

# From Kant to Phenomenology: The Philosophical Affiliations of M. M. Bakhtin and Jacques Derrida

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## *Abstract*

"From Kant to Phenomenology: The Philosophical Affiliations of M. M. Bakhtin and Jacques Derrida" deals with the common intellectual sources of the two thinkers, and their varying responses to a range of philosophers. Previous comparisons have been made in terms of their possible contributions to literary theory, but this thesis argues they are better understood as philosophers, working within a variety of philosophical traditions, and grounded in a number of shared intellectual roots. It therefore examines in turn the understanding of Kant, neo-Kantianism, Hegel, German Romanticism, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, *Lebensphilosophie*, phenomenology, Heidegger and Cassirer in the writings of Bakhtin and Derrida. An extended Conclusion deals with the Davos debate between these last two figures, and how Bakhtin and Derrida were received and used during the development of literary theory. This leads to an investigation of how recovering the philosophical affiliations of Derrida and Bakhtin may help reinvigorate an interdisciplinary methodological movement.

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# *Introduction: Changing assumptions about Bakhtin and Derrida*

## *General introduction*

This thesis offers a comparison of the works of Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) through an investigation of their common philosophical affiliations. Although superficial comparisons have been made since the early 1980s, there has been little attempt to analyse how deep their similarities run, or whether they could be accounted for through shared intellectual roots. The current work attempts to delineate the most significant of these mutual resources, and to examine Bakhtin's and Derrida's differing reactions to and uses of them; it looks in turn at Kant, neo-Kantianism, Hegel, Romanticism, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, *Lebensphilosophie*, and phenomenology. The argument is that while Derrida and Bakhtin are aware of and draw on a comparable selection of sources, their responses differ greatly, and it is unhelpful to regard the surface-level similarities between their writings as anything more. However, in the variety of their reactions, there is a shared appropriative attitude towards other thinkers, and a desire to bring together diverse approaches. Even though Bakhtin and Derrida do very different things with, say, Hegel, both readings are inescapably marked by their different contemporary contexts of interpretation, and both thinkers are more interested in deploying Hegel for their own uses than in presenting a specialised close interpretation. Furthermore, there is a story to be told about why commentators have compared Bakhtin's and Derrida's writings, and more generally why and how they have both been deployed in the institutional formation of literary theory. This work, throughout the text but most explicitly in the extended conclusion, attempts a higher level of commentary about the kinds of interpretation possible, and the contextual motivations for specific kinds of reading.

The project therefore has several aims. Most obviously, it attempts to enhance the understanding of the detail and direction of Derrida's and Bakhtin's texts through an investigation of their philosophical affiliations. By returning both to their distinctive intellectual contexts, and historicizing their engagements with certain topics and ideas, it is hoped to produce a more rigorous appreciation of their achievements and weaknesses. As suggested above, the thesis suggests deeper similarities between the two thinkers than have been previously

considered, and at the same time sketches a brief history of their reception and changing use, frequently arguing that they are better understood as philosophical writers than theorists of literature. To this end, the conclusion offers a tentative summary of the institutional expansion of literary theory and its relations to philosophy, and possible directions for its future development. My starting-point of Kant has, to some extent, been determined by convenience, as both Bakhtin and Derrida draw on older, even classical, traditions of philosophy; however, it is the Kantian model of the individual subject interacting with an objective world which provides the roughest of templates for their philosophies. It also provides a frame for the thesis, as the other philosophies examined can be seen as responding to Kant in a variety of ways and developing or criticising his division of perceptive subject and objective world. The intention, however, is to homogenise neither all post-Kantian philosophy into one body of thought, nor Bakhtin and Derrida into a unified theory of everything. Indeed, what is often most striking about their adaptations of individual philosophers is that by reference to the same name they can mean entirely different things: Nietzsche, to choose a privileged example, is disseminated so widely and variously within Russian and French contexts that Bakhtin and Derrida draw ideas and arguments in his name which barely overlap. This thesis attempts to deal with this diversity as much as with the possible unity, and hence the range of ways any one author can be interpreted is given priority over any notions of a single correct reading. In terms of Bakhtin's works, there is a double focus: firstly on his early writings, as these contain the most engaging and pertinent philosophical tensions; and secondly on his ideas about language as they shift and mutate over his entire career. The attempt is made throughout to avoid privileging any one phase of his writings, and to recognise instead a diversity of not-necessarily-developing positions. The canon of Derrida's works is, to say the least, sizeable, and is generally reckoned to contain over seventy books and hundreds of articles. I have inevitably been selective in my reading and more selective still in my commentary, although conscious attempts have been made to foreground some texts which do not appear to have received due critical attention, and to offer close readings of some pieces in order to highlight the details of Derrida's arguments. The general emphasis on regarding Bakhtin and Derrida as philosophers rather than as literary theorists allows their works to be seen as detailed responses to other philosophical texts, a case that I would like to outline now by examining some popular concepts of Bakhtin and Derrida, and how this thesis may offer different interpretations.

Upon his re-discovery in the 1960s, Bakhtin is reported to have warned the young postgraduate students who visited him in Saransk that he was a philosopher, not a literary scholar, and had turned to literature in order to carry out philosophical investigations in relative peace (Hirschkop 1999, p. 15). Bakhtin's warning, while hedged around with qualifications about his autobiography which will become familiar as this thesis develops, has been insufficiently heeded, and clearly directs attention to how his use of literature is always partial, motivated, and a way to larger questions of society and culture. To see him, therefore, as a theorist of the novel or even a philosopher of language neglects other aspects of his project. In one of the first works to be translated he draws attention to this larger ambition: "Many do not even see or recognize the philosophical roots of the stylistics (and linguistics) in which they work", he argues, so they "shy away from any fundamental philosophical issues" (Bakhtin 1981 [1934-5], p. 267). It is by returning to these basic philosophical problems that we will be able to draw the most from Bakhtin's work, and continue the project of seeing him within his intellectual and historical context. This, of course, means dispelling any lingering romantic ideas about Bakhtin's originality or his isolation from contemporary intellectual life, a task that has been under way for several years now and is steadily gathering common acceptance. One pioneer of this endeavour is Brian Poole, whose argument about recognising Bakhtin as embedded in contemporary arguments is still sound: "The illusion of Bakhtin's original categories is the ignorance of their sources. The result: a loss of their philosophical integrity. We may be thankful that Bakhtin wasn't just an 'original'" (Poole 2001a, p. 123). An example of this misplaced belief in originality can be found in the use by Western literary scholarship of one of Bakhtin's most famous terms, namely "heteroglossia". Firstly, this translates two different terms: *raznorechie*, pertaining to social groups, and meaning a variety of socio-specific discourses within one language; and *raznoiazychie*, relating to ethnic and linguistic divisions, meaning a variety of linguistically-distinct dialects. Confusion is therefore created between socio-economic variations of language and ethno-linguistic ones. Secondly, while Bakhtin appears to have the first recorded use of *raznoiazychie*, there are close parallels in late nineteenth-century texts about variety in language, and indeed *mnogoiazychie*, a word which could be translated as *polyglossia* or distinct national languages, featured in avant-garde and linguistic discussions of the 1920s.<sup>1</sup> So while awareness of historical sources is all to the good, it

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<sup>1</sup> A discussion of the particular difficulties around "heteroglossia" can be found in Brandist 2004a, pp. 147-8.



is to some degree inhibited by the current translations of Bakhtin's works. Indeed we must go further, by noting that the published forms of some of the Russian and English texts do not represent authorial arrangements, but rather confections by one or more editors. To take one instance among many: part of the Russian edition of *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* was, in translation, made the "Supplementary Section" to "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity", although the Russian editor of the text argues that it in fact forms part of a *preceding* section of this essay (Wall 1997, p. 671). This indisputably has effects on interpretation, from an assumption that Bakhtin brought his work to a more finished state than he did, to the consequent supposition that his writing forms a neat historical and intellectual progression.<sup>2</sup> As one leading commentator on Bakhtin recognises, this means we need to push back hermeneutic procedures: "Although interpretation is traditionally a second-order process – a discourse on a corpus of texts already in public view – in Bakhtin's case it became part of the first-order business of editing the texts themselves, that is *writing them*, for publication" (Hirschkop 1999, p. 119). This is further compounded by Bakhtin's translation into English primarily during the 1980s when literary theory was riding high, thus making him appear to anticipate some of its key ideas and interests. While this unquestionably builds upon certain elements of Bakhtin's text, it does encourage speculation on how we would understand Bakhtin now if, say, "Author and Hero" had been translated during the heyday of structuralism. One final effect of the translation of the bulk of the available work during the 1980s was to grant undue prominence to the early and late texts, not rendered in English until the 1990s. They have sometimes been read as the key to the writings on the novel, and at the least encourage the perception of developmental narratives that may not, as we shall now argue, be helpful (Wall 1998, pp. 206-7).

It is problematic to see Bakhtin as an author who knows where he is going. This is true on the large scale of his canon, where the ethics he so heavily emphasises in the early works gets transmuted into very different forms in his later work; and on the local scale of his texts, where even a relatively polished piece such as "The Problem of Discursive Genres" begins by trying to

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<sup>2</sup> The specific circumstances of one of the most problematic of these editorial arrangements, "Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences", will be explored in 3.4., below.

limit the titular concept, but ends incorporating all sorts of linguistic acts.<sup>3</sup> This has been more eloquently expressed by Ken Hirschkop:

One cannot [...] point to a single essay or book which represents Bakhtin shorn of earlier (or later) illusions, or trace a clear learning curve in the movement from text to text. There is neither a moment of original (or subsequent) insight to recover, nor a visible steady progress from one problem solved to the next.

(Hirschkop 1999, p. 54)

Identifying continuities in Bakhtin's writing can be performed only at the expense of not recognising the inconsistencies, evolutions, and regressions that riddle his work. It may be helpful to pursue one idea to which Bakhtin returns throughout his career, namely the connection between literature and life. In the earliest writings, art holds a magical power to reflect, comment on, and reconcile the individual to the experiential world, an argument clearly delineated in "Art and Answerability". In the 1930s writings on the novel, literature is connected to life through its realisation in language of social processes, and the individual is not a significant category. By the 1950s, however, and the writings on discursive genres, art has become one of *many* modes of creative verbal expression by which the individual can navigate through society. In the Rabelais and Dostoevsky books of the 1960s, literature again materialises social movements, but this time has a historical depth through the concept of genre. Finally, in the late methodological works, literature is once again subordinated to language in general, although it provides a key inspiration for the hermeneutical method offered for all forms of knowledge. There is no linear progression here, little consistency of conceptual framework, and only sporadic development of earlier insight. It is the burden of this thesis to prove that Bakhtin's work can be understood as a series of non-progressive movements between different philosophical positions, and that much of the reason for this oscillation rather than evolution is the sheer diversity of sources which Bakhtin attempts to draw together. The rest of this text will unpack them in detail, but for now a hasty summary would suggest that neo-Kantianism mediated by Kierkegaardian (individualist) and philosophy-of-life tendencies provides Bakhtin's initial orientation, which is subsequently influenced by Hegelian, Nietzschean, and

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<sup>3</sup> I have modified the title of this essay throughout on the recommendation of Prof. David Shepherd and Dr. Craig Brandist. The Russian title, "Problema rechevykh zhanrov", suggests a meaning broader than "speech", and indeed the text deals with specifically non-oral forms of communication, such as letters.

phenomenological philosophies.<sup>4</sup> Without detailed reference, it is still fair to say that Bakhtin brings together: materialist- and idealist-leaning philosophies; those that privilege the individual and the social group; and those that encourage the development of a transcendental methodology, and those that explicitly prohibit it.<sup>5</sup> Galin Tihanov suggests that the uniting element of Bakhtin's career is an exploration of the relations of life and culture and their mediation through form, a neat explanation that retains both the grounding in *Lebensphilosophie* and the general orientation provided by neo-Kantianism (Tihanov 2000, p. 293). It also allows for language to be seen as one intermediary among others between subjective life and objective culture, and for the impact of the various philosophies traced by this thesis on a recurrent set of problems. It is the diversity of Bakhtin's approaches and difficulties that are of current interest, not the unitary method that they, perhaps erroneously, can be seen to provide.

Derrida, while being a very different kind of thinker and writer to Bakhtin, is similarly valuable because of his refusal of one over-arching method. He has also suffered the fate of commonly being understood outside of his intellectual context, primarily by being read as a literary theorist, which he is not, but secondarily with reference to only limited philosophical traditions. A concise and acute rebuttal of both these charges is offered by Dermot Moran:

Derrida belongs to the second generation of French phenomenologists, a phenomenology which had already been transformed into a French philosophical outlook by Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Ricoeur, Gaston Berger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and others. [...] Influenced by the rather special sense of philosophy dominant in France in the 1950s and 1960s, Derrida understands philosophy primarily in terms of the contributions of Hegel, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Levinas, and contemporary French theorists (Lacan, Bataille, Foucault). Philosophy as such can be summarised by the triad Hegel-Husserl-Heidegger.

(Moran 2000, pp. 444-5)

This is an excellent description of Derrida's basic, if diverse, philosophical orientation, and the project of this thesis is generally to add some flesh to these bones, as well as to consider the

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<sup>4</sup> A more full, and indeed differently weighted summary of Bakhtin's basic position can be found in Brandist 2002a, pp. 15-24.

