself. Insofar as this attitude is that of a number of others, and insofar as he can assume the organized attitudes of a number that are cooperating in a common activity, he takes the attitudes of the group toward himself, and in taking this or these attitudes he is defining the object of the group, that which defines and controls the response' (Mead, 1964a: 290).

14   In the 1963 version of the book, the musical metaphors of polyphony and counterpoint are directly tied to the concept of dialogue that Bakhtin links to the Socratic tradition. He contributes a mixture of linguistics and ideology critique to the concept. Bakhtin rejects Englehardt's sociological reduction which defines the work as the coming together of three levels of ideas (the environment, the soil, the earth) but retains the notion that Dostoevsky's hero was in some sense the idea itself. Again this is an extension of the notion of the transgredient in that the idea can only develop through crossing over to other ideas. For Dostoevsky, according to Bakhtin, ideas have no copyright. Ideas are not individuated to the point that they might have 'permanent resident rights' because they exist in 'a persons head'. The idea is intersubjective – 'the realm of its existence is not individual consciousness but dialogic communion between consciousness. The idea is a live event, played out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or several consciousness' (*PDP*: 88). The close relation between the transgredient and the dialogic is obvious here. The new emphasis is on the linguistic act. The cross over is neither cognitive nor aesthetic but can now be defined as a verbal act. An idea takes on life 'only when it enters into

genuine dialogic relationships with … the ideas of others'. Thought is genuine 'only under conditions of living contact with another and alien thought, a thought embodied in someone else's voice, in someone else's consciousness expressed in discourse' (*PDP*: 88).

8

Bakhtin and the Study of Popular Culture: Re-thinking Carnival as a Historical and Analytical Concept[1]

Chris Humphrey

> 'The only choice is between a history that is aware of what it is doing and a history that is not.'
>
> Jenkins, *Re-thinking History*, 1991: 69

It is a notable irony that at the same time as scholars in medieval studies are bemoaning the marginality of their subject within the academy, a substantial proportion of the rest of the academic world would appear to be taking a vigorous interest in this very period, judging by the burgeoning literature on carnival in cultural studies and related areas. There can be no doubt that the idea of carnival has proved to be one of the most productive critical themes in cultural theory in recent years, with numerous books and articles attesting to the profound and helpful insights that this approach has offered.[2] In its emphasis upon the transgression of cultural norms and values by subaltern groups, carnival has been the ideal critical tool for approaching all kinds of social and material interactions and behaviours, from car-boot sales through to rock and roll (Crewe and Gregson, 1997; Kohl, 1993). The key source of ideas for this approach has been Mikhail Bakhtin's work on medieval and Renaissance carnival, although discussions have also drawn upon examples from the work of early modern historians.[3] Studies of carnival forms belonging to the present and to the more recent past have been less well-used by comparison.[4]

Despite the strengths and popularity of the carnival model, it is clear that this approach has been at its weakest when it has been used in a historically descriptive way, or turned upon the very cultural forms on which it is premised, namely the festal culture of the late Middle Ages and subsequent periods.[5] In addition, whilst Bakhtin's work has

promulgated a view of the Middle Ages, and in particular of its festival culture and associated meanings, which is hugely appealing, enjoyable to read, and which has been repeatedly mined for examples, it is a view which is now at some distance from the understanding of medieval culture which modern scholarship has reached, as critics continue to point out.[6] In one sense this need not necessarily be a problem when the emphasis is on the analysis of more recent material, where what matters is the productiveness of the approach rather than its adherence to the nitty-gritty of historical detail. That said, an approach to the study of popular culture which is able to situate the insights generated by Bakhtin's work within a more rigorous historical framework is potentially a more powerful tool of analysis, as previous work in this area has indicated.[7]

My aim in this short chapter, therefore, is to argue for a further refinement of the concept of carnival as a historical and analytical category, in order to contribute to the development of a more effective methodology for the study of particular aspects of popular culture. As a method of enquiry, the idea of carnival has obviously been a productive one, but there are clearly also aspects of this approach where further research and critical reflection are needed; as well as the issue of the historical accuracy of Bakhtin's exuberant descriptions, we can indicate areas such as the circumscribed vocabulary which the idea of carnival offers, and the formalised way in which the relationships between popular culture and social structure are characterized. Drawing upon the work of Stallybrass and White (1986) and my own research on the festal culture of late medieval England, I want to make some suggestions for how we might address these concerns, and thereby begin to develop a new agenda and approach for the study of those areas where the carnival model has in the past proved fruitful. These proposals can be understood in terms of a wider project, whose terms of reference are 'to effect a transposition of the Bakhtinian conception of the carnivalesque into a framework which makes it analytically powerful in the study of ideological repertoires and cultural practices' (Stallybrass and White, 1986: 26). The approach that I will be outlining is one which not only benefits from a close attention to the historical evidence, but which also perceives the examination of historical and contextual circumstances to be vital to any understanding of the dynamics of social and cultural change.

Carnival in a comparative perspective

It is a testimony to the attractiveness of the idea of carnival that over and over again, analysts working on popular culture have eschewed established methods of enquiry in favour of a shakier but potentially more inspiring platform derived from a reading of Bakhtin. The latter approach has typically involved comparing the practice in question, be it a car-boot sale or rock and roll music, with a description of medieval carnival in order to evaluate how that practice is situated with respect to a range of factors which the idea of carnival flags up. 'And indeed we see remarkable resonances between the car-boot sale and Bakhtin's representations of medieval marketplace festival' (Crewe and Gregson, 1997: 108). When used in this comparative way, however, the idea of carnival has a somewhat ambiguous status since it is at once understood to be historically grounded, based upon a form of cultural life that once flourished, and yet only in so far as this is Bakhtin's reading of the medieval past is it only a *representation* of it. In fact references to the medieval past in these contexts tend to be characterized by a particular rhetorical mode which as well as presenting the historical material, also asserts its provisional nature by the use of phrases which emphasise that it is derivative and possibly at some distance from the actual situation. There are two points which concern me here.

The first is in relation to the overall usefulness of this method of enquiry, since it seems that the brilliance of Bakhtin's conception of medieval carnival has in many ways dazzled us into overlooking the intervening five hundred years of history. Thus, in undertaking the tremendous imaginative and chronological leap into the past which the carnival approach requires, analysts have tended to pass right over the more immediate historical antecedents of contemporary cultural practices. Although comparisons with historically-remote forms of culture can at times be instructive and illuminating, the problem with this way of working is that we can lose the sense of where a contemporary practice has developed from, and therefore overlook the specific social and economic conditions that shaped its formation. When set against a nostalgic view of a radical but distant medieval past, contemporary practices may well appear to be neutered and incorporated in comparison, but as a method of analysis such an approach leaves out whole chunks of history which clearly complicate such a narrative.[8] We can say that since our ability to make convincing reference to the past at the level of the historical archive, broadly

understood, remains an extremely powerful aspect of a materialist analysis, the effectiveness of this approach can be enhanced by working towards a history of popular culture where the past can assume a fully critical role.