<sup>5</sup> A word here about terminology; *transcendental* refers to something greater than the sum of human knowledge and capacity, and is commonly associated with Kantian philosophy; *transcendent* to that which is greater than one individual's knowledge and capacity, yet still within the sphere of the human. This is connected with phenomenology, and it is no small measure of Bakhtin's eclecticism that he tries at different stages to employ both terms.

influence of Kant and Bergson. Without an understanding of this “rather special sense of philosophy dominant in France in the 1950s and 1960s”, Derrida’s adaptation by literary theory deserves the critical opprobrium it sometimes receives; yet with such an understanding, the enterprise of literary theory can be refreshed and renewed. Derrida’s basic philosophical approach can, at the risk of over-simplification, be summarised as reading: carefully, and with unflagging attention to detail, but reading none the less. This does not mean that the argument or intention of the text is necessarily copied in Derrida’s commentary, indeed quite the opposite, as he is famous for drawing conclusions apparently unsanctioned by the author (for instance, that Saussure recognises the inherent instability of linguistic meaning). Yet Derrida claims that this project of reading always follows the logic of the text, even if it takes him in entirely unexpected directions: “I feel best when my sense of emancipation preserves the memory of what it emancipates from. I hope this mingling of respect and disrespect for the academic heritage and tradition in general is legible in everything I do” (quoted Royle 2003, p. 32). We may note in passing the Hegelian imagery of incorporation of contraries into the whole, but concentrate on the duality of Derrida’s attitude, concerned with preserving and overturning the philosophical tradition. This is demonstrated by the short piece Derrida wrote for the back cover of an anthology of philosophical texts seen to influence his work:

There is no rigorous and effective deconstruction without the faithful memory of philosophies and literatures, without the respectful and competent reading of texts of the past, as well as singular works of our own time. Deconstruction is also a certain thinking about tradition and context.

(Taylor 1986)

If I lay excessive weight on this issue of tradition, lineage, and respect, then it is because it is too swiftly and too often forgotten in commentaries on Derrida.<sup>6</sup> We do his work no favours when we see it as the product of a lone eccentric genius, or even as the direct product of a 1960s French intellectual context: many different forces fed into and created that context, and references to May ’68 do little to explain a forty-year career of writing and teaching. Derrida was concerned with changing our understanding of language so that the reading of philosophy would also change, and the old certainties about the stability of meaning, the privileging of

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<sup>6</sup> This was made particularly clear in the spate of articles in the popular press following Derrida’s death in September 2004; for instance Moss 2004.

speech over writing, and the fundamental transparency of symbolic communication would no longer hold (cf. Derrida 1982a [1972], pp. 4-5). This does not sanction an anything-goes relativism, nor does it suggest that all communication is ultimately doomed to failure; rather, it notes (like Saussure, Nietzsche, or even in Derrida's reading, Plato) that language is an artificial system that relies on many common assumptions and evasions in order to function. Philosophy, even though it can comment with authority, precision, and clarity on language, still does so through the medium that inhibits all these characteristics. And this further sophistication of the philosophy of reflection, of the capacity for philosophy to criticise itself and its tools, is part of an august philosophical tradition stretching from Plato through Kant to Heidegger.

Once we accept this grounding of Derrida's philosophy in a distinct tradition, or perhaps better an intersection of a variety of traditions, then we come closer to drawing the most value from his works. If Bakhtin's basic philosophical orientation is provided by neo-Kantianism, albeit heavily modified by a range of other positions, then Derrida's is a similarly adapted model of phenomenology. In particular, it is a Heideggerian development, which firstly emphasises the proximity between what we can say about the world with what we can know, and secondly underscores the need to reconsider some of the founding concepts and institutions of philosophy.<sup>7</sup> For Heidegger, this is achieved through the close reading of dominant philosophical texts in order to recover their hidden alternative meanings (cf. Heidegger 1978, p. 350). This project clearly resonates with Derrida, although the obvious irony is that the process of a Heideggerian reading always risks producing results incompatible with a Heideggerian philosophy. I would therefore suggest that, as with Bakhtin, but for different reasons, Derrida's intellectual trajectory is not clear or uniform: Derrida has suggested that all of the major concepts and motifs explored throughout his career can be found within his earliest works, a credible claim but one which needs to be balanced with an understanding of how relations between them shift (e.g. Derrida 1983b, pp. 39-40; 2002). In later years, for instance, his thought about political and ethical responsibility became more obvious as well as more grounded in specific examples and situations, although it is unquestionably present in his early writings (e.g. Derrida 1974 [1967], pp. 139-40). Yet alongside this description of how Derrida understood his own work, we also need to examine how it has been received by others. The name of Derrida has

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<sup>7</sup> Derrida accepts neither of these ideas uncritically, as will become evident throughout the body of the thesis, and in particular in Chapter Eight.

enormous symbolic power within academic disciplines, raising emotions disproportionate even to his voluminous canon. At one pole Derrida is seen as one of the greatest twentieth-century philosophers by certain academics who follow every text and argument; at the other he is a bogeyman, presumed to inspire such fanatical devotion, and to threaten everything modern philosophy holds dear.<sup>8</sup> A major reason for this extremity of reaction is the power which “deconstruction” – “a word I have never liked and one whose fortune has disagreeably surprised me” – wields, especially in its assimilation by American literary critics (Derrida 1983b, p. 44). For Derrida, it was intended to translate the Heideggerian terms *Abbau* or *Destruktion*, neither of which was a negative concept, as both were meant to represent the processes of “unbuilding” necessary for a radical overhaul of philosophy (cf. Derrida and Mortley 1991, p. 97). It encapsulates the attention to detail combined with revolutionary orientation outlined in the description above of Derrida’s philosophical technique. However, in its American application it was taken as a failsafe method of literary criticism, designed to uncover the contradictions in a text, the slipperiness of meaning, and the impossibility of absolute certainty. These are all simplifications of the subtlety of Derrida’s thought, and throughout this thesis the philosophical lineage of his arguments will be offered in contradistinction to their understanding within literary theory. The basic difficulty of assimilating Bakhtin and Derrida is accurately described by a commentator on the former:

The problem as defined by Vitalii Makhlin, one of the most persuasive of current Russian Bakhtinians, is that Western interpreters across a broad range of subject areas simply appropriate Bakhtin for their own purposes and purely in their own terms: in a series of selective approaches to an already unstable “canon” each succeeds only in making Bakhtin a *double of his or her own self*.

(Renfrew 1997, p. ix)

Much the same could be said for Derrida, although with the canon’s instability perhaps being modified to its enormity. What is done with Bakhtin and Derrida when they are compared or juxtaposed often reveals deeper trends about their usage or application. These images and translations of Bakhtin and Derrida are of as much interest as, and in some ways comparable to, their own adaptations of other philosophers, and all will be treated here.

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<sup>8</sup> This polarity of opinions was seen in the dispute over the award of an honorary doctorate by Cambridge University, and then more recently in writing commemorating Derrida’s death (cf. Derrida 1995, pp. 399-421, and the *Times Higher Education Supplement* of November 12<sup>th</sup>, 2004).

### *Previous comparisons*

Criticism connecting Bakhtin and Derrida is, as could be expected from two authors at the centre of academic industries, reasonably extensive, and several common motifs emerge from the existing literature. These include the use of Bakhtin in a broad critique of post-structuralism, the recognition of typological similarities between Bakhtin and Derrida, and comparisons of their philosophies of language and their possible applications. There is also a significant strand of doctoral work that frequently employs both authors to understand a larger third term, normally an author or text. The majority of the work comes from Bakhtinian critics, partly because of the aversion to tracing Derrida's sources mentioned above, and a development of this into unwillingness to see the intellectual giant as akin to anyone. Yet I would also suggest a deeper reason, connected with the broader use of Derrida and Bakhtin in literary theory, especially during the mid-1980s when comparative articles first emerged. In these texts, Bakhtin is often seen as prefiguring and solving Derrida's problems, offering a more politically- and ethically-engaged version of "deconstruction", more grounded in the realities of social interaction and the literary text, and much more concerned with the preservation of linguistic meaning. By reading Bakhtin as if he were a post-structuralist, only better and earlier, critics employed a defensive manoeuvre which retained benefits of the new theory, such as a greater awareness of the flexibility of meaning, yet rejected detriments like the thorough-going critique of subjectivity. The growth of the literary theory industry during the 1980s could not have been to everyone's tastes, and this reading of Bakhtin allowed the pursuit of traditional critical goods with a veneer of theoretical complexity, and thus a rejection of theory's more radical suggestions. A rough chronological order has been preserved in the present section to reinforce this image of Bakhtin being used to ward off the bogies of deconstruction, and to suggest how reception of the two thinkers has shifted over time. Given the points about translation noted above, Bakhtin's work appeared to be readily applicable to a wide range of texts and objects, yet was diverse enough to accommodate a range of critical viewpoints, a flag of convenience in the battle for new ideas, publications, and jobs.<sup>9</sup> It is also important to recognise the diversity of political constructions of Bakhtin and Derrida – the former as champion of democracy *and* genuine (i.e. non-Stalinist) socialist, the latter as arch-conservative *and* radical anarchist – and how this again serves

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<sup>9</sup> This point was made by Brian Kennedy in a paper he delivered at the Bakhtin Centre on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2004 (for more information, see <http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/academic/A-C/bakh/theosem.html#04>).

rhetorical comparisons between the two. Many of the critics from this crucial mid-1980s period recognised that the diversity of Bakhtins was not necessarily a good thing and perhaps a sign of lack of rigour rather than healthy debate, and this question persists in an era where critics are interested both in where Bakhtin came from, and what can be done with his work (e.g. Carroll 1983, p. 67; de Man 1989 [1983], p. 108; Young 1985, p. 74). Similar combats have been fought and will continue to be fought over the significance of Derrida's work, and because historical proximity and indeed fidelity to both men's arguments militates against offering absolute readings of either thinker, it is important to retain awareness of these processes of identity construction.

One of the best examples of the defensive reading of Bakhtin is also chronologically one of the earliest comparisons, namely Allon White's "Bakhtin, Sociolinguistics, and Deconstruction" (White 1984). It is, unfortunately, an inauspicious opening to the tradition: never citing Derrida directly, and referring to something called Deconstruction (his capitalisation), White uses Bakhtin as a materialist stick with which to beat the Frenchman. He aligns Derrida with literature rather than philosophy, and confusion rather than ambiguity or necessary indeterminacy, and sees Bakhtin in a sociolinguistic context that, while clearly pertinent, needs to be adduced more carefully to prove his case. For White, Deconstruction is in "naive complicity" with social control and domination, and only Bakhtinian carnival can maintain the utopian emphasis of play while demonstrating political commitment (White 1984, p. 145). It hardly need be said that "deconstruction" and "carnival" could be exchanged in that sentence without a loss of validity.<sup>10</sup> A much better place to begin an alignment of Bakhtin and Derrida is Juliet Flower MacCannell's article, "The Temporality of Textuality" (MacCannell 1985). She sees both writers as critics of structuralism, and particularly of the Saussurean emphasis on the self-evidence of the present, which Bakhtin was the first to recognise as a sham, an "unseen and social economy of value hierarchies and distinctions" (MacCannell 1985, p. 974). From here she moves to a Heideggerian model of Bakhtin's theory of communication, showing how it can draw out this unsaid social remainder in every act of communication; poetry is valorised by Bakhtin and the formalists precisely because it emphasises how our linguistic acts rely on the unspoken (pp. 984-5). Deconstruction is a similarly transgressive movement that

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<sup>10</sup> This was recognised by an enormously significant contribution to the debate, Robert Young's "Back to Bakhtin" of 1985 (Young 1985). This article provides the inspiration for much of the rest of my thesis, hence will be treated at the end of the literature review as a summary of the debates.



ignores the boundaries of discipline and genre in favour of a penetrating analysis of language. MacCannell takes deconstruction as a general influence rather than a specific point of comparison, noting the similarities between the thinkers as well as what they could bring to one another; thanks to its subtlety and intelligence hers is still one of the best articles available.

Two other canonical texts merit prompt attention. Michael Holquist, Bakhtin's translator, biographer and editor, has explored the similarities with Derrida in a fine article, as well as more passingly in his introductions to Bakhtin's works (Holquist 1986; cf. Holquist 1990, p. xxx). Holquist sees Bakhtin in a politically liberal, Russian Orthodox context, primarily as a philosopher of language and literature, which, although a helpful starting-point, possibly neglects some of the more interesting and less coherent aspects to his writing. Derrida too has some of his teeth drawn, being accused of negative theology, a charge he rebutted as early as 1967, and is cast by Holquist as a clown (Holquist 1986; cf. Derrida 1982b [1972], p. 6). Holquist is quick to assert that he means this in a technical rather than derogatory sense, the wise fool who has the right to treat life as a comedy and rip the masks off others, and the charge marks the beginning of the connection to Bakhtin, who in the chronotope essay asserts the importance of the rogue, the clown, and the fool in the development of the novel (Holquist 1986; Bakhtin 1981 [1937-8], pp. 158-67). Holquist then outlines the similarities of *différance* and dialogue, how both men challenge Saussure's separation of speech and writing, and more tentatively, some underlying philosophical similarities (Holquist 1986, pp. 141-6). The author's confidence with Bakhtin is obvious, although his adoption of Richard Rorty's line on Derrida as a gadfly limits what he understands in that thinker while reinforcing the essentially conservative bias of his reading. What can be achieved without direct reference to Derrida is demonstrated by another article from the same year, Graham Pechey's "Bakhtin, Marxism and post-structuralism" (Pechey 1986). This casts Bakhtin as a deconstructionist of Formalism, attacking it when it falls back on tradition, re-emphasising the fundamental importance of history, and suggesting that the idea of the author is an ideological construct rather than just a misleading delusion (Pechey 1986, pp. 107-17). Pechey is clear that an either/or logic must be avoided when comparing Bakhtin and post-structuralism, and instead the emphasis placed on "the textual *process* which conditions *and exceeds* these gestures" – how and why such contrasts are possible (p. 105). This keeps faith with both the movement of Bakhtin's texts and the outlines of Derrida's technique, thus offering an alignment through performance rather than theme.