A second point to make is that although the idea of carnival offers an attractive means of characterizing the more general relationship between popular culture and the dominant structure of society, in the sense that it posits popular culture as a site of resistance and struggle, such a formulation can nonetheless be limiting if the analysis of the evidence is not pursued several steps further. Part of the problem here is that the view of medieval carnival derived from Bakhtin's work has been used to guarantee particular characterizations of the form and function of popular culture, encouraging us to 'read off' instances of transgression as either successful resistance or as incorporated opposition. Two key limitations of this kind of analysis by analogy can be noted; it does not enable us to describe the complex range of ways in which cultural practices make use of inversion at the level of symbolic form, since all inversion is read as resistance, and neither does it enable us to investigate with any degree of refinement how forms of culture come to acquire and express various kinds of political meanings and effects historically. In order to address these concerns, therefore, I want to suggest that we begin to develop a methodology which permits us to work at the level of the specific example, so that we can investigate how and why any particular aspect of popular culture is able to articulate social and political meanings. By working through some of the misconceptions that are found in the view of carnival derived from Bakhtin's work, I am able to outline in more detail the basis of such an approach.

Medieval carnival: re-thinking form and function

In arguing for the historically specific nature of the characteristics of modern leisure practice, Chris Rojek asserts that '[a] historical perspective in leisure study is the best defence against imagining that leisure relations are either unique to a specific period or common to all times'. One way of providing such a perspective for Rojek is to examine carnival, which he describes as 'the characteristic mass leisure form of the Middle Ages' (Rojek, 1985: 23). Rojek goes on to cite from Bakhtin:

> Carnival was emphatically celebrated as non-work time by most people, and seemed highly valued precisely as a release from work.

> In today's community life there is no parallel to the spectacle and meaning of the medieval carnival. Bakhtin writes of carnival as a period of unrestrained merry-making in the lives of ordinary people. Work was suspended. The hierarchy of the 'official order' was overturned. The lowly mocked the high, and the high poked fun at the lowly. This was the people's 'second life' where, for days on end, jesting, drollery, and pleasure-seeking dominated social relations. The carnival brought people of all ranks and from all walks of life together to share in its 'universal spirit'. (Rojek, 1985: 26–7)

Whilst agreeing with Rojek's more general point about the importance of a historical perspective, the problem with this kind of account of medieval carnival is the way that the cultural life of a whole epoch is formalised to this degree of abstraction; such descriptions are *over-historicized* in the way that they reduce a complex range of cultural forms to a neat chronological aphorism. That is, although the fields of recreational and festal culture, popular politics, and the use of imagery of reversal or the world upside-down can indeed be shown to have coincided in the medieval period, this was by no means as universal an occurrence as the idea of carnival would suggest. By considering the limitations of such a description, we can begin to develop a more sophisticated vocabulary for investigating such conjunctions as and when they occur in the present and in the historical record.[9]

A key point to bear in mind is that customs which were premised upon some kind of reversal or misrule constituted only one part of a much larger festival calendar and culture in the later medieval period, which in the English context included the feast of Corpus Christi, the celebration of Christmas, Midsummer watches and so on. The medieval European festival calendar changed considerably over the period in question, with some feasts becoming more popular and elaborate whilst others waned or were suppressed; even at the same point in time, the nature of the calendar clearly varied greatly according to regional and national factors, and the Lenten season is no exception.[10] A second point to be appreciated is that whilst a custom may have made use of tropes of inversion or the breach of social norms, it does not need to have done so in a socially oppositional way. A clear limitation of work which cites Bakhtin's description of carnival is its tendency to group together all of the customs of this sort into a genre which mocked and debased everything that was normally revered and taken seriously in medieval society. However, the critical point to

make here is that whilst a custom may make use of inversion at the level of its form, this does not necessarily mean that such a use is therefore socially oppositional or that it challenged the social order in some way. In fact medieval calendar customs can be shown to have made use of tropes of inversion and reversal for a range of different purposes, from the expression of an orthodox religious message (the boy-bishop custom for example), right through to direct antagonism and political intervention (the Gladman's riding at Norwich in 1443). Thus whilst it is reasonable to suppose that social domination will in turn provoke opposition, and that calendar customs will have some kind of relationship with power structures, it is too simplistic to perceive the transgression found in misrule to be a direct reaction to unequal social relations: clearly, we need to have a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship between social subordination and the use of inversion by subordinates (Humphrey, 1997: 39). These observations have clear implications for the vocabulary that we use to discuss practices which have as their basis some kind of inversion or reversal, and the approach which we take to investigating their social dynamics.

As regards terminology, my own view is that in respect of the Middle Ages and later periods, the term 'carnival' is best used in a self-conscious way, to indicate that this is a particular understanding and vision of the past, whose relationship with the actual historical evidence at this point in time is understood to be problematic. The capitalised version of the term can then be used to denote those festivities which are associated with Shrovetide proper, overcoming a second limitation of the idea of carnival, which is its tendency to characterize all festive life in terms of one particular set of rites and celebrations. In turn, we can begin to use the term 'misrule' to identify those calendrical practices which make use of inversion at the basic level of their form, but which do not necessarily share a similarity of intention or motivation. This is I would suggest a more helpful general term than the way in which carnival has previously been used and understood. A further improvement in terminology is possible if we adopt Stallybrass and White's suggestion and use the term 'transgression' to signal the more general cultural process whereby practices like Carnival manipulate symbolic imagery and action; although this term has an oppositional sense in general usage, it should be regarded as neutral with respect to purpose in this context (Stallybrass and White, 1986: 17–18). These terms constitute the basis of a more effective vocabulary for discussing those complex interrelationships of festivity,

transgression and politics which analysts have previously sought to explain by recourse to the general idea of carnival. Of potentially greater significance though are the implications of the notion of transgression for the way in which we approach the question of the social dynamics of popular culture.

As I have already indicated, a third weakness of the idea of carnival is the way that it comes with a built-in view of the uses to which festive inversion was put, which is either the radical view, where carnival is perceived to offer a fundamental challenge to the status quo, or the safety-valve model, as summed up for example by Eagleton: 'Carnival, after all, is a *licensed* affair in every sense, a permissible rupture of hegemony, a contained popular blow-off as disturbing and relatively ineffectual as a revolutionary work of art' (Eagleton, 1981: 148). The problem here is that as well as failing to reflect the range of functions which are shown in the historical evidence, these perspectives are also restrictive in the way that they formalize the relationship between popular culture and the reproduction of social relations, reducing the critic's task of analysing these complex relationships to a simple choice between subversion or containment. It is not surprising, therefore, that popular practices are so often seen as incorporated and in the service of the status quo, since when set alongside these formalised descriptions of carnival, either they are unable to match up to the perceived political radicalism of carnival, or they are seen as just another example of the safety-valve phenomenon. In order to overcome these limitations, I suggest that we need two tools: a more sophisticated understanding of how particular elements of popular culture might be situated in relation to the wider structure of society, and a methodology for investigating these relationships which can do justice to their diversity and historical mutability.

Finding more sophisticated models of social interaction is simple enough, since a reaction against the reductiveness of the subversion/containment binary has already begun in many fields of enquiry, and relevant works are coming to the fore.[11] Developing a new methodology for investigating the social dynamics of popular culture does not pose much more of a challenge, since all it really entails is restating a commitment to a materialist analysis which is thoroughly historical in its approach. In relation to the idea of carnival, for example, we need to put behind us the notion that the festive is somehow a privileged site of inversion and political agency, against which all other popular practices can or need to be measured (a view which the constant recourse to Bakhtin's descriptions has tended to

underline). Instead, we can understand the kinds of transgressive tropes found in festal culture as just one manifestation of a more fundamental process which operates across the full range of culture, whose political dimension is always going to be historically determined. As Stallybrass and White suggest:

> If we treat the carnivalesque as an instance of a wider phenomenon of transgression we move beyond Bakhtin's troublesome *folkloric* approach to a political anthropology of *binary extremism* in class society. This transposition not only moves us beyond the rather unproductive debate over whether carnivals are politically progressive or conservative, it reveals that the underlying structural features of carnival operate far beyond the strict confines of popular festivity and are intrinsic to the dialectics of social classification as such. (Stallybrass and White, 1986: 26)

Accepting this argument leads to a fundamental shift in the way that we approach the question of how popular practices are situated in relation to factors such as the reproduction of social relations, or how they might articulate ideologies or discourses which differ from those which prevail elsewhere. It means that in order to determine the social dynamics of a particular practice, whether over a short time-scale or over a longer period, we need to be thinking in both synchronic and diachronic terms, situating the practice within a wider social and historical context than has previously been called for.