With the benefit of historical perspective and a larger body of texts from which to work, it is easier now to distinguish Derrida from his post-structuralist and postmodernist contemporaries. However, this was not so smoothly accomplished in the 1980s and '90s, where frequently the attempt to assert Bakhtin's priority to the ideas of post-structuralism neglected the differences within that set of ideas. David Carroll leads the charge by outlining the basic principles of dialogism with one eye on Lyotard and the idea of postmodernism; Bakhtin is seen as navigating the worst extremes of postmodernism while bringing something new and relevant to the proceedings (Carroll 1983). Alex Callinicos uses Voloshinov's work as a counter to the "textualist" strand of post-structuralism represented by Derrida and his followers, and a critique of the Nietzschean tendencies of that movement which sees truth as only an effect of power (Callinicos 1984). It could be suggested that Callinicos is unfair both to Voloshinov, seeing him as a materialist when perhaps the situation is more complex, and to Derrida, of whom Callinicos shows a much more nuanced appreciation in later works (e.g. Callinicos 1996; 2004). In his case against "textualism", Callinicos manipulates Voloshinov into some strange alliances involving the American philosophers Quine and Davidson, as well as the later Foucault and Deleuze and Guattari. The faith that Bakhtin is different from post-structuralism triumphs over clarity of argument in Iris Zavala's article as well (Zavala 1990). She suggests that Bakhtin posits a series of specific communicative actions, while Lacan, Kristeva, and other post-structuralists rely on a universal model of communication; and that dialogue is *ambiguous* rather than *ambivalent*, the product of interactive but separate voices which respond to one another.<sup>11</sup> The precariousness of this distinction, as well as its questionable relevance to Derrida's works, do not detract from the good intentions of separating Bakhtin's own work from modern interpretations. Her closing argument, however, that Bakhtin's greatest contribution "is breaking ground for an unsettling process of meaning and subject, and heightening what is open, mobile, relational against what is finished, conclusive, static" seems to draw her back towards the post-structuralism she had previously foresworn (Zavala 1990, p. 87).

A more balanced account of the relations between Bakhtin and postmodernism is provided by Barry Rutland, who begins from the very strong position of acknowledging their

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<sup>11</sup> This is broadly a line of argument adopted by other critics, for instance Craig Brandist, who suggests there is a difference between the sorts of indeterminacy offered by both writers, and R. Wilson, who similarly posits a difference between post-structuralist free play and Bakhtinian carnival being the volition, or in Kantian terms, purposiveness, of the participants (Brandist 2000; Wilson 1986).

historical similarities (Rutland 1990). The Bakhtin Circle produced in the late 1920s a series of critiques which undermined the very foundations of structuralism: Saussurean linguistics (*Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*), Freudian psychology (*Freudianism*), and cultural semiotics (*The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*) (Rutland 1990, p. 127). Structuralism soon offered auto-critiques of precisely these motifs, and turned to intertextuality, a version of dialogism, to help frame these criticisms.<sup>12</sup> Rutland notes that Bakhtin emphasises the continuity of social formations (continuity of discourse, history, and materialism) while postmodernism relies on discontinuity and rupture; and that carnival has become the dominant mode of postmodern society, with all the conservatism and banality that suggests (pp. 129, 132). Vincent Crapanzano also points out the dangers and inescapability of postmodernism, and suggests a Bakhtinian (more properly, Habermasian) approach of dialogue to resolve lasting social inequalities (Crapanzano 1995). His article is useful if for no other reason than the area of resistance to postmodernism that it emphasises – the discursive practice of history and the (Freudian) work of memorialisation – is also a key concern for Derrida. He cannot be counted among the straw men Crapanzano sets up as postmodernism, but rather indicates his critical distance from it. To continue this anti-postmodernist line, Matthias Freise sees the value of Bakhtin's work in his recovery of an author-figure from the ravages of post-structuralism (Freise 1997). Bakhtin perceives the educative role of the artist and his engagement with entirely social, grounded notions of ethical responsibility, which reinforces the indispensability of an organising central force. Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan also pursues the question of ethics in the work of Bakhtin, linking this with the problems of postmodern moral uncertainty (Erdinast-Vulcan 1997). Her work suggests a loss of ethical confidence between Bakhtin's early and mid-period writings, which does not detract from the possibility of correcting guilt-free postmodernism with his arguments about individual responsibility. She acknowledges the dangerous freedom of the postmodern subject, and argues: "Unlike many of our own postmodern contemporaries, Bakhtin does not hasten to celebrate this liberation. He knows that even as we rejoice in polyphony, we prick up our ears for the Word" (Erdinast-Vulcan 1997, p. 267). This is undoubtedly true, although as will become clear Derrida is a postmodern thinker still concerned with ethics; nevertheless, Erdinast-Vulcan makes a good general case for what Bakhtin has to offer postmodernism.

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<sup>12</sup> The network of historical problems surrounding intertextuality will be explored below.

The same author has also written a helpful article on Julia Kristeva's interpretation of Bakhtin, and this introduces us to the historical links drawing together Derrida and Bakhtin (Erdinast-Vulcan 1995). Through Tzvetan Todorov, Kristeva learnt about Bakhtin and turned to his work to provide support and detail for her theories, especially intertextuality, in an article from 1969 (Kristeva 1986 [1969]). She reshaped his writings very much for her own ends, using the language of structuralism with vertical and horizontal axes, hypotheses, and references to mathematical set theory (Kristeva 1986 [1969], p. 37). Although she is not overly concerned with reflecting and dilating the details of Bakhtin's texts, unlike the more conservative critics examined thus far she is happy to incorporate Bakhtin into her post-structuralist theory. To this end she marks out the similarities between Bakhtin's notion of the monologic epic and Derrida's history of the transcendental signified, and offers, like so many others, dialogue in the place of dialectics: "[Dialogue] does not strive towards transcendence but rather towards harmony, all the while implying an idea of rupture (of opposition and analogy) as a modality of transformation" (Kristeva 1986 [1969], pp. 48, 58). Therefore within the post-structuralism that has been so roundly abused by many Bakhtinians, there lurks a reading of Bakhtin from an earlier generation, through a different medium (the original Russian), and with a much more sympathetic intention (cf. Young 1985, pp. 87-9). This testifies to the polyvalence of Bakhtin, yet reinforces the obvious point that readings which use Bakhtin against post-structuralism neglect a specific element in his reception-history, and indeed the diverse possibilities of his work.

Although contributions from the Derridean side of the fence are notable for their rarity, there are a couple of passing comparisons that may be of relevance. In the companion volume to the 1986 translation of *Glas*, Gregory Ulmer compares Derrida's text to Menippean satire, and specifically with Bakhtin's reading of the linguistic and corporeal excess of that genre (Ulmer 1986, p. 107).<sup>13</sup> He then turns to the problem of "inner speech" which his article has treated throughout, and gestures at "Russian linguists, psychologists, critics, and artists of the revolutionary period" who offered materialist critiques of Freud: "Derrida's critique of the logocentric model of hearing-oneself-speak as interpreted by Western Metaphysics, then, is an extension of the Marxist as well as of the Freudian branches of materialist thought" (pp. 107, 109). This is developed through *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, with the assertions that "the

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<sup>13</sup> Intriguingly, the comparison between *Glas* and Menippean satire is also one that Derrida draws, perhaps indicating it was a suggestion to Ulmer on the event of the translation (Derrida 1985 [1982], pp. 140-1).

'linguistics' of *Glas* is a version of the dialogical or 'double-voiced' word", Derrida's punning play with the names "Genet" and "Hegel" is another example of this double-voiced word, and the basic structure of "otobiography [...] is dialogical" (p. 109).<sup>14</sup> It is intriguing to see an appropriation of Bakhtin to reinforce Derrida, and to offer some apparently linguistic support for his philosophical arguments; however, its reading of carnival as an *individual* celebration of physical and linguistic excess is misguided, and, as in the work of some Bakhtinians, there is too hasty a movement between different points in Bakhtin's work. Perhaps because of his role as commentator on a notoriously difficult and complex text, Ulmer tries to normalise Derrida and note the overlap of his work with more familiar projects. Something similar goes on in an unusual piece by Geoffrey Bennington which makes passing reference to Voloshinov's critique of Saussure, "which we accept up to a point" (Bennington and Derrida 1993 [1991], p. 100). The book is co-authored, so that Bennington tries to write a text that encapsulates and explains Derrida's work, while on the bottom half of the page Derrida writes something attempting to evade such definition. Again there is an elucidatory role played by the critic, suggesting a normalisation effect, and also perhaps in this context an attempt to use Voloshinov's (disputable) Marxism to reflect on Derrida's. There is one final connection from Derrida's side, through his close friend and colleague Paul de Man, and it provides a rare direct contact between Bakhtin and Derrida. At de Man's funeral, Derrida read an oration that listed those authors whom de Man had "renewed" the reading of; and the last proper name before "and so many others", is Bakhtin (the oration is included in Derrida 1989 [1986], p. xviii).<sup>15</sup> The reading to which Derrida refers is de Man's short 1983 thought-piece, which sketches some aspects of the contemporary interpretation of Bakhtin and their weaknesses (de Man 1989 [1983]). He makes some palpable hits against the Bakhtin industry and the variety of ways he has been appropriated: "An author and a concept – dialogism – that can be made to accommodate the textual model of Leo Strauss as well as some disciples of Gilles Deleuze shows, to say the least, remarkable scope" (de Man 1989 [1983], p. 108). However, partly because the main matter of his argument, a debate about

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<sup>14</sup> "Otobiography" is Derrida's shorthand for his argument that autobiographies, like all texts, require completion from not just one reader but an infinite series of readers, and hence are akin to spoken utterances (therefore *oris*, mouth) requiring a listener. Cf. Derrida 1985 (1982).

<sup>15</sup> The other moment of direct contact I have discovered is so slight that it is almost insignificant – during a 1994 roundtable in which Derrida participated, reference is made by Bill Readings to *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, which he ascribes to Bakhtin "because I've not called in this week to find out who actually wrote [it]" (Adams *et al.* 1996, p. 27). The discussion soon moves on, and Derrida makes no comment for the following three pages.

fact and fiction, lies elsewhere, and partly because he demonstrates only minimal knowledge of Bakhtin's work, the article does not elaborate a post-structuralist perspective on Bakhtin.

Akin to these biographical proximities, there is also a fragile strand of criticism emphasising the common philosophical heritage of Bakhtin and Derrida. Rutland's article mentioned above is a fine example of this, as is Dragan Kujundzic's on laughter, which gathers the two together with an emphasis on Nietzsche (Kujundzic 1990). An extensive series of parallels is established between Bakhtin and Derrida, for instance the former's concept of novelistic hybridisation and the latter's grafting, or more playfully, *heteroglossia* and *heteroglasia* (Kujundzic 1990, pp. 272, 284). The thesis that "Bakhtin and Derrida meet as radical thinkers or philosophers of *the ontology of laughter*, or, we could perhaps say, *laughter as ontology*" is well-delineated and argued, and forms one of the more creative engagements of the two thinkers (p. 287). Robert Young similarly notes that "In the larger historical context it would be necessary to trace [Bakhtin's and Derrida's] respective relation to the whole Nietzschean tradition", a point which this thesis, 20 years late, attempts to unpack (Young 1985, p. 87). Fred Evans uses Marx to bind Derrida and Bakhtin, but inhibits any true insight by displaying scant familiarity with Derrida's writings and reaching a lukewarm neo-liberal conclusion, asserting the superiority of dialogue over dialectics because of its greater tolerance (Evans 1990). Alongside these philosophical-historical interpretations, there have been critics who have compared the linguistic philosophies presented by Bakhtin and Derrida. Terry Eagleton, like Callinicos, has suggested Bakhtin as a materialist alternative to Wittgenstein's and Derrida's theories of language that founder on their own anti-metaphysical intentions (Eagleton 1986). Post-structuralism has such a tortuous relationship with Bakhtin because his work unites a revolutionary politics with a capacity to think the indeterminacies which, according to "what we might now rhetorically call certain Derridean and Lacanian positions", would ground any theory of politics (Eagleton 1986, p. 116). One of the few Russian-language articles on the topic also examines how a theory of language would affect larger issues, in this case, the methodology of the human sciences (Murashov 1994). By replacing "truth" with the "movement towards truth" at the heart of the humanities, a variety of post-structuralism is suggested which avoids the fall into relativism.<sup>16</sup> To return briefly to Derrida, there is an argument that he explores the

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<sup>16</sup> My ignorance of Russian has prevented me from pushing further in this direction. There is also a Spanish-language work comparing Bakhtin and Derrida that I have for similar reasons been unable to consult. This is

repressed effects of writing on philosophy, while Bakhtin looks more generally to its results in culture. This is the opinion of Robert Cunliffe, who has explored Bakhtin's thought on speech and writing; according to him, Bakhtin associates speech with drama and the naïve illusion of presence, while the novel, a written form, calls such superficiality into question (Cunliffe 1997). Both Bakhtin and Derrida displace presence and the possibility of originality, and assert the significance of writing in the formation of modern culture, an argument that is fine so long as their different understandings of language are always borne in mind.

Finally, something should be said about the amount of doctoral work carried out on Bakhtin and Derrida. Linking the two has proved a popular topic for dissertation writing, often to explain a third term or author (e.g. Sirabian 1994, who writes on the novels of Dickens; Noel 2003, on Hawthorne). Sometimes this shades into the presumption of *carte blanche* for the worst pretensions of academic writing, leading to such exciting-sounding opuses as Richard Scott Bakker's "Supernaut: An essay into the temporalities of performance and representation" (Bakker 1997). On the other hand, it can produce meaningful and exciting work, especially when centred on established topics of debate such as theories of meaning, and postmodernism (Porritt 1989; Bruce 1992). One piece worthy of special mention is Lee Honeycutt's MA thesis (Honeycutt 1994 [1993]), which while it fails to engage with Derrida in any meaningful way, and suffers from the too-common suspicion that he is ultimately a sophist, has two redeeming features. The first is its detour back to theories of rhetoric in order to place Bakhtin and Derrida in a classical heritage of linguistic thought; the second that it looks forward to changing modes of textuality, principally through the Internet and other electronic media, which both thinkers can help us understand. Writing such as this demonstrates the flexibility and polyvalence of Bakhtin and Derrida's works, and the positive results to be garnered by putting them together.

The difficulties, however, of such a comparison are recognised in 1985 by an article of founding significance for this thesis, Robert Young's "Back to Bakhtin". This piece, apparently a response to Allon White's effort, notes the weaknesses of that attempt and the general dangers of regarding Bakhtin as assimilable to any cause going. This leads him to a point of distinction between Bakhtin and Derrida – "Whereas Derrida raised passionate disciples and equally

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Domingo Sánchez-Mesa Martínez's 1996 article in *Discurso* 9:10, "Dialogía y Différance. Bajtin y el pensamiento de la escritura", and it will have to stand here for the enormous volume of work produced on Bakhtin in the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking world. I am indebted to Carolina Núñez-Puente for bringing this article to my attention.

passionate opponents, it seems that just about anyone can, and probably will, appropriate Bakhtin for just about anything”; and a point of comparison:

Everyone is attracted to the fact that Bakhtin appears to offer a reconciliation between poetics and hermeneutics, between questions of form and questions of interpretation, in the context of their relation to society and to history. The spectre of Derrida also looms large and helps to account for Bakhtin’s sudden appeal around 1980. For humanist critics a key factor lies in the way in which Bakhtin’s work emerges as a critique of Russian Formalism: he thus appears as a critic who has gone “beyond” structuralism, who uncannily anticipates most post-structuralist thought but presents it in a more traditional guise. He talks, it seems, reassuringly about characters, plots, the author, and consciousness, offering a humanist vision of poststructuralism together with a liberal politics centering on the idea of the word as a guarantor of human freedom. [...] Rather than offering an alternative to Derrida in the sense of an entirely oppositional position, [Bakhtin] seems to allow the assimilation of some of the more compelling aspects of his thought while placing them within a more acceptable sociohistoric framework. Derrida himself can then be more or less rejected altogether.

(Young 1985, p. 74)

This encapsulates the starting-point of my argument precisely, and demonstrates how consciousness of the difficulties of using Bakhtin goes back to the founding days of the Bakhtin industry. There is always something at stake in drawing comparisons between Bakhtin and Derrida, and awareness of that hazard, as well as the intellectual circumstances which determine it, is essential for more rewarding work.

### *Shared affiliations: from Kant to phenomenology*

The review of existing work has noted that previous comparisons between Bakhtin and Derrida have been on the grounds of: broad typological similarities; similarities in approach; their linguistic philosophies; some historical similarities; the work of Kristeva; and rhetorical attempts to undermine post-structuralism, postmodernism, or literary theory as a whole through recourse to Bakhtin. This thesis attempts to produce a more philosophically-rooted alignment to explain why, at times, Bakhtin and Derrida sound similar, as well as unpack some of the reasons for previous kinds of comparison. The stakes of my own project are readings of the two authors that see them firmly as philosophers rather than literary theorists, and a conviction that while they



may arrive at apparently comparable conclusions, they do so by very different routes. It is this second claim that I attempt to justify here.

One basis for comparison which is almost self-evident is that both Derrida and Bakhtin deal with the philosophy of language, and see in it much greater complexity than a tool for communication; thus Derrida:

“everyday language” is not innocent or neutral. It is the language of Western metaphysics, and it carries with it not only a considerable number of presuppositions of all types, but also presuppositions inseparable from metaphysics, which, although little attended to, are knotted into a system.

(Derrida 1981 [1972], p. 19)

Similarly Bakhtin:

The living utterance, having taken meaning and shape at a particular historical moment in a socially specific environment, cannot fail to brush up against thousands of living dialogic threads, woven by socio-ideological consciousness around the given object of an utterance; it cannot fail to become an active participant in social dialogue.

(Bakhtin 1981 [1934-5], p. 276)

Language represents positions and presuppositions fundamentally beyond the knowledge of the individual language-user, and with specific, determined cultural histories. For both, language provides a means of reintroducing social influence into philosophies which otherwise might become irreducibly subjectivist; as the rest of this work expands, the Kantian prioritisation of the perceptive individual over her world is criticised by both thinkers, yet without adopting the Hegelian solution of emphasising society and history.<sup>17</sup> Bakhtin and Derrida perhaps mean slightly different things by language: Bakhtin primarily sees language as a model for social interaction, and secondarily (differently, in the early and late texts) as a constraint on human perception, while Derrida explicitly concentrates on language as a fundamental division of the world required for any perception. In both cases, “language” is used to signify something greater than the way we communicate with one another, and is seen to carry more weight than signified

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<sup>17</sup> A rough outline of this argument would note that Derrida follows Nietzsche’s refusal of Hegelian totality, while self-consciously tending towards an Hegelian emphasis on considering becoming as the basic category of being; and that Bakhtin similarly criticises the possibility of a totalised system of knowledge while his neo-Kantian orientation moves him towards it.

information. This emphasis on language is important because it enables literature, which plays a substantial part in each thinker's philosophy, to be seen as *illustration* rather than *the matter of* their work. It is a limit-case of certain actions of language, a best example or privileged site, but does not, in itself, constitute the end of their projects. The focus throughout this work will be on a broad understanding of language as a problem of perception as much as communication, which has in turn its own detriments. Philosophical rather than linguistic analyses of language will always be wanting, and by their very orientation say more about the social, cultural, and political elements of language than its empirical structure or function. This leaves Bakhtin's, but perhaps particularly Derrida's, works open to criticism from a scientific-linguistic standpoint, a challenge I have not addressed here. To pick up on the suggestion just made that a philosophical analysis of language also examines the politics of language, one of the minor themes advanced in the current work is that Bakhtin and Derrida offer small-scale, localised versions of politics which are not designed for generalised application.<sup>18</sup> Language is, to reiterate, a social domain, and thus necessarily encompasses intersubjective relations, although these are seen quite differently by Derrida and Bakhtin. This may become clearer through an analysis of two passages displaying the kind of superficial similarities that prompted commentators to draw comparisons. Derrida first, then Bakhtin:

To speak to someone is doubtless to hear oneself speak, to be heard by oneself; but, at the same time, if one is heard by another, to speak is to make him *repeat immediately* in himself the hearing-oneself-speak in the very form in which I effectuated it.

(Derrida 1973 [1967], p. 80)

Any understanding of live speech, a live utterance, is inherently responsive, although the degree of this activity varies extremely. Any understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker.

(Bakhtin 1986 [1952-3], p.68)

In both arguments, the intersubjectivity of language is foregrounded, as are the inherently repetitious nature of language and the activity of the listener, especially in recreating or adopting the role of the speaker. However. The two authors have reached these similar-sounding

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<sup>18</sup> This in particular is explored in the sections on language and national identity, 4.3.1. and 6.4.1.. The motif of national language has been chosen in preference to literature as a way of exploring political questions of linguistic philosophy without tramping over well-worn territory.

positions by two different routes, so their arguments go rather different ways after this point: Bakhtin's neo-Kantian idealism becomes more evident, as does Derrida's phenomenological suspicion of transcendentalism; Bakhtin suggests a strongly subjective model of communication, while Derrida argues that language necessarily unbinds any strong version of constituted subjectivity; a response of some kind is guaranteed in Bakhtin's schema, but always endangered and likely to fail in Derrida's; and Derrida sees the iterable nature of language as a fundamental challenge to meaning, while Bakhtin attempts to see it as a diversification around a coherent core. So while the philosophy of language is unquestionably a point of overlap between the two, they operate from variant assumptions, some of which will be explored as this work progresses.

As well as an overlap of topic, another strand to come out of the review of current work was a relation through approach or attitude, and, like the philosophy of language, this is partly an area of similarity and partly a way of ringing the changes. Both Bakhtin and Derrida try to return to something before philosophy, an interrogative awareness of our being in the world and its possible consequences and assumptions. In an untranslated piece from the 1940s, Bakhtin affirms the need for "a new philosophical wonderment [*filosofskoe udivlenie*] before everything", a point which recalls Heideggerian phenomenology's foregrounding of astonishment that there should be something rather than nothing, and Derrida's derived reflections on the necessary conditions for recognising that there is a difference between something and nothing (Bakhtin 1996 [1943], p. 70).<sup>19</sup> This common desire to work through academic philosophy to find something closer to human existence is a typical aspiration of avant-garde artistic movements, which impact on both authors, particularly early in their careers, and which provides one explanation for the deployment of literature in their works (cf. Brandist 2002a, pp. 27-32; Eagleton 2003, p. 65). The desire for wonder is also a marker of their shared critical interest in philosophies of origin, which for both means taking a step beyond Kant and neo-Kantianism by asking not just what forms are fundamental for human perception to take place, but whether we can know what *fundamental* means. Derrida's response to this is much more radical than Bakhtin's, primarily because the latter believes he can explore the issue through a relatively transparent medium of language, while the former holds that language is part of the problem. In these different attitudes, we can see the reflection of their varying philosophical orientations, as neo-Kantianism relies on an ideal realm of validity which can be represented through some

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<sup>19</sup> I am indebted to Prof. David Shepherd for his assistance in locating and translating this quotation.

human systems (notably pure logic), yet phenomenology argues for the construction of objects through subjective (therefore linguistically-influenced) acts of perception. We can also perhaps discern different kinds of response to these orientations: here Bakhtin is synthetic, drawing into neo-Kantianism a range of other positions to shore up its weaknesses, and Derrida is analytical, pushing the logic of Heidegger's modification of Husserl's phenomenology to a radical extreme. These two kinds of thought can sometimes produce similar effects, as both Derrida's and Bakhtin's works run the risk of fragmentation; Bakhtin has been characterised as "a broken thinker", someone whose work deliberately resists efforts of totalisation through its shifting positions and arguments, while Derrida produced a long series of finished works which continually drew attention to their own incompleteness (Wall 1998a). In Bakhtin's case the fragmentation is more than a little ironic, as, in his early work in particular, he calls for systematic philosophy at the same time as the disjointed form of his writing militates against it (cf. Hirschkop 1999, p. 100; Wall 1998a, p. 671). Derrida has rather more control over this relationship between part and whole, as he resists the over-arching sweep of Husserlian transcendental phenomenology at the same time as suggesting indeterminacy as a new basis for systems of human knowledge (cf. Derrida 1978 [1962], p. 153). The same pattern of conscious and unconscious mimicry of the arguments of their text can be discerned at the formal level too, where Bakhtin's disparate writings have been interpreted as offering a realisation of their content's resistance to totalisation, while Derrida's writings quite deliberately echo the arguments which they propose (Wall 2001; Harvey 1989 and Chapter One). Once again, although Bakhtin and Derrida might produce works that look as though they have emerged from a common approach, in reality they stem from substantially different attitudes and ideas.

One final issue that I wish to raise is the question of whether Derrida's or Bakhtin's writings add up to what could be an identifiable, complete position, or whether such totality is contrary to the tenor of their work. Both men develop their ideas over the course of their careers, although as we have previously noted Derrida shows a more linear continuity than Bakhtin. This can now be related to the argument that Derrida tends to work in a more analytical fashion while Bakhtin synthesises, as the latter produced a series of models of language which do not necessarily cohere, while the former essentially stuck with one model and extended it to a variety of applications. In both cases, the incompleteness of their positions is stressed, and neither can claim the fundamental status for their ideas that aspects of their philosophies might desire. A

further layer of incompleteness is added by the distinctive problems of referencing in each author's work: Derrida footnotes copiously and often runs the academic machine into exhaustion, while still keeping certain sources or basic inspirations quiet, for instance in *The Post Card* where a whole series of puns on Heideggerian terms relating to destinations, sending, and returning is revealed through the form of the text rather than its content (e.g. Derrida 1987 [1980], p. 66). Bakhtin, on the other hand, firstly has fairly dismissive things to say about footnotes, and secondly is at the mercy here of editorial procedure: for instance, authorial references to Cassirer, Marr, and Dilthey in "Discourse in the Novel" were editorially excised from the Russian text (Bakhtin 1990 [1924], p. 257; B. Poole 1998, p. 573, n. 39). In both cases, the text on the page is not by itself sufficient explanation, therefore again imitating the argument as a whole. A self-evident part of this is the fact that Bakhtin and Derrida have been translated not just from non-Anglophone languages, but non-Anglophone contexts, meaning that what is lost is far more than linguistic nuance, as the notes on translation above should have made clear. In writing this thesis I have used both author's works in translation only, which was one of the inspirations for considering their adaptation and development by Anglophone literary theory. What I have lost in contact with the original languages I have gained in a sensitivity about how they could have been read in a particular way, and in a helpful suspicion towards attempts to rely on an original text to absolutely affirm one interpretation.<sup>20</sup> The *Collected Works* of Bakhtin in process at the time of writing have done a great deal to clarify the textual problems relating to his works, yet still have a certain Slavist image of Bakhtin they wish to present; a useful reminder, as Ken Hirschkop remarks, that all editions have an axe to grind (Hirschkop 1999, p. 124). Hirschkop is one of the clearest commentators on the appropriative processes of criticism, on how Bakhtin has been commonly aligned with a form of politics and social thought which does not necessarily follow from his philosophy; as suggested earlier, Derrida has suffered from a similar, although more diverse, traducement of his thought (e.g. Hirschkop 1999, p. viii). In particular, the sophisticated philosophical tools which Derrida employs have not been fully understood by literary theory, with a consequent "extraordinary blurring and toning-down of the critical implications of this philosopher's work" (Gasché 1994, p. 25).<sup>21</sup> Of course, by the logic

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<sup>20</sup> I have also clearly benefited from the kind support of Prof. David Shepherd and Dr. Craig Brandist in checking translations from Bakhtin's works.

<sup>21</sup> An important flipside to this argument – that Derrida himself misunderstood the work of Saussure, Marx, and Freud in the formation of his philosophical project – will be examined in the Conclusion.

of both Bakhtin and Derrida, although for different reasons, there could be no reading of a text that accurately and faithfully represented it in all its detail, even if that was a direct copy of the text. Yet both would still recognise the importance of sensitive and faithful readings, and wish to pursue the goal of complete understanding even in the knowledge that it will never be attained.