To sum up, a consideration of the idea of carnival has demonstrated its limitations as a privileged decoder of cultural meanings and social dynamics. Transgression, where it is found in contemporary popular culture and in the historical record, is a starting point, not a conclusion.

Notes

1 David Shepherd deserves thanks for giving me the opportunity to present an earlier version of this paper at the University of Sheffield.
2 See for example Patterson (1990: 87). Although a full survey of the literature in which the idea of carnival is used is beyond the scope of this chapter, a number of examples will be considered in the text. For the relevance of Bakhtin's ideas to medieval studies, see the range of essays collected in Farrell (1995).
3 See Bakhtin (1984a and 1984b). Studies of early modern popular culture cited for their discussions of carnival include Davis (1975), Burke (1978) and Le Roy Ladurie (1980).
4 See for example Cowley (1991).

5   'Bakhtin's views must be used with caution in the empirical and analytic investigation of social carnivals' (LaCapra, 1983: 295).

6   'Medieval culture was more complicated than it appears from Bakhtin's work' (Gurevich, 1988: 179). See also Berrong (1986), for an alternative perspective on sixteenth-century popular culture and its relation to Rabelais' writing.

7   '[T]he politics of carnival cannot be resolved outside of a close historical examination of particular conjunctures: there is no a priori revolutionary vector to carnival and transgression' (Stallybrass and White, 1986: 16).

8   'If moments of apparent, functioning stability are frozen as moments and then stuck together as sequences of time, change from labour's point of view gets mystified, struggle marginalized' (Yeo and Yeo, 1981: 131).

9   The approach described here is a more general application of the new methodology for the study of medieval misrule which I outline in Humphrey (forthcoming).

10 See Hutton (1996) and the discussion of the origins and regional distribution of Carnival in Mansfield (1995: 136–42).

11 'Perhaps we can reconceive the binarisms of social process as other than conflict leading to one-sided victory. Compromise, negotiation, exchange, accommodation, give and take – these bases for social relations and change are as recognizable as those mentioned thus far ... A model of change that makes room for negotiation acknowledges the persistence of coercive discipline but argues that disciplines themselves, not only the forces resisting them, may be eroded or curbed' (Leinwand, 1990: 479–80). Of particular use is Scott (1990).

9
What is Marxism in Linguistics?*

Vladimir M. Alpatov

The question that forms the title of this chapter has been the cause of heated debate in Russia and elsewhere. Many no longer see it as a topical issue, but it is one that cannot be avoided in the study of Soviet linguistics. It seems to me that the time has now come to examine this problem with the greatest possible objectivity, without emotions and *a priori* positions.

In speaking about Marxism in linguistics one must immediately demarcate four aspects which should not be confused. The first aspect, which we shall try to resist, but which for many is the most important, is the political views of this or that linguist and his attitude towards Marxism outside linguistics. This aspect may undoubtedly be connected with the others, but the connection is far from direct and may be completely absent. The Russian linguist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries D.N. Kudriavskii (1867–1920), author of a text book introduction to linguistics (Kudriavskii, 1912) and translator of the work of Antoine Meillet (1866–1936), participated in the revolutionary movement and wrote Marxist agitational pamphlets, but as a linguist he was close to the neo-grammarians, and the two sides of his activity did not intersect. Even the fact that E.D. Polivanov (1891–1938) was a commissar during the Civil War, an agent of the Comintern and, according to his memoirs,[1] a lecturer in historical materialism in Tashkent, does not define his views on linguistics, although, unlike Kudriavskii, he did seek to develop a Marxist linguistics.

The second aspect has to do with how a given linguist's interest in

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* Translated by Craig Brandist, with many thanks to David Shepherd for his meticulous and enlightening comments on an earlier draft.

Marxism, or the dominance of Marxist ideology in society, determined the range of his interests, led him to select from among the many approaches available one which was by no means necessarily Marxist in the exact sense. This aspect was especially significant in the USSR. The third aspect relates to a particular neighbouring area of scholarship, sociolinguistics, where apart from views on linguistics the scholar is obliged to have a definite point of view on the society studied, and the Marxist conception of society undoubtedly was and is one of the most influential. And finally, the fourth aspect concerns Marxist linguistics in the full sense, the attempt to construct a theory of the structure, functioning and development of language on Marxist foundations.

Linguistics and the Marxist classics

The question of the construction of such a theory has arisen more than once in various countries, but it undoubtedly took on particular significance in the USSR in the years after the Revolution. It was not possible to take this theory ready-made from the founders of Marxism. Linguistics had to be assigned to those areas 'only cursorily touched or completely untouched by the hands of the founders – Marx and Engels' (*MFL*: 8). It was observed that in the works of these thinkers Marxist linguistics exists only in the form of 'methodological outlines (*ustanovka*)' (Lomtev, 1931: 51). Compare this also with the significantly later comment:

> If we analyse Marx's and Engels's statements about language, then we observe that in many cases their concern is not specifically linguistic issues; they touch upon questions of language as a way of better elucidating positions on the social sciences with which the classics of Marxism were primarily concerned: philosophy, political economy, history. (Gak, 1971: 53)

The comments of Marx and Engels on language, and later those of Lenin, had by the 1930s been catalogued and were published more than once in the form of anthologies of useful quotations (Lomtev and Loia, 1932; Zvegintsev, 1965). For the most part these contained either statements of a general philosophical character or, conversely, very concrete comments such as Lenin's well-known strictures about the unacceptability of misusing foreign words.

In this connection an assessment by a representative of a different

tradition is of interest. When Noam Chomsky (as is well known, not only a linguist, but also a social thinker with left-wing views) was advised by the Japanese linguist T. Okubo to read Hegel and Marx he replied: 'Of course I agree that these are outstanding figures in the history of thought. But I do not know what they did in the area of scholarship in which I work. I would be grateful if you could tell me.'[2] Okubo did not respond; or in any event, several years later he published a facsimile of the letter with no reference to any subsequent correspondence.

We can, however, state that unlike most other Marxist theorists, Engels did turn his attention to linguistics. He even wrote a specialist work on the history of the German language, *The Frankish Dialect* (Engels, 1935). In *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* he continually discusses the development of languages in the transition from primitive to class society. In *Anti-Dühring* the topics of his polemic with Dühring, include the question of linguistics, while in a letter to Lassalle, Engels even stated that 'I once nurtured the bold idea of writing a comparative grammar of the Slavonic languages', but gave this up after 'Miklosich fulfilled this task so brilliantly'. Yet wherever Engels discusses language, we find nothing specifically Marxist. Engels was fascinated by comparative linguistics and was competent in it. *The Frankish Dialect* is in the tradition of German historical dialectology founded by Grimm (1785–1863). In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, the account of the history of Indo-European languages is based on current linguistic scholarship. Engels held the works of Bopp (1791–1867), Grimm, Diez (1794–1876) and Miklosich (1813–91) in high esteem, and took them into account, but he viewed these linguistic insights as aspects of the leading science of the day, along with Darwinism or cellular theory in biology. It is necessary to take stock of these discoveries, but they do not form part of Marxist theory.

Of the other already existing Marxist works Paul Lafargue's (1842–1911) pamphlet about language in the French Revolution was always singled out in the USSR (Lafargue, 1894). But this is a purely sociolinguistic work in which the Marxism appears principally in the evaluation of social processes. The pamphlet deals with the dissemination of a standard language in France in the age of revolution, and with lexical changes that directly reflected social development.

As a result it was necessary to state that 'Up to the present, there is still not a single Marxist work on the philosophy of language. Moreover, there are no definite and developed statements on language

in Marxist works dedicated to other, close subjects' (*MFL*: 7). 'Marxist linguistics does not yet exist either in the West or here' (Polivanov, 1931a: 3). In the 1920s and early 1930s there were several attempts to construct such a linguistics.

Marr and his opponents

The most widely hyped and officially recognized, but also the most unsuccessful, of these attempts was the 'new doctrine on language' of N. Ia. Marr (1864–1934) and his followers. From 1928 Marr was continually making statements such as: 'The materialist method of Japhetic theory is the method of dialectical materialism, i.e. the method of Marxism, but made concrete by specialized research on the basis of linguistic material' (Marr, 1933: I, 276). But in fact, although certain propositions of Marxism were hitched up to Marr's ready-formed (and in many respects fantastic) ideas, they generally did not directly concern language. Moreover, Marr dismissed out of hand the very insights of comparative linguistics that Engels had acknowledged. For Marr and his circle, the important thing was to achieve dominance within Soviet scholarship, and for this it was essential to prove the Marxist character of the 'new doctrine'. They used three techniques: unsubstantiated ascription of their own ideas to the founders of Marxism; quoting out of context; and deliberate silence about the actual views of Marx and especially Engels. These techniques are studied in detail in my book on Marrism (Alpatov, 1991). So it is not surprising that in 1950 Stalin could easily show that Marr was not a Marxist.

A more sincere and less extreme attempt to construct a Marxist linguistics (but also one that did not go beyond a statement of intent) was the activity of the group *Iazykfront* (LanguageFront), which challenged Marrism in 1930–32, and especially that of its principal theorist, Lomtev (1906–72). He was very young at the time and was entirely a product of the 'new reality'. For Lomtev, as for many of his peers, Marxism was a doctrine of original truth, and his attitude to it was almost religious. There was only one question: how to connect the teachings of the Marxist classics with the facts of scholarship on language which the *Iazykfronters*, unlike Marr, did not want to ignore. The *Iazykfronters* were rapidly defeated in their struggle with Marrism. They published little, and what did see the light of day was basically pure polemics with the 'Indo-Europeanists' and Marrists. Later, Kuznetsov, one of the members of *Iazykfront*, recalled that Lomtev and

his comrades wrote a 'new methodological grammar resting on dialectical-materialist foundations', but its fate is unknown (Kuznetsov, undated).

The *Iazykfronters* were brought close to Marrism by two shared theses: that language is part of the superstructure, and that it has a class nature. These theses were connected with facts in a very straight-forward fashion (Lomtev, 1932: 12). General declarations that included Marxist terms were mechanically connected to familiar descriptions of languages. In the unpublished grammar, 'the parts of speech were defined as classes of words reflecting actuality through class consciousness. The noun reflected actuality through class consciousness objectively, the verb reflected actuality through class consciousness processually, etc.' (Kuznetsov, undated). The shell of 'class consciousness' added little to the traditional understanding of the parts of speech.

More interesting, of course, was the research in this field by top-class professional linguists. Here we must mention such major scholars as Polivanov, Iakovlev (1892–1974) and Iakubinskii (1892–1945), especially the first of these.

Evgenii D. Polivanov

Polivanov constantly set himself the task of constructing a Marxist linguistics, to which he dedicated a series of works some of which were collected in a book actually entitled *For a Marxist Linguistics* (Polivanov, 1931a). It is, however, important to know what he really understood by this. Polivanov wrote that Marxist linguistics is not the same as materialist linguistics, for 'linguistics may be regarded as having been materialist ever since the time of Schleicher'.[3] The main difference between this linguistics and the as yet unconstructed Marxist linguistics is that 'unfortunately, up to the present linguistics has been just a natural-historical science and not a social science'. While not denying 'the importance of collective-psychological factors' (Polivanov, 1991: 538, 539), Polivanov stressed the priority of a social approach to language: 'In order for this science [linguistics] to be adequate to its object of study, it must be a sociological science.'[4] More than once he referred to language as a 'labour process', a term that forms the title of one of his articles. It is important to note straight away that a 'sociological science of language' is understood here as something broader than sociolinguistics in the modern sense of the term: it includes, for example, the question of internal changes within language.

There can be no doubt that Polivanov's Marxist world view pushed his research in this direction, but where is the Marxism in the exact sense? Polivanov himself remarked that 'no one would dispute the proposition that language is a social phenomenon' (Polivanov, 1968: 182); 'I would not say that our best linguists of the last generation had nothing to say about the social aspect of language' (Polivanov, 1991: 539). He recalled the prediction of his teacher Baudouin de Courtenay (1845–1929): 'while noting the fact that Western European and Russian linguists contemporary with him did not work on the sociology of language, he suggested that the next dialectical stage in the development of our science would be precisely a turn in that direction towards the study of the social aspect of language'. He also noted 'a turn expressed precisely in the search for a sociological linguistics' (Polivanov, 1968: 183–4), a turn with which almost all the most prominent European linguists of the 1910s and 1920s were associated: de Saussure (1857–1913), Meillet, Bally (1865–1947), Vendryes (1875–1960), Jespersen (1863–1943) and Vossler (1872–1949).

The turn towards sociological linguistics was thus a general characteristic of the time. But it was necessary not only to accumulate facts relevant to this problem, but also to construct a theory of language as a social phenomenon. It has to be said that there is no remotely complete such theory in Polivanov's surviving work. There may have been one in the work that was lost at the time of his arrest on 1 August 1937 or perhaps earlier. What we know of deals basically with just one problem: a theory of linguistic changes worked out on the basis of phonological material.

In his polemics with the Marrists, Polivanov stressed the absence of immediate connections between changes in the economy and in language: 'To expect that specific economic features should be reflected immediately in the form of specific sounds of language, phonetics or specific morphological forms is tantamount to expecting that at the moment of revolution all locomotive pistons should begin to work differently than they did under tsarism' (Polivanov, 1991: 539). Changes may just as easily be purely internal as indirectly determined by socioeconomic causes; such causes lead to the inauguration or cessation of contacts with one language or another, changes in the number of native speakers of a language, and so on. Polivanov associated inner changes in language with the notion of language 'as a labouring activity which has as its goal communication between members of a given (united by linguistic characteristics) collective … The special purpose – i.e. that for which and for the sake of which

language exists – is exclusively the communication necessary for a collective linked by co-operative needs of that collective'.[5]

The influence of Marxism is evident in the terminology, but the notion of language as primarily a means of communication is found in the work of many linguists (although there are other points of view: for example, Sapir (1884–1939) singled out the function of language as giving form to thought and knowledge). In those same years a similar approach was adopted by the Prague school, especially in the work of Trubetskoi (1890–1938) and Jakobson (1896–1982). Although far from Marxism, the Prague school attached paramount significance to what Polivanov called the 'special purpose' of language; unlike structuralists of other schools, they conducted specialized studies of the regularities of linguistic changes. The similarity of views was recognized by both sides: see Polivanov's positive review of one of Jakobson's books[6] and the mentions of Polivanov in the correspondence between Trubetskoi and Jakobson (Trubetskoy, 1975). If we leave aside Polivanov's use of Marxist terminology, then the main point of divergence was their respective attitudes toward 'collective-psychological facts': following Baudouin de Courtenay, Polivanov retained an understanding of phonology as 'psychophonetics', something that the Prague school rejected.