Before launching into the thesis proper, I would like to briefly outline the coming chapters, and say something about their order. The reasons for starting with Kant have been explained above, and the end-point of the thesis is the 1929 debate between Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger at the Swiss town of Davos. This was the juncture at which it became clear that the old methods of doing philosophy were less effective at addressing, even formulating, the questions that contemporary life presented, and that phenomenology was the philosophical movement of the moment. In general, it is Bakhtin's project to try to fuse the old methods with some of the new, while Derrida grounds himself in Heidegger's revision of phenomenology and works his way back to some older methodologies. The Davos debate is as convenient and arbitrary a close to the heuristic framework as Kant is an opening, which is not to say it is unjustified, merely that by 1929 most of the significant influences on Bakhtin and Derrida were in place, and the narrative has reached a natural rest. The topic of the Davos debate is Kant, who provides a starting-point to this work because of his seminal status in modern philosophy, and more specifically because of his treatment in Bakhtin and Derrida. For both thinkers, he provides a reflexive and unitary philosophical method that is a model for their similarly ambitious projects, and a balance of relations between the perceptive subject and the objective world that is equally useful as a guide. As with most of the other philosophers discussed in this text, Kant is more appropriated by Derrida and Bakhtin than read carefully, as they turn elements of his work to their own ends and often synthesise them with other perspectives. For Bakhtin, this happens relatively early in his career, as his understanding of Kant is immediately overshadowed by neo-Kantian and other readings, a point clearly visible through an analysis of the origins of the chronotope. Derrida, on the other hand, is more concerned to follow through Kant's arguments to a point where they are no longer self-sufficient, and require a deepening of self-awareness attainable through phenomenology, an idea developed by exploring his series of writings on Kant. Yet both Bakhtin and Derrida are concerned to develop Kantian philosophy away from the academy and return it to its power as a critical set of tools with which to live, a gesture particularly noticeable in their treatments of Kant's aesthetics which reinforce the

Kantian link with ethics, and question how far a transcendental philosophical method is possible. While both are interested in one intellectual approach to encompass all spheres of existence, neither regards Kant's solution as the definitive one, and indeed they hold off the category of totality with different degrees of scepticism.

This suspicion of totality is also explored by Chapter Two, which investigates the neo-Kantian reading of Kant, and Bakhtin's and Derrida's responses to this. It is examined at this achronological stage in the work because of its fundamental impact on Bakhtin, as well as its integration of Kantian philosophy with post-Kantian movements that are treated in more detail later. Neo-Kantianism differs from Kant's work in its certainty about a transcendental realm of value or validity that resolves some of Kant's problems in an idealist manner precluded by his own formulations. While neo-Kantianism initially relies on a very strong model of logic in all spheres of human knowledge and a downgrading of subjective experience, these beliefs are criticised both within the movement and in the responses offered by Bakhtin and Derrida. Bakhtin aligns neo-Kantianism with the notion of a "scientific philosophy" and synthesises it with phenomenology, a movement that also had pretensions to a foundational status, so that individual experience is returned to the fore of neo-Kantian thought. This move is heavily influenced by one of Bakhtin's friends and intellectual co-workers, Matvei Kagan, although neo-Kantianism pervades much of Bakhtin's thought and is therefore modified by a range of other sources. Derrida is touched far less explicitly by neo-Kantianism, so after a summary of general connections and influences, I offer a close reading of his piece on Hermann Cohen. By critically analysing Cohen's alignment of German and Jewish identities, Derrida continues his Kantian critique of the overlap of philosophical and political force while emphasising the necessary ethical interventions philosophy must make in real-world situations. Cohen may get it wrong by positing an essentialist connection of identities, but by recognising that philosophy has a part to play in politics, he lays the ground for more reflexive and self-aware kinds of engagement.

Chapter Three changes tack slightly by offering, after a relatively brief outline of Hegel's philosophy, a more detailed exploration of its reception and development in France between the 1930s and the 1950s. This is significant because of Derrida's generally negative reaction to it, although through the development of his own work he later comes to recognise the value of other interpretations of Hegel. French Hegelianism of this period was concerned with subjectivity, language, and totality, in a manner that determined Derrida's interest even while he refused its

conclusions, and it is not until the 1974 work *Glas* that Derrida is able to work through Hegel in any detail. He ends, I argue, by expanding the dialectic as he has expanded the Kantian philosophy of reflection, so that its structural prejudices and blindspots become evident, and the critic can move beyond them. This very direct response to Hegel is contrasted with Bakhtin's more generalised interpretation, as he demonstrates little familiarity with Hegel's primary works yet receives him through several other channels. Most notably, Ernst Cassirer offers a reading of Hegel that Bakhtin adopts, concentrating on language and the body in, respectively, the 1930s writings on the novel, and the Rabelais book. In his late methodological writings Bakhtin recovers a more reflective, open version of Hegel, although again through a re-reading of neo-Kantianism rather than through direct influence. Through different routes, therefore, both Bakhtin and Derrida are seen to reach a mature understanding of Hegel that, in an Hegelian fashion, builds and improves upon previous interpretations.

Romanticism, the subject of Chapter Four, forms another set of responses to Kant, and is particularly significant for invoking a strong vision of language that shapes the individual and her worldview. The Romantics emphasise the role of art in addressing problems of perception by asserting that each act of understanding is as creative and individual as any artistic endeavour. The subjective turn of Kant's work, socialised by Hegel and largely abandoned by neo-Kantianism, is strengthened here, although a transcendent boundary is maintained by emphasising the community and, particularly, the nation in the development of the individual. Bakhtin's 1930s works on the novel are read twice, first in relation to Romanticism's privileging of the novel as the only genre to accurately reflect the process of becoming. Bakhtin is seen to draw upon Romantic conceptions of genre and the author, although these are heavily mediated by other twentieth-century sources. This provides a bridge to my second investigation of the 1930s texts, this time in the context of the theories of language and national identity offered by students of Jan Baudouin de Courtenay and Nikolai Marr. Both schools move towards discussing language as stratified by social groups while retaining the Romantic framework of language as a marker of national identity, a tension that is continued in Bakhtin's work. The specific points of influence from Marrist linguistics are examined, before gesturing at how Bakhtin's other significant influences (notably *Lebensphilosophie* and neo-Kantianism) also mediate and develop Romanticism for their own ends. The section on Derrida and Romanticism treats only briefly his understanding of the movement as received through Nietzsche and



Heidegger, and brings together some points from the chapters about Kant and Hegel. Romantic thought, with its idealism and nascent conservatism, offers little to Derrida apart from its opening of a critique of rationalism. This, however, is much more significant in Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, who form two of the three subjects of the next chapter.

The third figure treated in Chapter Five is Schopenhauer, whose philosophy provides a bridge between post-Kantian thought and later varieties of irrationalism. It is his emphasis on the body, the overlap between art and philosophy, and the significance of aesthetic intuition that is most developed by Nietzsche, and although Bakhtin does not appear to have been directly familiar with his works, similar ideas can be found. Yet it is Nietzsche who is of greater significance, especially for Bakhtin in his various Russian adaptations, which were many and varied. The examples developed here are Viacheslav Ivanov and Anatolii Lunacharskii, cultural theorists whose work impacted on Bakhtin's ideas of carnival and Dostoevsky, and whose political commitments during the post-Revolutionary era indicate the stakes of Bakhtin's deployment of Nietzsche. Derrida's work on Nietzsche is similarly aware of the political risks, and his two longer commentaries (*Spurs* and "Otobiographies") attempt to model a hermeneutical method that can incorporate morally unacceptable readings without foreclosing interpretive freedom. The question of morality recurs with an investigation of Kierkegaard, underscoring his anti-rational conception of faith, and the absolute primacy of ethical responsibility. Bakhtin uses Kierkegaard as inspiration for the religious structures contained within his early works, while Derrida attempts to translate this explicitly theological framework into secular, ethical, terms. Kierkegaard also gathers together another set of interests in the chapter around the language of philosophy and the self-presentation of Derrida and Bakhtin. While there are clear differences between each author's construction of his own image, it is suggested as a commonality that both become aware of their representation as thinkers, and actively intervene in these processes.

Chapter Six deals with *Lebensphilosophie*, and notes some of its connections with Romanticism. This is brought out by the structure of my argument, which recapitulates the theme of language and national identity with reference to Derrida rather than to Bakhtin. Neither Bakhtin nor Derrida holds *Lebensphilosophie* in very high regard, but while both see it as a poor cousin to phenomenology, they also selectively deploy its resources, for instance emphasising the priority of experience over reason. Part of the reason for this is the diversity of the

movement, which brings together Bergson's critique of temporality and metaphysics, Simmel's early sociological investigations, and Dilthey's methodological focus. Bakhtin works with all three of these motifs, although in each case alongside neo-Kantian treatments, and this chapter investigates their significance in his early works, his writings on laughter, and the late methodological notes. Derrida, on the other hand, is more overtly critical of *Lebensphilosophie*, and while he admires Bergson's critique of conventional treatments of time, he fundamentally refuses his category of experience. This is unfolded into an investigation of Derrida's understanding of national identity in language, which, like Bakhtin's, is seen to be intrinsically political; Bakhtin deploys Romantic and Romantic-influenced ideas of language to question assumptions about the neutrality of language, and Derrida uses *Lebensphilosophie* to analyse the subjective language user's movement within objective structures of interpretation. The individual must work within and subvert these valorised linguistic institutions, and Derrida believes that phenomenology can be used to elucidate the actions through which this is possible.

Chapter Seven therefore deals with phenomenology, emphasising its diversity and range, and how it represents for Bakhtin and Derrida a modern formulation of problems that they have dealt with through other schools and authors. The relationship it posits between individual and world, its balance of experience and a transcendental science, and the awareness of a special bond between language and consciousness are all motifs treated elsewhere in this work and throughout Bakhtin's and Derrida's writings, but are gathered together by phenomenology. This is not to diminish phenomenology's original contribution, as, for instance, the concept of intentionality has enormous significance within Bakhtin's work, allowing him to regard the individual as a bundle of acts rather than a stable Kantian essence. Specifically, Bakhtin relies upon: Max Scheler, especially his theories of empathy and the transcendent determination of the subject; *Gestalt* theory, intertwined from its origins with phenomenology; and the philosophers of speech acts who develop Franz Brentano's work into an analysis of the social orientation of language. Derrida is similarly indebted to phenomenology, with his early works providing a sustained commentary on Husserl, and an attempt to recall that thinker to his own awareness of historical conditionality. This is also something drawn out by more materialist versions of phenomenology, specifically the work of Tran Duc Thao and Gaston Bachelard, whose works enjoy a significant impact on Derrida's. Both Bakhtin and Derrida therefore affiliate themselves to phenomenology, yet use it in very different ways; Bakhtin persistently emphasising the

idealist aspect and attempting to reconcile it with neo-Kantianism, and Derrida moving towards the materialist pole, or perhaps better, a form of thought which refuses such binaries.

This is all seen in Chapter Eight, the first part of an extended Conclusion, which deals with the Davos debate between Heidegger and Cassirer. Their debate is intended as a discussion about Kant, but it becomes instead an exchange of ideas about the nature and role of philosophy itself. It is important to this thesis because of this summarising function, and in particular the way it draws together the different themes and schools explored in the rest of the work. The two central influences on Derrida and Bakhtin – Heidegger and Cassirer – are investigated with constant reference to their usage of post-Kantian traditions, and their ambitions of finding a new role for philosophy. Following this is a detailed discussion of the Davos seminar and its relations to Bakhtin and Derrida; in fine, it is seen as the point of philosophical traditions dividing less because of differences in reference or ground, but more because of their conceptions of philosophy. This feeds into the Concluding Remarks where the argument of this work is summarised and drawn together, and some suggestions made as to where to turn next. Literary theory marks one attempt to fulfil the ambitions of Cassirer and Heidegger in reinvigorating philosophy and re-applying it to everyday life, yet one that failed to take into account the weight of its historical baggage. Because of its institutional success, it has become a repetition of the orthodoxy it attempted to overthrow rather than a subversion, and needs to be returned to its philosophical origins in order to recognise the wealth that lies within. Literary theory can be relatively easily dismissed if it is regarded solely as an invention of the twentieth century, as something born in or around 1968 and with no memory or history (cf. Tihanov 2004b). This project attempts to show that it is not, and consequently that richer interdisciplinary movements can be drawn from its resources once they have been more thoroughly understood.

# 1. Kant

## 1.1. Introduction

We begin, then, with Kant, and his vision of philosophy. This is a particularly apt starting-point as his work has fundamental importance both in specific terms of Derrida and Bakhtin, and more generally for the variety of philosophical traditions that they follow. Kant's Copernican revolution, which placed man at the centre of philosophy and looked to him rather than the world to determine the outlines of an epistemology, allows both Bakhtin and Derrida to develop their distinctive restructurings of the relationship between subject and reality. Both thinkers are interested in the limits of reason and the inevitability of faith even in the most rational systems, and indeed Derrida explicitly draws out Kant on this point, while Bakhtin looks more to neo-Kantianism to reach the same ends. They both are interested in the conditions of knowledge and knowing as much as the knowledge itself, which taps back into a Kantian vision of philosophy as an over-arching theory of knowledge. In different ways, and perhaps with differing degrees of scepticism, both Bakhtin and Derrida follow the Kantian examination of the conditions of possibility for human understanding. Finally, both Derrida and Bakhtin value Kant's work for the reflexive possibilities which it offers, its capacity to pass comment on its own methods and conclusions which, for Derrida, unfolds into a radical methodological self-awareness. What Kant sets himself and his whole system against is, "the dogmatic procedure of pure reason *without previous criticism of its own powers*", and this provides essential inspiration for both Bakhtin and Derrida (Kant 1969 [1787], p. 20). This chapter opens with an outline of Kant's thought, and then examines its reception in Bakhtin and Derrida. For both thinkers, a synoptic approach is adopted where their works are seen as coherent, although unfolding and shifting, projects; this is because both comment, directly (Derrida) or indirectly (Bakhtin) on Kant throughout their careers. Different kinds of influence are therefore found, as Bakhtin works with Kantian problems in their neo-Kantian or other formulations, while Derrida more frequently returns to the source. Both, however, are concerned with updating Kant's work, preserving its methodological rigour, and analysing its utility in more fragmented intellectual worlds.