Another of Polivanov's theses was the reflection of the laws of the dialectic in language. He wrote an article specifically on this question[7] shortly before his death, and dealt with it at length in a number of other articles. The law of transformation of quantity into quality was seen as being manifested in mutational, sporadic changes in the phonological system of a language, when two phonemes merge into one or, conversely, one phoneme splits into two. On the basis of material from different languages Polivanov showed how in the course of phonetic development there accumulate changes which do not affect the system of phonemes, but subsequently a leap occurs and the system changes. No doubt a connection with the law of the dialectic does exist here, but Polivanov's explanation of the regularity retains its force without appealing to this law.

An interest in sporadic changes in language is typical of that time (as opposed to the pure evolutionism of positivist linguistics). In 1939 the Danish scholar Brøndal (1887–1942) wrote: 'It is, of course, necessary to note the evident discontinuity of any essential change'; twentieth-century linguistics, according to Brøndal, takes account of 'intermittent change' and 'abrupt leaps from one state to another'.[8] Brøndal found a connection here not with the law of transformation

of quantity into quality, but with the concept of quanta in twentieth-century physics and that of mutation in genetics; but Polivanov also used the concept of mutation. In this regard too we find in the Soviet scholar a general trend of the age, one that is not specifically Marxist. Nor should it be forgotten that the law of the dialectic is a feature not only of Marxism, but of a much broader tradition deriving from Hegel. In addition, it is characteristic that as well as to Marxism Polivanov turned to other theories such as the ideas of the prominent historian Kareev (1850–1931), to whom he was indebted for the term 'historiology' (Polivanov, 1928: 30). And Kareev continually argued against Marxism.

One further example. In one of the articles in the collection *For a Marxist Linguistics* Polivanov argued that one of the roles that the linguist must combine in himself is that of 'linguistic politician', prognosticator of the future. 'Such a linguist is able (although admittedly to a limited extent) to predict the linguistic future, again in the interests of utilitarian linguistic construction (one of the varieties of the "social engineering" of the future).'[9] Once again the connection with the Marxist world view is beyond doubt. But Baudouin de Courtenay had written about prognosis of the future being an essential part of linguistics considerably earlier, and had bequeathed an interest in this problem to his most talented student (Boduen de Kurtene, 1963: 70).

In one work not published in his lifetime, Polivanov wrote:

> In empirical research (in particular linguistic) it is necessary not to start out from Marxism, but to arrive at Marxism on the basis of the investigation of facts. That is why I say, and consider it quite adequate to say, that I am a Marxist in as much as the conclusions that I draw from linguistic phenomena support the fundamental positions of dialectical materialism and the methodological principles of the establishment of causal connections 'from economic cause to linguistic fact'. (Polivanov, 1991: 559)

And on the whole we can agree with this. Polivanov strove to construct a Marxist linguistics, but in speaking of his concepts we must really speak about something else (not about the fourth but about the second aspect of the problem as outlined in the introduction of this article). His adherence to Marxism gave his work a definite direction, it influenced his choice of approach and often of theme. His conclusions do not contradict dialectical materialism (just as the conclusions of many other scholars, including those who had not read Marx and

Engels, do not contradict dialectical materialism), but there is no basis for considering his work Marxist.

The same could also be said about Iakovlev and Iakubinskii. They, too, did not offer a remotely complete or coherent Marxist theory of linguistics. In many respects they are close to Polivanov, but were distinguished by a more eclectic approach, having been influenced to a certain degree by Marrism (Iakubinskii, 1986).

Marxism and the Philosophy of Language (1929)

Marxism and the Philosophy of Language (hereafter *MPL*), another work with Marxism in the title, has become well-known all over the world. Straight away I must say that this is not the place to go into the complex and in recent years peculiarly convoluted issue of its author-ship. What is known to date about the creation of the work suggests, on the one hand, the participation of Bakhtin; on the other hand, neither is there any basis for ruling out Voloshinov as one of the authors. We will consider the book as the work of both authors. *MPL* is today evaluated in various ways: some researchers regard it as Marxist alongside the work of Polivanov (Leont´ev, 1994) (such a view is also dominant in the West), while others try to see in it a hidden refutation of Marxism.[10] The latter point of view, in our estimation, is without foundation. We know that Voloshinov became a Marxist towards the end of the 1920s after a period of dalliance with mysti-cism. As far as Bakhtin is concerned, one should not use evidence dating from a much later time, following his arrest, exile and protracted obscurity, to characterize his views in the 1920s. In any event, his description of himself at the time of his interrogation at the end of 1928 as a 'Marxist-revisionist' (Konkin and Konkina, 1993: 191) is rather more in line with *MPL* than the legends about his unchang-ing and consistent anti-Marxism.

But to what extent can *MPL* be considered a Marxist book? For the most part the book's concerns have no connection with Marxism. In the second, and in our view central, part of the book, which is entitled 'The Paths of a Marxist Philosophy of Language', Marxism is only mentioned in the title. It is really an argument with Saussureanism and, more broadly, with positivist linguistics; I have discussed the properly linguistic concerns of *MPL* in more detail elsewhere (Alpatov, 1995). Marxism is really only discussed in the first, and shortest, of the three parts of the book, where general philosophical problems only partly to do with linguistics are discussed. Active use is made of

Marxist terminology and formulations usual for Soviet works of the time, such as: 'Being, when reflected in the sign, is not simply reflected but is refracted in it … What determines this refraction of being in the ideological sign? The intersection of differently oriented interests within the limits of one sign collective, i.e. the class struggle.' This is quite similar to Lomtev defining parts of speech in terms of the reflection of actuality through class consciousness. But in *MPL* it is the neutrality of the sign that is stressed: 'The word is neutral towards specific ideological functions. It may bear any ideological function: scientific, aesthetic, moral, religious'; 'One and the same language is used by different classes. The consequence of this is that within every ideological sign vari-directional accents intersect' (*MFL*: 27–8, 19, 28). It was precisely this contention that was rejected by the more dogmatic Lomtev: according to him, Voloshinov's 'bourgeois theories obscure the real essence of language as a weapon of class' (Lomtev, 1932: 12). Lomtev was one of the few to recall *MPL* in 1949, when he reiterated his harsh assessment (1949: 323–4).