## 1.2. Kant

I will begin by outlining some key tenets of Kant's philosophy, particularly as expressed by the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and gradually dilate the focus to include Kant's later work and his immediate influence on German philosophy. There are two elements to Kant's thought that it will be helpful to underscore immediately. The first is that Kantian philosophy is, from the outset, a meta-theory about the possibility of philosophy: it addresses the very basic question of "What can we know?", and never intends to lay out dogmatic answers and solutions. It is a system of doubt and inquiry rather than certainty and dogma (Höffe 1994 [1992], p. 2). The second is the simultaneous modernity of Kant, exposing many of the questions and techniques of philosophy with which we still grapple today, and his embeddedness within a particular set of historical circumstances. This unquestionably tells us something about the significance of the late eighteenth century in the formation of modern European society, and about the progress of modern European philosophy largely under the auspices of Kant. While his solutions, techniques, and arguably even formulation of the problems may have been troublesome, the fact that he raised them ensures his progenitorial status.

Prime among Kant's terms are *a priori* and *a posteriori* truths. A posteriori truths are relatively easy to define, for they are given to us by experience: I know that putting my hand into the fire on previous occasions has caused it to suffer pain, and that doing it again would be foolish. A priori therefore refers to things we know without experience; to develop the example above, that there is a causal link between my putting the hand into the fire, and the pain which follows soon after.<sup>1</sup> The a priori/a posteriori distinction provides Kant with one axis for a map of the structure of human judgements; and the other axis is shaped by the opposition between *analytic* and *synthetic* judgements. An analytic judgement is a judgement proved correct by the original terms of the proposition: nothing else needs to be brought to the statement *all bachelors are unmarried* to recognise that it is true (my examples come from Scruton 1982, pp. 18-19). Conversely, a synthetic judgement is one that affirms something in the predicate that is not contained within the subject: *all bachelors are unhappy* brings to the concept *bachelors* something external. The kind of judgement in which Kant is most interested in the *Critique of*

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<sup>1</sup> However, Kant does confusingly employ two meanings of a priori: in its strong version, it is something which is true for everyone; while in its weak usage, it is something believed true by someone, but not requiring general validation (Bennett 1966, p. 19).

something external. The kind of judgement in which Kant is most interested in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is synthetic a priori judgements, those that add something to a predicate without experience, through what Kant refers to as *intuition*. This form of pure thought is in harmony with the organisation of the outside world and can, according to Kant, provide us with certainties of reason upon which philosophies and actions, both individual and social, may be based. The two disciplines that, in ideal terms, are most capable of exploiting intuition are mathematics and ethics, although their ideal capacity does not translate directly into their actual performance, a point perhaps neglected by the neo-Kantian movement treated later. Yet justification for their strong reading of intuitive reason can undoubtedly be found in Kant; according to him, scientists such as Galileo realised that

reason only perceives that which it produces after its own design; that it must not be content to follow, as it were, in the leading-strings of nature, but must proceed in advance with principles of judgment according to unvarying laws, and compel nature to reply to its questions. [...] Reason must approach nature with the view, indeed, of receiving information from it, not, however, in the character of a pupil, who listens to all that his master chooses to tell him, but in that of a judge, who compels the witnesses to reply to those questions which he himself thinks fit to propose.

(Kant 1969 [1787], pp. 10-11)

In this one quotation we have Kant's simultaneous awareness of the strengths of reason and its possible limits, as well as of its complex relationship with the objective world. It also makes clear the significance of human activity in the development of knowledge, and the arrangements innate to human understanding that facilitate this discovery.

While a priori and a posteriori represent forms of knowledge, Kant suggests a parallel structure of faculties for obtaining that knowledge. He suggests there are primarily two mechanisms through which humans make judgements about the world, namely *sensibility* and *understanding*. The first of these is the main interest of Hume and the empiricists, namely our physical sensations and our necessarily limited sensorial means of receiving the outside world. Understanding, in contrast, is the rationalism of Leibniz and others, and matches a priori forms of knowledge: it is our intellectual capacity to organise and sift our sensorial impressions. The two faculties communicate via *schemata*, a problematic term in Kant's work, as sometimes he considers these schemata as a process of interaction, and sometimes as pre-given structures in

which sensibility and understanding meet (Scruton 1982, p. 25). One of the points at which Kant's work breaks with the history of philosophy thus far is his recognition that sensibility and understanding could be two equally valid but qualitatively different forms of perception. In the terms of Kant's early writings on the philosophy of science, they form a *real opposition* of two positive forces, rather than a *logical opposition* of thesis and antithesis, a move which enables Kant to go beyond narrow subscription to one school or another, and move towards a more open-minded critical style of philosophy (Beiser 1992, pp. 41-2). One of the problems that Kant recognises with the empiricist view, and which ensures that a posteriori and sensible judgements are always balanced with a priori and understanding-based ones, is that there are certain things all individual perceivers can recognise in common. Not least of these, according to Kant, is a self-awareness in perception, not as a Cartesian *cogito*, where thought becomes the guarantee of existence, but as a much more fundamental assurance that thought means the individual is thinking (Höffe 1994 [1992], p. 114). This is what Kant names the *transcendental unity of apperception*. The term merits some unpacking: "apperception" is a Leibnizian term for self-conscious experience, when you not only know but *know* that you are knowing; "unity" comes from the awareness of wholeness in the individual which this generates; and "transcendental" means it is not based in experience. It is therefore what precedes all data of intuition and provides the minimal conditions for perception (Scruton 1982, p. 32). What Kant is trying to do – and this is arguably one reason why his philosophy is still so influential – is to recover a sense of wonder that despite the confusion and flux of the world of sensorial and intellectual impressions (the *manifold*, as Kant refers to it), individuals can still make valid and reliable judgements. The explanation that he offers for this may have been interpreted as too dogmatic, but it is important to recall that Kant arrived there through a process of open discussion and reason, and did not begin with the intention of proving transcendental categories (Pinkard 2002, p. 31).

After determining, by his own lights, that human judgements must not be exclusively under the control of the sensations, but be guided by elements of a priori, non-experiential, understanding, Kant then sets out to examine what some of these a priori forms might be. He produces a table of twelve categories, deduced from a dozen "moments" in the process of judgement and which form a transcendental complement to those more empirical conceptions (Kant 1969 [1787], pp. 79, 74). The fundamental step which Kant takes, and which he believes

to qualities of the object. This is not to say that they exhaust the object, or that the object is composed exclusively of these categories; rather, that that is all we are able to find. Again, Kant is trying to chart a middle way between the rationalism of Leibniz, which asserts the inviolability of every object and its total independence from the perceiver, and the empiricism of Hume, which locates the value of perception firmly in the perceiver. In calling it his “Copernican revolution”, Kant noted how his system of critical philosophy fundamentally changed the philosophical structure for investigating the world: objects of knowledge do not appear of their own accord but must be brought to appearance by the subject (Kant 1969 [1787], p. 12; Höffe 1994 [1992], p. 38). The radical nature of this turn should not be underestimated, for as one twentieth-century commentator has it, “The first thing the Copernican revolution teaches us is that it is we who are giving the orders” (Deleuze 1984 [1963], p. 14).<sup>2</sup> So if the complete object necessarily cannot be discovered through processes of human perception, what, then, remains? Kant posits, but can never prove, the existence of a *Ding-an-sich*, a thing-in-itself, which underpins the variety of possible judgements. It is, quite simply, something of which we can have no knowledge, yet which reason should always pursue and attempt to define more narrowly. A structurally similar element of Kant’s argument is the *unconditioned*, that which is caused by itself and derived from no other source: in other words, an ultimate grounding for reason. As with the thing-in-itself, the unconditioned quite simply cannot be proved, yet should always be the desired aim of philosophy. These two components of Kant’s system point out how it is as much a system of doubt as it is of certainty, and this is something Kant, a certain rhetorical bravado aside, is keen to emphasise:

philosophy is merely the idea of a possible science, which does not exist *in concreto*, but to which we endeavour in various ways to approximate, until we have discovered the right path to pursue – a path overgrown by the errors and illusions of sense – and the image we have hitherto tried to shape in vain, has become a perfect copy of the great prototype. Until that time, we cannot learn philosophy. [...] We can only learn to philosophize, in other words, we can only exercise our powers of reasoning in accordance with general principles, retaining at the same time, the right of investigating the sources of these principles, of testing, and even of rejecting them.

(Kant 1969 [1787], p. 474)

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<sup>2</sup> Undoubtedly Deleuze is influenced by the anthropocentrism of the contemporary (1960s) reading of Hegel, a theme and confusion we will return to both in Chapter Three, and in the section on Derrida and Kant.



One of the aspects of reason which Kant draws out here is its innate reflexivity, its capacity to examine its own premises and find them wanting, an idea which is too quickly lost in the Romantic movement, and assuredly in the image of Kant presented by the neo-Kantians in Germany at the start of the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> For instance, the “sceptical method” introduced by the first Critique allows contradictory arguments to run against each other, without any attempt at resolution (Kant 1969 [1787], pp. 258-9). These are known as *antinomies*, disputes in which reason cannot be faulted on either side, and the philosopher’s task is to draw significance from their irresolution. The method has been compared to psychoanalysis in its uncritical attempt to let all sides be heard, and forms part of Kant’s mistrust of dogmatism, or the absolute assertion of only one side of reason (Höffe 1994 [1992], p. 116). The reflexive tendency that Kant’s work offers has proved historically one of its most valuable contributions, and certainly plays a prominent role in Bakhtin’s and Derrida’s appropriations. However, there have always been alternative views, such as that pithily expressed by Brentano: “It is well known that men were able to reason correctly for thousands of years without having reflected upon the principles of valid reason and even without knowing anything about them” (Brentano 1969 [1889], p. 38). This downplaying of reason, sometimes folding over into a direct suspicion, forms a major current of nineteenth-century thought, yet one not entirely opposed to Kantian philosophy. Because Kant is interested in the minimal conditions for knowledge, he can prioritise the question of *how we know* above *what we know*, thus extending his rational critical philosophy beyond the initial sphere of epistemology into other, more diffuse, territories.

After his *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant expanded his theory of knowledge to ethics (in the *Critique of Practical Reason*), theology (*Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* and other writings), aesthetics (the *Critique of Judgement*), and politics. The last of these categories is only at first glance less substantial than the others because Kant wrote relatively sparsely on political questions. For one thing, it is no great challenge to find in his philosophical work comments of political import; when talking about “a constitution [for] *the greatest possible human freedom*”, there are seen to be “obstacles which perhaps do not necessarily arise from the character of human nature, but rather from the previous neglect of true ideas in legislation” (Kant 1969 [1787], p. 220). For another, a political or social extrapolation from his ethical theory is

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<sup>3</sup> Although Köhnke argues that the interest in methodology is one of the first things to be recovered from Kant’s writings in the early neo-Kantianism of the 1860s, especially when *Weltanschauung* philosophies atrophied in their institutional dominance (Köhnke 1991, p. 115).

perfectly plausible. So let us begin from the ethics, and from their origins in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Here, Kant recognises how the existence of antinomies and irresolvable conflicts of reason in no way negates the individual's obligation to act: speculative reason is essential for determining the possibilities of action, but is no substitute for action itself (Kant 1969 [1787], p. 288). Kant's deployment of reason in ethics manifests itself in several ways, most famously with the concept of the *categorical imperative*. The theory behind this is that all individuals should act as if, at the same time, they willed their actions to become a universal law; the practice, unfortunately, is more complex. To be willing to accept your actions as a universal principle is no guarantee of their moral worth; nor are there many actions that could not, under specific circumstances, become immoral or detrimental to the individual. However, the categorical imperative can serve as a litmus test for the individual's own ethical precepts, which Kant organises as *maxims*, groups of laws which determine general goods for the individual without calling for specific actions. To use Otfried Höffe's fine example, a non-swimmer would help a drowning man differently from a strong swimmer, although both would acknowledge the maxim of the need to help (Höffe 1994 [1992], p. 149). Kant is as interested in determining the minimal conditions for ethical action as he is in discovering the minimal conditions for knowledge, and this means he strips away all social reward or privilege from ethical action in search of an absolute, unmotivated good. To perform an action either because it will be rewarded, or because failure to perform it will be punished, is nothing more than *duty*; what Kant desires, and that to which we should all aspire, is autonomous *morality*.<sup>4</sup> Distinct from what some of his critics have argued, Kant recognises from the outset that there is a division between personal and political morality, and acknowledges that he is concentrating only on the first, giving an idealist tinge to his writing (Höffe 1994 [1992], p. 142). As with his writings on epistemology, the difficulty, perhaps impossibility, of completing the project does not impact on the necessity for it to begin.

Kant's third Critique deals with aesthetics, and attempts to draw together his work on knowledge and ethics into one coherent system. As this amalgamation of, especially, ethics and aesthetics provides most meat for Bakhtin and Derrida, I will not dwell on it here, but will rather note how Kant seems driven to test the limits of reason's powers, so that from the relatively

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<sup>4</sup> Without anticipating my argument too much, surely here is an obvious point of connection between Bakhtin and Derrida: for both, ethics is not only granted an originary place within their philosophical systems, but also integrated into their conceptions of life (e.g. Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], pp. 41-2; Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 22; Derrida 1997 [1994], p. 79; or Derrida 1995 [1992], *passim*).

traditional ground of metaphysics and epistemology, he turns to less easily rationalised problematics, such as morality, art, and theology. The basic structure of Kant's thought, and especially his ethics, links immanence and transcendence, leading to a theology which emphasises if not the logical necessity of God at least his rational expediency; as one strongly Hegelian commentator on Kant puts it, "God becomes no more than the theological expression of man's aspiration towards a perfect community" (Goldmann 1971 [1967], p. 91).<sup>5</sup> Theology also becomes for Kant another arena for exploring the problem of *freedom*: he sees inner freedom (*virtue* or *personal morality*) as best dealt with by theology, while history represents the pursuit of outer freedom (also known as *law*) (Höffe 1994 [1992], p. 193). For Kant, freedom has a greater significance even than reason; he argues in 1784, "If only rational beings can be ends in themselves, that is not because they have reason, but because they have freedom. Reason is merely a means" (quoted Guyer 1998, p. 189). Kant also distinguishes different kinds of freedom in the terms he uses: for instance *Willkür* or *free choice* belongs to the public realm of limited goods and compromises, and is essentially bounded by natural appetite; while *Wille*, *free will*, is the highest private realm of morality, answerable only on a transcendental plane, and unrestricted by individual desire. The two forms of freedom are not necessarily coincidental, although both should always be kept in mind during the selection of maxims (Pinkard 2002, p. 55). Kant recognised that the empirical individual has freedom only on the transcendental level, which may hamper the performance of our actions but in no way impacts on the obligation to act (Scruton 1982, p. 60).