If we isolate the directly linguistic concerns of the first part of the book then they come down to three theses: (1) language has a significative character; (2) language is a collective phenomenon; and (3) the positivist approach based on a 'worship of facts' (*MFL*: 8) and idealistic psychologism, which reduces everything to individual consciousness, are both unacceptable. This scarcely contradicts Marxism, but neither does it have anything to do with it. All three points are close to the ideas of Saussure, who is so harshly criticised in the second part of the book; perhaps it is because Saussure's departure from positivism is insufficiently radical for the authors of *MPL* that he attracts their criticism. Even the very active use of the term 'ideology' throughout the book does not have an organic relationship to Marxism. See, for example, the formulation 'Where there is the sign, there is ideology. Everything ideological has a sign-borne significance [*znakovoe znachenie*]' (*MFL*: 14). The term 'ideology' more or less corresponds to what is more often called significance (*znachenie*). On the one hand this in no way corresponds to the original understanding of this term in Marx and Engels themselves as 'false consciousness' (Marx and Engels, 1957). On the other hand, scholars who had no connection with Marxism used the term ideology in the same sense as in *MPL*. Here is a quotation from one of Jakobson's books, published in the same year as *MPL*: 'Here and subsequently I retain the traditional term "linguistic consciousness", although it would be more precise to speak of "linguistic ideology", because I am not speaking about psychic

processes, but about phenomena of an ideological order, namely about signs making up social values (*valeurs sociales*) (Jakobson, 1929: 102). The similarity is clear, although overall the authors of *MPL*, unlike Polivanov and Iakovlev, had no association with the Prague school and diverged from it on many issues. According to the testimony of Sergei Bocharov, many years later Bakhtin called the Marxist concerns of the book 'annoying additions' (Bocharov, 1993: 71). But at the end of the 1920s Marxism could be a support to the authors of *MPL* in their struggle with both idealist psychologism and positivism. At the same time the Marxist concerns really do seem like 'additions' in the book.

I.V. Stalin: *Marxism and Questions of Linguistics* (1950)

Thus, up to the middle of the 1930s the problem of Marxist linguistics was actively discussed in the USSR, and research in this area yielded interesting results; but no specifically Marxist linguistics was constructed. Thereafter dogmatism reigned in Soviet linguistics, as in other humanities disciplines, for many long years; all that was permitted was the re-narration of conceptions that were declared to be 'uniquely true', and the application of these conceptions in the analysis of a given body of material. In linguistics this assumed a specific character connected with Marr's 'new doctrine on language', which was officially pronounced 'Marxism in linguistics'. But in linguistics, in contrast to other disciplines, the problem of Marxism was posed seriously and in a far from standard form at what seemed like the most unpropitious of times: June 1950. And it was done by the one person in the country permitted to develop Marxist theory: I.V. Stalin.

At the beginning of his work Stalin wrote: 'I am not a linguist and cannot of course satisfy comrades fully. But as to Marxism in linguistics, as well as in other social sciences, this is a subject with which I have a direct connection' (Stalin, 1950: 3). The word 'Marxism' is often encountered in the work, but attentive analysis leads to a paradoxical conclusion: Stalin denies Marxist linguistics its right to exist, although he does not formulate this directly. The first, and largest, of these articles Stalin wrote in the form of a catechism: four questions are posed and the answers to them given. The first two answers refute two propositions: language as superstructure and the class nature of language. It is worth noting that although Stalin connects these propositions with Marrism they had much wider currency. The thesis about the class nature of language, which probably goes back to Nikolai Bukharin (1921: 227–8), was shared by Marrism's implacable

foe , Polivanov (1931b); and the notion of language as a superstructure on the base was being advocated even on the eve of Stalin's intervention by the anti-Marrist A.S. Chikobava (1898–1985).[11] Stalin stressed that

> Language exists, has been created, precisely in order to serve society as a whole, as a means of intercourse between people, in order to be common to the members of society as its single language, serving members of society equally, irrespective of their class position … In this respect, while it differs in principle from the superstructure, language does not differ from the implements of production, from machines, let us say, which are as indifferent to class as is language, and may equally serve both a capitalist system and a socialist system.

Several times an argument is repeated in support of this: 'the Russian language has remained fundamentally the same as it was before the October change of power'; and

> It is more than a hundred years since Pushkin died. In this period the feudal system and the capitalist system have been eliminated in Russia, and a third, socialist system has arisen … Yet if we take the Russian language, for example, it has not in this great length of time undergone any fundamental change, and the modern Russian language differs very little in structure from the language of Pushkin. (*Ibid*.: 5, 10)

Thus Stalin separates language from the superstructure and, of course, from the economic base, but he likens it to machinery and other implements of production (cf. Polivanov's comparison of the system of language with the work of locomotive pistons). Elsewhere he compares his opponents with 'troglodytes' who 'claimed that the railway which was left in our country after the October change of power was bourgeois'. But Marxism provided a general explanation only of those phenomena included in the base and superstructure. No one seriously attempted to construct a Marxist theory of machines and railways; the occasional attempts in the USSR had long ago been condemned as a 'vulgarization' of Marxism (at the beginning of the 1930s a pamphlet 'Marxism and foundry work' was published, but it was derided in the press).

  Thus Stalin led the reader to the conclusion that there is not

'Marxist' and 'bourgeois' linguistics, but a single science of language. This became even clearer in his replies to the third and fourth questions, where he rose in defence of nineteenth-century linguistics. About the comparativist method and the families of languages Stalin wrote the following:

> despite all its shortcomings, the comparative-historical method was nevertheless better than Marr's really idealistic four-element analysis, because it gives stimulus to work, to the study of languages … It cannot be denied that that the linguistic affinities of, for example, the Slav nations is beyond question, and that a study of the linguistic affinity of those nations might be of great value to linguistics in the study of the laws of language development.

The Marrists' assertions that 'until Marr there was no linguistics' were derided (Stalin, 1950: 3, 5, 10, 18).

If we leave aside the Marxist terminology, the positive programme for linguistics put forward by Stalin converged with that of Russian linguists twentieth centuries who adopted positivist, neo-grammarian positions. The leader's principal linguistic consultant was Chikobava, himself a supporter of these positions, who later recalled that Stalin relied primarily on the text-book by Kudriavskii mentioned earlier. 'Materialism' in linguistics was declared to be that which had earlier been called 'bourgeois science' (Zvegintsev, 1989: 20). However, Stalin had in mind only the older, primarily Russian pre-Revolutionary scholarship; structuralism was not reflected in his ideas. Stalin undoubtedly took account of the fact that the classics of Marxism had little to say about language, so that here he could show himself to be an original theorist. But the conclusions of the work had a dual character. On the one hand it ends with the statement that it is necessary to 'introduce Marxism into linguistics' (Stalin, 1950: 18). On the other hand, the positive conception that he puts forward (*ibid*.: 12–16) is never once described as Marxist, and in this section Marxism is mentioned twice, on both occasions in the same connection: 'Marxism does not recognize sudden breaks in the development of language'; 'Marxism holds that the transition of a language from an old quality to a new does not take place by way of explosions, by the destruction of an existing language and the creation of a new one, but by the gradual accumulation of the elements of the new quality, and, consequently, by the gradual dying out of elements of the old quality' (*ibid*.: 15). Here Stalin was not the first or last to find in language

development an expression of the transition from quantity to quality which had been formulated as early as in Hegel, but many linguists also understood the development of language in this way without reference to the dialectic.

Thus Stalin did not so much define the task of constructing a Marxist linguistics as remove it from the agenda by equating language with the objects of study of the natural sciences. But Soviet linguists were permitted to do research in 'bourgeois linguistics', although at first not in its entirety. Also, to some extent Stalin did not argue from a Marxist position so much as from 'common sense'. Chomsky in his letter to Okubo interestingly evaluated the work as 'perfectly reasonable but quite unenlightened'.[12]

Soviet linguistics after Stalin

Stalin's work proved to be more or less the last significant contribution to the search for Marxism in linguistics in the USSR, although the search continued thereafter in other countries. After the leader's death his pamphlet soon ceased to be cited, and was never subjected to serious critique. Soviet linguistics was untouched by the arguments and discussions about Marxism that unfolded in a number of other disciplines in the post-Stalin period. If ideas of 'cleansing' Marxism of the accretions of the Stalin era were popular among philosophers and historians of the 1960s, then the new generation of Soviet linguists simply 'forgot' about Marxism. By the early 1960s Lomtev was observing sadly: 'to speak of Marxism in linguistics has become a sign of bad taste' (Lomtev, 1982: 13).

'Official' linguistics

There were, however, linguists who actually enjoyed talking about Marxism. The majority of them were of an older generation formed in the years of Marrism and especially notable was the group regarded as the standard-bearers of official linguistics in the 1950s–1980s: F.P. Filin, R.A. Budagov, V.Z. Panfilov and others. They referred to themselves as Marxists, and were sharply critical of the 'idealist' conceptions of structuralism and generativism. They cited the Marxist classics, often, as at the time of Marrism, out of context or with out-and-out errors. For example, Budagov discussed the treatment of Einstein's theory of relativity in Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* (Budagov, 1982: 26), where it is not even mentioned. But if we examine what these linguists really meant by Marxism in linguistics,

then we can identify three basic positions. The first is the idea of linguistics as a purely historical science ('antihistoricism' was Filin's favourite term of abuse): 'the only method capable of truly explaining the system [of language] is the historical method based on the Marxist–Leninist understanding of history'. The 'synchronic–systematic approach' was regarded as permissible only if it 'fulfils specific tasks and does not make any claim to a leading position in the theory of linguistics' (Filin, 1982: 13). If we ignore the references to Marxism–Leninism, then statements like this are in total accordance with the ideas of traditional nineteenth-century linguistics, which regarded only the historical study of language as 'genuinely scientific'. The second position is a marked empiricism, a rejection of all scientific abstraction. Structuralism and generativism were accused of 'schematicism', a refusal to examine phenomena in detail. For Filin, 'whatever new principles of compiling dictionaries are proposed, dictionaries always will be collections of separate words and nothing more' (Filin, 1970: 7). He considered theories of language which did not include analysis of concrete facts to be unacceptable: 'A strange variety of linguists is appearing about whom it is impossible to say which language or languages they specialize in' (Filin, 1982: 76). This approach also came from the nineteenth century, but more from its second half, when positivism reigned with its 'worship of facts', in the words of the authors of *MPL*. The third position was a straightforward sociologism: 'the impulse to changes is always a social factor' (Filin, 1977: 9); 'One cannot fail to see the profound dependence of language on the social structure. What happened to the Russian language after October 1917? The problem cannot be reduced simply to lexis' (Budagov, 1976: 65).

It is not difficult to see that the first two positions derived from a literal understanding of Stalin's ideas, one that relied on the linguistics of the last century; the third originates in Marrism, although in a somewhat moderated form. The notion of the 'correlation of the stages in the development of language with the history of social formations' (*ibid*.: 194) was a step backwards in comparison with the writings of Polivanov and even Stalin. In all this there was really nothing Marxist, as Zvegintsev has rightly pointed out (1989: 20).

T.P. Lomtev

More interesting was the approach of Lomtev, who returned to the theme in the 1950s and 1960s, and even that of Serebrennikov. They attempted to connect Marxist theory with the insights of twentieth-

century theoretical linguistics, in particular structuralism. Lomtev, for example, wrote that the 'analysis of the meaningful expressions of natural language shows that the principle of reflection, so uncompromisingly advocated by Lenin, is the only reliable basis on which to construct a non-contradictory theory of the semantics of the propositions of natural language' (1976: 271). Sometimes Lomtev's adherence to Marxism led him to pose rather interesting problems. Back in 1953 he had raised the question of the 'contradictions which arise between the available resources of a given language and the growing requirements of the exchange of ideas in the process of human intercourse' (1953: 79). In connection with this he was one of the first Soviet linguists to touch on the problem of surpluses (*izbytochnost'*) in language (1953: 85). Like Polivanov, he studied the transformation of quantity to quality in the history of languages (1976: 16–33). More often than not Lomtev associated the Marxist (materialist) approach to language with certain theoretical positions he regarded as important. Here is one that he repeated on more than one occasion: 'the question of the opposition between materialism and idealism in grammatical doctrines is a question of acknowledging or denying the substance of linguistic facts' (1958: 8). He also continually criticized certain descriptivists who excluded meaning (*znachenie*) from the sphere of linguistics: 'Marxism cannot acknowledge such an approach as correct' (1958b).

Yet again, as in the case of the law of the transformation of quantity into quality or the recognition of the social character of language, an adherence to Marxism here led to certain theoretical approaches being winnowed out, but did not lead to something in principle distinct from 'non-Marxist' linguistics. Neither the notion of language as a network of pure relations, with no account taken of substance, nor the denial of semantics was by any means characteristic of all Western linguistics or of all structuralism. The Prague Circle undoubtedly took account of language's phonic substance as part of phonology, while a rejection of semantics is found in the work of Zellig S. Harris (1909–92) and a number of other American descriptivists, but it is certainly not characteristic of European linguistics. Here too, as with Polivanov, it was a question of the influence of world view on the choice of approaches rather than of the formation of a specifically Marxist linguistics.

B.A. Serebrennikov

It is important to mention too the work of Serebrennikov (1915–89), who addressed the question of Marxism in linguistics right up to the

1980s (his last books came out at the time of *perestroika*). He, again, examined the issue of the categories of the dialectic in language, and the associated issue of contradictions in language. A whole section of his last book was dedicated to an examination of various instances of the transcendence and non-transcendence of contradictions in the systems of various languages; it was noted that the removal of some contradictions may create others (1988: 213–29). He also highlighted 'instances where contradiction is on the whole good for the language and there is no need for it to be transcended'. Serebrennikov associated the concept of contradiction with that of law: 'a contradiction arises when the action of the law of one sphere collides with the oppositely directed law of another sphere'. He turned to the classics of Marxism for his definition of law too: 'before speaking of laws in language, we must remember the particular characteristics of a law operating in any sphere. "Law", as Lenin said, "is a relationship" … Marx wrote that by law we should understand "the inner and necessary connection between phenomena"' (1988: 229, 157).

Serebrennikov, too, took from Marxism little more than some rather commonplace definitions and formulations. If Filin and others used these to ground an approach to language that had been dominant in the nineteenth century, then in the other linguistic camp Serebrennikov was even more consistent than Lomtev in connecting a number of the ideas of structuralist linguistics with Marxism: if law is relationship, then the approach of structuralism, according to which structure, the mulitiplicity of relationships, is more important than 'the points of intersection' of these relationships, is well-founded. We should also note that in the 1960s and 1970s there was a small, though active, group of linguists and philosophers (A.G. Volkov, I.A. Khabarov) who set out to construct a 'Marxist semiotics'.

Russian Language and Soviet Society (1968)

One of the most interesting attempts in Soviet linguistics to employ certain Marxist positions in scholarly analysis was the collective work *Russian Language and Soviet Society. The Lexis of Contemporary Standard Russian* (Muchnik *et al.*, 1968). The general approach was outlined in the preface by I.P. Muchnik and M.B. Panov. Citing Lenin, they asserted: 'the dynamic, historically changeable system of language is subject to the fundamental law of dialectics – the law of the unity of opposites'. And subsequently, on linguistic antinomies: 'every concrete resolution of any of these oppositions give rise to new collisions, new contradictions in language (in principle, contradictions of

the same order) and, consequently, their final resolution is impossible: they constantly stimulate the inner development of the language'. Muchnik and Panov highlighted a series of such antinomies: speaker and listener; code and text; the asymmetry of the linguistic sign; the two functions of language, the purely informational and expressive. They stressed that 'all these antinomies are inner stimuli to the development of a language and as such are distinct from the actions of immediately social factors on language ... these stimuli to the inner development of language are not in themselves asocial: they are all determined by the essence of language as the most important means of intercourse.' The book's authors (in addition to Muchnik and Panov there were Zemskaia, Krysin and others) attempted to demonstrate how these antinomies had operated in different periods of the Soviet era. For example: 'in the first decades after the Revolution it is the speaker who wins, while in the 1940s and 1950s, it is the listener' (Muchnik *et al.*, 1968: 23, 24, 28, 31).