One of the main problems with Kant is his seemingly relentless desire for systematisation. His tendency to divide things into threes and fours is well-known, as is the impulse to create parallels and interlocking structures; what it is easier to miss is how such a desire for totality can diminish the genuine insights and revelations (Bennett 1966, p. 89). In the introduction to the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant asserts "My chief aim in this work has been thoroughness; and I make bold to say, that there is not a single metaphysical problem that does not find its solution, or at least the key to its solution, here" (Kant 1969

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<sup>5</sup> This slippage between logical reasoning and structural convenience is one of the things which Bakhtin and Derrida both find to criticise in Kant, although it should be noted that their readings often repeat such a movement: Bakhtin criticises Kant through the neo-Kantian reading which separated absolutely experience and validity, even though this distinction is more cautiously phrased in Kant, while Derrida sets to work on a range of Kant's perceived binaries, not least that of sensation and understanding (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 6; Derrida 1987 [1978], pp. 17-147).

[1787], p. 3). This arrogance is toned down in the second edition of the Critique, as it becomes less necessary to boast of his achievements, and more necessary to prove them (Höffe 1994 [1992], p. 35). The desire for totality does, nevertheless, have its champions, for instance Goldmann, who sees Kant as unique among modern philosophers for recognising the integration of individual and society in a reciprocal whole reliant on all sections in order to function (Goldmann 1971 [1967], p. 53). Goldmann also notes, again in a very Hegelian mode, that where Kant differs from Hume and Leibniz is in seeing that totality is something *created* by man, not merely *discovered* by him (Goldmann 1971 [1967], p. 105). It is a goal for man, and one that ascribes to him dignity and purpose. Yet this humanism – or rather, the psychologism that it implies – has also been seen as a significant problem in Kant’s work. The psychological phrasing of the analytic/synthetic distinction, where it becomes a matter of individual decision what kind of judgement is being made, neglects other possibilities, such as those judgements which appear to be true although the concepts are false: for instance, “Every circle is square” (Bennett 1966, p. 7). Kant also relies heavily on the self-consciousness of the individual, so that certain non-self-conscious perceptive acts, such as could occur during a temporary bout of insanity, would be seen by Kant as not necessarily existent (Bennett 1966, p. 105). Connected with this is a problem commonly seen in his ethics, where the sum of individuals’ good actions is equated, almost unthinkingly, with a social good (Schneewind 1992, p. 325). This is not necessarily the case: it would be good for each individual to recognise their abuse of natural resources and forswear driving, but not good for the society which had to suddenly adjust to the consequences. Gillian Rose has chased back the crisis of philosophy and the birth of social theory of the early twentieth-century to Kant’s ethics which, by separating legality and morality, breaks the linkage between individual and social action (Rose 1993, p. 27). This is clearly influenced by her own Hegelian position, but it contains a deal of truth in its criticism of Kant, and certainly clarifies reasons for some specifics of his interpretation by the Romantics.<sup>6</sup> One final problem returns us to where we began, with the category of totality: by ascribing such significance to reason and rational inquiry, Kant sometimes neglected to emphasise his important qualifications, most notably the need for the concept of reason itself to be subject to critical

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<sup>6</sup> In its own way, Derrida’s writing on Kant also approaches this individualisation of institutional problems, although resolves them in a manner anathematic to Rose; perhaps here is one reason for her acerbic comments on Derrida (Cf. Derrida 1991, pp. 61-71; 1992 [1980], p. 21; Rose 1993, pp. 65-87; 1984, pp. 131-70)?

inquiry. This allowed a certainty and presumption about reason to develop in post-Kantian philosophy that was not validated by the source material.

Kant's philosophy had a remarkable impact in the closing decades of the eighteenth century and after, not least in its prompt to Hegel and the following dialectical tradition. German Idealism, the name given to one of the predominant schools of philosophy at least partially reliant on Kant, develops his work away from the empiricist sources and very much towards the idealism he accepted only critically. Fichte, for instance, argues that reason is an action rather than an idea, and that searching for its origins and justifications is a mistake; we should accept that it works in its spontaneity, and occupy ourselves with the consequences (Pinkard 2002, p. 107). Schelling similarly changes the emphasis of Kant's work, suggesting that nature is not given enough significance, and so equates the mind, and the innate principles that Kant recognised, with a transcendental spirit of nature (Höffe 1994 [1992], pp. 234-5). Jacobi's main contribution to post-Kantian thought is to emphasise the inescapability of faith: he does not consider Kant to have overcome Hume's scepticism, and instead suggests there is a *salto mortale*, a leap of the intellect, in every act of knowing. This had a tremendous influence on the Romantics, and indeed on subsequent irrationalist philosophies (Pinkard 2002, p. 94). There is a tension, and one which will become increasingly clear as my argument develops, between following Kant's own arguments, and using Kant to achieve other intellectual ends. Probably the most famous instance of this is Hegel, where, to follow Goldmann's fine description, the question of "How are synthetic judgements a priori possible?" becomes "How do *isolated and independent* men who take no account of one another and who recognize their own reason as the sole judge and the highest court of appeal not only understand one another, but *necessarily* understand one another?" (Goldmann 1971 [1967], p. 152). This social mediation of Kant's individualistic outlook becomes, in rather different ways, a predominant concern for Bakhtin and Derrida, both of whom are interested in the experiential side of Kantian philosophy which its founder neglects. For Bakhtin in particular, the tie between ethics and aesthetics needs to be recalled to this intersubjective, social context in order for its significance to unfold most fully. It is to his reading of Kantian philosophy to which we now turn.

### 1.3. Kant and Bakhtin

There is little of Kant in Bakhtin that has not reached him through any number of intermediaries. The predominant mediating filter is neo-Kantianism, as Chapter Two will explain at length, but Bakhtin's influence from Hegelianism and Romanticism, even in their twentieth-century adaptations, means he still strongly bears the imprint of other readings of Kant. Where Kant is cited directly in Bakhtin's work (as in the instance of the chronotope explored below), the Kantian source is almost immediately overlaid with a neo-Kantian reading. Yet the deep influence of Kant on the shape of modern philosophy leads to a typological similarity between their work, most notably in their concern with methodology and philosophical universality, and with the subsequent ambition of their projects. This section examines Bakhtin's work in terms of its affiliations with Kant without trying to anticipate the argument of the neo-Kantianism chapter, and begins with one of his earliest and most complex texts, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*.

This piece brings together a whole range of philosophical viewpoints – most noticeably, neo-Kantianism, phenomenology, and *Lebensphilosophie* – which will be explored in the rest of this work, so the point about directly Kantian influence being overlaid by many others is, perhaps paradoxically, clearest here. The focus on ethics, especially in connection with aesthetics, plays out very strongly, and Bakhtin follows a Kantian division of morality and duty: an individual is not absolved from his personal moral responsibilities by virtue of his position or social role, even if this is a religious one (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 52). The individual's moral responsibility is paramount, and he must set aside all other considerations in order to act purely, or in Kantian terms, autonomously. This is a key element in Bakhtin's broader argument about the discovery of moral values only through experience, to which we will return when discussing neo-Kantianism and Kierkegaard (e.g. Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 6). Responsibility is linked to aesthetics because "In order to give a preliminary idea of the possibility of [...] a concrete, value-governed architectonics", Bakhtin chooses to analyse "the world of aesthetic seeing – the world of art" (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 61). This,

In its concreteness and its permeatedness with an emotional-volitional tone [...] is closer than any of the abstract cultural worlds (taken in isolation) to the unitary and unique world of the performed act. An analysis of this world should help us to come closer to an understanding of the architectonic structure of the actual world-as-event.

(Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 61)

The traditionalism of this vision of art as an exemplar for society should be obvious, although the emphasis Bakhtin places on their common foundational architectonics is distinctively Kantian. Like Kant, Bakhtin sees the significance of rationality as its capacity to help the individual act in an ethical manner rather than as a goal in itself, and thereby, most probably unconsciously, softens the neo-Kantian blow by recovering a Kantian open-mindedness: "Rationality is but a moment of answerability" (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 29). One of the main targets of *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* is formalism in ethics, a belief in abstract, absolute structures of right and wrong into which the individual belatedly fits.<sup>7</sup> Bakhtin counters this through his qualifications over the use of reason, the awareness of the social mediation of moral goals, and above all the weight that he lays upon the individual's subjective existence and her particular responsibilities and decisions at any one time. "Participative thinking", philosophy that attempts an understanding of this existential specificity, is lauded as the best path for progress (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 8).

A very similar structure is carried over into Bakhtin's early aesthetic writings. Here, it is poetry that bears the burden of everyday life, and that unlike linguistics remains receptive to the nuances of language and meaning, thus providing access to the transcendental without being overwhelmed by it (Bakhtin 1990 [1924], p. 294). Indeed, the general thrust of "The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art" is to exploit the weakness of the Formalist position, which lays such emphasis on the third of the titular elements, by highlighting unity (or at least harmony) in the other spheres. This is attempted through an adaptation of another Kantian formula, the pure "architectonic forms" that Bakhtin sees underpinning literary genres, so developing them from a first-order recognition of an object to a second-order recognition of a collection of traits or objects into a distinct type (Bakhtin 1990 [1924], p. 270). Much closer, as we shall see, to Cassirer, Bakhtin argues that architectonic forms of artistic perception are social in a way that piggybacks on more primordial forms of being: "Architectonic forms are forms of the inner and bodily value of aesthetic man. [...] They are forms of aesthetic being in its distinctiveness" (Bakhtin 1990 [1924], p. 270). As in the ethical philosophy, it is only through "autonomous participation" or "participative autonomy" in the unitary cultural system that every

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<sup>7</sup> "Formalism in ethics" of course makes reference to Max Scheler's work, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, upon which Bakhtin was reliant throughout his early work.

cultural phenomenon has meaning, the use of “autonomy” underscoring the Kantian lineage (Bakhtin 1990 [1924], p. 274). The basic structure that the early Bakhtin applies to a range of intellectual spheres – active individuals and passive structures – certainly mirrors the Kantian framework, yet more through its adaptation by other schools (most pertinently, *Lebensphilosophie*) than through direct exposure. This is clarified by a brief diversion in Bakhtin’s career into biological science, and the vitalist line he develops there. The 1926 article “Contemporary Vitalism” which has been ascribed to Bakhtin argues for an innate purposiveness materially contained within certain organisms that allows them to grow and reproduce even when divided into sections.<sup>8</sup> This recalls two things. Firstly the early Bakhtin’s habit of discussing creative elements as if they were conscious organisms, for instance, “Aesthetic form, as an intuitively uniting and consummating form, descends upon content [...] and transposes it to a new axiological plane” (Bakhtin 1990 [1924], p. 282). Secondly, it resonates with Kant’s development of his arguments about purposiveness into biology, where again he argued for a self-conscious teleology within living organisms (Höffe 1994 [1992], p. 223). However, as Bakhtin’s source is clearly the work of Bergson and the theories of vitalism he contributed, this coincidence with Kant serves as an example of how their projects ran and developed along similar lines.

This text on vitalist scientific philosophy can also be tied back to Kant through an argument about historical proximity. During the period when Bakhtin was in Leningrad (1924-30), he gave lectures to the Circle on Kant and the neo-Kantian movement, the content of which has been summarised by a leading Bakhtinian:

first, that “the issue in Kant is the substitution of historical consciousness for natural consciousness (and its loopholes)”, second, that philosophy – genuine, systematic philosophy – had to be the guardian of this historical consciousness, and finally, that one had to draw a firm and sharp distinction between the “unity of culture” which was the true bearer of history and the “unity of consciousness”, inevitably relative to a personal position, to which this culture was so often reduced (this final argument would be repeated in Bakhtin’s book on Dostoevsky, when he argued against the monological reduction of truth to the contents of a single consciousness).

(Hirschkop 1999, p. 161)

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<sup>8</sup> This article, along with the complications over its authorship, will be dealt with in Chapter Six.



The first two points are strongly Hegelian and will be touched on in the relevant chapter, while the third, with its division of a “unity of consciousness” from a “unity of culture”, is clearly neo-Kantian, although with Hegelian underpinnings. Yet it is worth following Hirschkop’s suggestion of examining the 1929 Dostoevsky book as interested in the Kantian passage between subjective and objective, especially given its special status within Bakhtin’s canon. This text acts as a hinge between the individualist, ethically-centred, neo-Kantian early works, and the intersubjective, ideology-centred, more Hegelian 1930s writings on the novel. Here are the openings of the interest in social movements and beliefs, without the historical-teleological frame of, for instance, “Discourse in the Novel”, and the interest in intersubjectivity as the interaction of individuals before it moves towards a more diffuse structure of internal linguistic relations. This last point is significant, as it develops the Kantian notion of individual moral responsibility through a phenomenological argument about the interaction of juridical subjects as demonstrations of ethical action:

Plot in Dostoevsky is absolutely devoid of any sort of finalizing functions. Its goal is to place a person in various situations that expose and provoke him, to bring people together and make them collide in conflict – in such a way, however, that they do not remain within this area of plot-related contact but exceed its bounds. The real connections begin where the ordinary plot ends, having fulfilled its service function.

(Bakhtin 1984 [1929], pp. 276-7)<sup>9</sup>

This Kantian vision of interacting conscious individuals is already shading over into an Hegelian reading, where history is the product of such meetings or conflicts, and it does so via an emphasis on language as the model for interaction. This is perhaps why Bakhtin takes so strongly against Romantic adaptations of Kant, as in his dogmatic statement that “Ideological monologism found its clearest and theoretically most precise expression in idealistic philosophy”, in other words that it leaves no room for the social interaction which he now cherishes (Bakhtin 1984 [1963], p. 80). For this interest in intersubjectivity is a relatively recent turn in Bakhtin’s work, and one unquestionably aided by the writings of Medvedev and Voloshinov: without them, Bakhtin simply would not have developed the conviction “that every literary work is internally and immanently sociological” (Bakhtin 1984 [1929], p. 276). Similarly, the linkage of ethics and aesthetics developed in the early works is altered, although

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<sup>9</sup> For a development of this argument, see 7.3. of this work, and Brandist 2004b.

the confidence in one philosophical method to unite the two remains, and indeed the motif of incarnation as the embodiment of moral action becomes stronger through the emphasis on intersubjectivity (e.g. Bakhtin 1984 [1929], pp. 277-8). Just as art becomes more a matter of social determination than of individual volition, so does moral choice, and we move from even loosely Kantian elements to more firmly neo-Kantian.