Here we can see an attempt to take into their armoury those elements of Marxism that Polivanov had used: the laws of the dialectic, especial attention to the social sphere. But only the most general positions are taken, positions that Lenin followed Marx and Engels in formulating, while they in their turn followed Hegel. In applying these ideas to problems in linguistics, the authors of the book used the ideas of Polivanov alongside those of scholars far removed from Marxism. The antinomy of code and text and that of speaker and listener were explored by Jakobson, while the antinomy of the asymmetry of the linguistic sign goes back to Kartsevskii (1884–1955). So here too we cannot speak of a Marxist linguistics.

Marxism and Soviet linguistics

As noted earlier, as the years passed the problem of a Marxist linguistics was of less and less interest to linguists in the USSR. One might say in one sense that the subject had been 'closed' by Stalin, whatever the attitude towards him of any particular linguist. By the end of the 1980s it was a non-issue. But the attempts to 'unmask' Marxism that became popular in other humanities disciplines (like the previous attempt to 'cleanse' it) were not seen in linguistics (the works referred to above, where Marxism is combated with the help of the Voloshinov/Bakhtin book, are by philosophers, not linguists). In Russia, in contrast to a number of other countries, the problem of Marxism in linguistics seems completely irrelevant. But one must bear in mind that linguists

who were educated in Soviet times have been through the school of Marxism, principally via their courses in higher education. And at least until the 1960s they studied Marxism seriously, reading the original texts. And more often than not the influence of Marxist ideas has not been extinguished by the influence of other philosophical teachings; the only doctrine that was influential on Soviet linguistics from the late 1950s was neopositivism, which could, in some sense, coexist with Marxism; but with a few exceptions Soviet linguists were indifferent to various idealist conceptions. And the influence of Marxism, not necessarily conscious, could be preserved regardless of attitudes towards the Soviet system.

It seems to me that this 'inculcation' of a serious, well worked out and comprehensive theory was manifested principally in a conscious or unconscious refusal of scholars to adopt two approaches towards their object of study that were very common in the scholarship of other countries. The first is pure empiricism, analysis of facts for the sake of facts. 'Problematicality' was long considered a plus in Soviet scholarship, which attempted to see behind facts something more profound, and sought to generalize on any pretext. Until the 1960s, 'minor themes' were unpopular, and not only in linguistics. But even now, when empiricism is noticeably stronger, a Russian scholar speaking at an international conference will rarely dedicate his paper to, for example, the etymology of a single word or an interpretation of a single 'obscure passage' in a text, whereas this is precisely what their foreign counterparts, especially Europeans, often restrict themselves to. Secondly, Soviet linguistics has not been inclined to treat its object of study as a game, as were, for instance, the *glossematics*. In American descriptivism at one stage there was a dispute between those on the side of 'God's truth' and those on the side of 'hocus-pocus'. There were no such disputes in the USSR, since there were no active supporters of approaching language as 'hocus-pocus'. Abstract theorizing without regard to its applicability to real facts was not widespread in the USSR. Every believing or non-believing linguist wanted to try to find the way to 'God's truth'. It is curious that both these tendencies that were so uncharacteristic of Soviet linguistics were more apparent in the work of those who declared their Marxism the loudest: the marked empiricism of Filin and others, and Marr's reluctance to deal with facts. Of course I am not trying to suggest that the influence of Marxism was the only or even the main reason for the unpopularity of these two tendencies in Soviet linguistics, but it seems to me that it was one of the reasons.

Soviet sociolinguistics

It only remains to look at sociolinguistics. Although we have paid it little attention here, some of the figures we have examined wrote on the problem of language and society: Polivanov, Iakovlev, Iakubinskii and others. For several decades after the brilliant pioneering works of Polivanov and others, research on theoretical and synchronic socio-linguistics was ruled out of court (although the widely known works of the 1930s and 1940s by Vinogradov (1895–1969) and Vinokur (1896–1947) on the history of standard Russian is also sociolinguistics, but historical sociolinguistics). Restored to legitimacy from the 1960s in the USSR, sociolinguistics fell into two distinct trends, which were not infrequently combined in the same works: on the one hand, serious and informative analysis of concrete facts regarding linguistic politics, the spread of bilingualism and monolingualism in one country or region or another, and so on; and on the other, sweeping declarations, taken from newspaper editorials and decisions of Party Congresses, often contradicting the very facts referred to in the same work (this was most true of works about the USSR, where incantations about the 'equality' and 'blossoming' of minor languages sat alongside factual data testifying to the opposite). If one could speak of Marxism here, then it was only 'spontaneous' Marxism. The notable Marxist trend in Western sociolinguistics in recent years is almost unknown in Russia.

Conclusion

So, recalling the delineation of four aspects of the problem 'Marxism in linguistics' with which we began, we can finally answer the question of what Marxism in linguistics is. The influence of Marxism on the selection of themes in linguistic research, on the choice of this or that approach, has undoubtedly proved important on more than one occasion; Marxism's influence could fetter the scholar, deny him the opportunity to work on this or that problem, but it could also be a stimulus to rather interesting investigations, as it was, for example, for Polivanov. The Marxist approach to the study of society does remain influential in the study of the problem of 'language and society', but in the study of the inner structure of language, of human linguistic mechanisms, or in constructing models of the activity of speaker and listener, there can be no separate Marxist scholarship: all attempts to construct it have failed to yield convincing results. These dimensions,

like the concerns of the natural sciences, are neutral in relation to Marxism, and to other comparable doctrines.

Notes

1 E.D. Polivanov, 'Iz materialov "polivanovskoi" diskussii v kommunisticheskoi akademii. Fevral′ 1929g' (Polivanov, 1991: 549).
2 *Gengo* (9, 1978) 77. In the unfortunate absence of access to the original English, this has been translated back from Alpatov's Russian translation – (editor) C.B.
3 E.D. Polivanov, 'Problema marksistskogo iazykoznaniia i iafeticheskaia teoriia. Stenogramma 4 fevralia 1929g' (Polivanov, 1991: 337).
4 E.D. Polivanov, 'Krug ocherednykh problem sovremennoi lingvistiki' (Polivanov, 1968: 182).
5 E.D. Polivanov, 'Faktory foneticheskoi evoliutsii iazyka kak trudovogo protsessa' (Polivanov, 1968: 57).
6 E.D. Polivanov, 'Retsenziia na knigu R. Iakobsona' (Polivanov, 1968).
7 E.D. Polivanov, 'Zakon perekhoda kolichestva v kachestvo v protsessakh istoriko-foneticheskoi evoliutsii' (Polivanov, 1968).
8 *Acta linguistica* (Copenhagen, 1, 1, 1939).
9 E.D. Polivanov, 'Istoricheskoe iazykoznanie i iazykovaia politika' (Zvegintsev, 1965: II).
10 V.L. Makhlin, 'Kommentarii' (*MFL*, 1993).
11 *Pravda*, 9 May 1950.
12 *Gengo* (9, 1978) 77.

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