This is particularly noticeable in Bakhtin's late 1930s concept of the chronotope, which Bakhtin introduces thus: "In his 'Transcendental Aesthetics' (one of the main sections of his *Critique of Pure Reason*) Kant defines space and time as indispensable forms of any cognition, beginning with elementary perceptions and representations" (Bakhtin 1981 [1937-8], p. 85, n. 2). This much is Kantian; yet almost immediately we turn to a Marburg neo-Kantian revision:

Here we employ the Kantian evaluation of the importance of these forms in the cognitive process, but differ from Kant in taking them not as "transcendental" but as forms of the most immediate reality. We shall attempt to show the role these forms play in the process of concrete artistic cognition (artistic visualization) under conditions obtaining in the genre of the novel.

(Bakhtin 1981 [1937-8], p. 85, n. 2)

Time and space are no longer transcendental preconditions for perception but forms of experience, revealing more about the individual's perceptive act than the a priori conditions of possibility investigated by Kant. This is clearly influenced by Cohen, who while dividing the constants of time and space saw both as determining images of nature, and Cassirer, whose arguments about the cultural determination of ways of conceiving of space and time impact so heavily on Bakhtin during the early 1930s (Brandist 2002a, p. 123).<sup>10</sup> Indeed, Bakhtin goes further along this neo-Kantian route by examining time and space as characteristics of the novel, of fictionalised writing, rather than immediate experience (Scholz 1998, p. 147).<sup>11</sup> A harmony can also be seen between the argument of the chronotope essay and its form, as the published text brings together ideas from at least three different phases in Bakhtin's work in a manner which foregrounds the disparity and historical development between them rather than the unity

<sup>10</sup> Both themes to be unpacked in Chapter Two.

<sup>11</sup> Bakhtin makes a similar slip when Cassirer's work enters his reading: Cassirer intends symbolic forms to be general means of manifesting human thought, while Bakhtin regards them as narrower kinds of creativity. In other words, Cassirer sees a symbolic form as something like language, while Bakhtin sees it as elements within language such as dialects and social strata (Brandist 1997, p. 24). This creative misunderstanding is also what happens to Kant's architectonic forms, as mentioned above.

(Wall 2001, p. 139). It does not rely exclusively on either Kantian or neo-Kantian figures, and one critic goes as far as to regard the stated framework of the chronotope as a heuristic flag of convenience:

having introduced a neologism [...] and having said something about its semantics [...] Bakhtin wished to say something about the *type* of concept to which the chronotope belonged, and he did so by means of the (Neo-)Kantian conceptual framework which dominated German philosophy prior to the ascendancy of Husserlian Phenomenology and Neo-Positivism. That framework, one might say, provided him with the conceptual means for articulating an insight into the role of space-time relations which, under different circumstances, he might conceivably have articulated in a different framework.

(Scholz 1998, p. 149)

This should undoubtedly be taken as a warning for other apparently easily-traceable elements in Bakhtin's work, yet perhaps risks subordinating the specific reliance the chronotope enjoys on a Kantian paradigm. It is for Kantian and neo-Kantian philosophy to provide the mixture of subjective and objective that enables Bakhtin to explicate his theory of individual creativity and social inclination, just as it did twenty years previously in his early work.

Bakhtin's work over the next thirty-five years moves so strongly towards Hegelian and other arguments that Kantian elements almost completely drop out. A good example of this is the early 1950s work on discursive genres where, instead of a Kantian investigation of the conditions of possibility underpinning various kinds of verbal form, Bakhtin synthesises phenomenological and Romantic conceptions of genre to create a much more experiential critique. It is only in the very late works that an interest in Kant, primarily through neo-Kantianism, is recovered. One element of this to which we will frequently return is the methodological orientation of these later writings:

Our analysis must be called philosophical mainly because of what it is not: it is not a linguistic, philological, literary, or any other special kind of analysis (study). The advantages are these: our study will move in the liminal spheres, that is, on the borders of all the aforementioned disciplines, at their junctures and points of intersection.

(Bakhtin 1986 [1959-61], p. 103)

This interest in methodology is by no means exclusively Kantian, but it does recall important Kantian themes about the unity of knowledge, and means of knowing. That Bakhtin was still

mindful of his 1920s influences during the 1970s is demonstrated at several points in the text (not least by his assertion, “Spengler’s ideas about closed and finalized cultural worlds still exert a great influence on historians and literary scholars”), and neo-Kantianism in particular seems to have retained a hold (Bakhtin 1986 [1970], p. 6). This is why in a passage about the incorporation of others’ words into individuals’ speech he can see “The ‘unsaid’ as a *shifting boundary*, as a ‘regulative idea’ (in the Kantian sense) of creative consciousness” (Bakhtin 1986 [1975], p. 163). This “regulative idea” is much more a neo-Kantian than a Kantian notion, and one that pegs down a distinction between experiential and transcendental at least more sophisticated within Kant’s work. In general, therefore, while strong typological similarities do exist between Kant and Bakhtin, this is traceable more to the development of philosophical traditions from Kant than to Bakhtin’s primary knowledge *per se*. For instance, when coming to terms with the distinction just offered between knowledge given through experience and that attained by the intellect, he does not employ the Kantian binary of sensible and intelligible, but the neo-Kantian one of experience and validity, heavily influenced by the philosophy-of-life concepts of life and form. Bakhtin chooses modern descriptions of and solutions to philosophical problems, even if those problems can ultimately be traced back to Kant.

#### 1.4. *Kant and Derrida*

The alignment of Derrida and Kant is an action much less radical than it appears. The ordered, systematising philosopher of reason and the literary, ironic philosophical gadfly could be seen to inhabit separate intellectual worlds, meeting only in the form of dismissive comparisons or complaints about what philosophy has become. However, this vision of each thinker is weak, and more likely to be grounded in traditions of secondary comment than individual primary reading. To give some idea of the reversals possible: Kant’s idea of reason can be seen as a socially, morally, even theologically transformative force; Derrida’s work a prolonged series of comments on the possibility of philosophical systems. There is a recognised critical tradition which draws the two together, as well as making more general comparisons of German Idealism or its roots, and French post-structuralism (cf. Pinkard 2002; Norris 1990; Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1988 [1978]; Behler 1993; Bowie 1997). This argument is best represented by Christopher Norris, who has written some of the most stimulating commentary on the matter:

Derrida provides the most rigorous, indeed the most authentically *Kantian* reading of Kant precisely through his willingness to problematise the grounds of reason, truth and knowledge. Deconstruction refuses to rest content with the notion of an end-point to critical enquiry, a stage at which thinking simply has to accept the self-evidence of its own rational laws. Kant's appeal to "a priori forms of intuition" thus appears a kind of stopgap measure and one, furthermore, that voids the more radical implications of his own thinking. It is in the nature of transcendental arguments to push back the proofs of enquiry from stage to stage and ask at every point what grounds exist for our claim to know truly what we think we know. And it is the virtue of Derrida's reading to raise this question to the highest point of visibility, to demand a reason for reason itself, without resorting to premature forms of intuitive self-evidence or circular argument.

(Norris 1990, p. 199)

Derrida here works very firmly within the Kantian tradition, developing its insights and arguments in a manner which forces reason, transcendental philosophy, and the critical method to reflect upon themselves. As we will see below, this is a model of his work that Derrida is, for a variety of reasons, relatively happy to accept; one example often adduced is his rhetorical question,

Who is more faithful to reason's call, who hears it with a keener ear, who better sees the difference, the one who offers questions in return and tries to think through the possibility of that summons, or the one who does not want to hear any question about the reason of reason.

(Derrida 1983a, p. 9)

The search for a ground of reason which this question enacts is an essentially Kantian theme, like its implication that philosophy should be a system of doubt rather than certainty. As we have seen, Kant argues that we cannot learn philosophy as a stable body of knowledge, only to philosophise or constantly interrogate our assumptions, a suggestion which Derrida glosses as "The essence of philosophy excludes teaching; the essence of philosophizing demands it" (Kant 1969 [1787], p. 474; Derrida 1984a, p. 138). Norris has made the acute point that readers of both Derrida's and Kant's works have often forgotten this openness, and have tended "to pass over the detail of [their] 'philosophic' arguments and latch on to their radical conclusions without fully grasping the structured genealogy of concepts which holds them in place" (Norris 1985, p. 221). The injunction to read more slowly and carefully is, of course, classically Derridean, and marks a

very different manifestation of the Enlightenment heritage of rationalism. This lasting legacy is noted by Derrida in suitably complex terms:

In the daylight of today we cannot not have become the heirs of these *Lumières*. We cannot and we must not – this is a law and a destiny – forgo the *Aufklärung*, in other words what imposes itself as the enigmatic desire for vigilance, for the lucid vigil [*veille*], for elucidation, for critique and truth, but for a truth that at the same time keeps within itself some apocalyptic desire, this time as desire for clarity and revelation, in order to demystify or, if you prefer, to deconstruct apocalyptic discourse itself and with it everything that speculates on vision, the imminence of the end, theophany, parousia, the last judgement.

(Derrida 1984b, p. 22)

This section develops the logic of Derrida's argument, so that his Kantian investigation turns to questioning Kant's premises and ultimately finds them wanting. This makes him both the culmination and subversion of Enlightenment thought, although it is in the bones of that project to continue its investigation after Derrida.<sup>12</sup>

Derrida's first explicit and sustained engagement with Kant is in the field of his aesthetics which, in a move familiar by this point in Derrida's career, is used as a lever to expand other elements of his philosophy. With Kant, of course, this is relatively easy, as he himself emphasised how his progression from epistemology to ethics to aesthetics not only formed a coherent system, but resolved problems formulated in his earlier works. And in one sense Derrida picks up on this, not dismissing the problems of Kant's aesthetics as irrelevant remnants of modernism, but seeking to work through them and emphasise that the issues they deal with are important and that aesthetics still has general relevance today (Norris 2000a, p. 67). Kant argues that judgement, the subject of the third Critique, is a *Mittelglied*, "middle articulation", between understanding and reason, and by challenging our reading of judgement Derrida can dilate his focus to criticise the secondary terms.<sup>13</sup> One of the traditional points of criticism of Kant's aesthetics, and a main target in Derrida's work commentary, is Kant's notion that the spectator of

<sup>12</sup> This line of argument follows, for instance, Levinas, who describes Derrida as engaged in a Kantian project of using reason to critique all constructs, including itself and metaphysics (Critchley 1992, p. 147).

<sup>13</sup> This is a strategy also adopted by one of Gilles Deleuze's early works, the dense and tough *Kant's Critical Philosophy*, which takes seriously Kant's promises of systematicity and uses the arguments of the third Critique to develop the first two (Deleuze 1984 [1963]). Derrida, to my knowledge, never makes direct reference to Deleuze's work on Kant, but it is a striking indication of a cultural mood that aesthetics can, at the very least, be used as an entrance-point to a complex moral and epistemological philosophy.

a beautiful artwork should remain entirely disinterested. Derrida develops this line of argument by taking the third Critique itself as a beautiful object, and asking whether Kant's clear devotion to and pleasure in the text forms a refutation of its own argument (Derrida 1987 [1978], p. 49). The rationality which Kant attempts to preserve as pure, objective, and entirely self-contained becomes, in Derrida's reading, just one more manifestation of desire, and hence incorporates not just the subject and his personal fancies, but his very physicality (Derrida 1987 [1978], p. 41 *et passim*).<sup>14</sup> As the argument develops, it becomes clear that Derrida sees a whole set of things like desire which Kant has excluded from his system at the same time as recognising their potency: economics, ornamentation, physical pleasure, pleasure in immoral or inappropriate things are all, for Kant, distractions from the purity of aesthetic contemplation. Derrida reads this anxiety out of Kant's term "*parergon*", which he uses to describe that which is outside of the work yet impinges upon it, such as the frame of the painting; it is a word repeated in *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone* to explain things outside of reason which tempt it but are ultimately excluded, such as prophecy (Derrida 1987 [1978], p. 55). As Derrida sees it, Kant needs *parerga* to separate that which is worthy of philosophy's study from more trivial matters, and by being so critical of their power to distract the spectator he acknowledges their potentially devastating impact on his philosophy:

*Parerga* have a thickness, a surface which separates them not only (as Kant would have it) from the integral inside, from the body proper of the *ergon*, but also from the outside, from the wall on which the painting is hung, from the space in which statue or column is erected, then, step by step, from the whole field of historical, economic, political inscription in which the drive to signature is produced.

(Derrida 1987 [1978], pp. 60-1)

*Parerga* transform what are unique and unrepeatable instances of beauty into recognisable experiences, again setting up a tension between mistrust and respect in Kant's work, and quite clearly impacting on his arguments about ordinary acts of cognition: what, after all, are the transcendental categories of experience if not frames which order and sort the external manifold (Derrida 1987 [1978], p. 93)? It is difficult for Kant to criticise the power of *parerga* to formalise experience when the rest of his philosophy turns on the inherence of certain forms in

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<sup>14</sup> The influence of Freud should be self-evident here, and many of the arguments about Kant find parallels in Derrida's roughly contemporary work on the pleasure principle (Derrida 1987 [1980]).

both the perceiver and the perceived.<sup>15</sup> What Derrida sees going on here is a form of mourning, a reification of the loved object in advance of its loss: Kant mistrusts *parerga* because they objectify the artwork before the individual spectator's ordinary acts of perception have an opportunity to (Derrida 1987 [1978], p. 44). In trying to extend the concept of reason into the most subjective of philosophical arenas, Kant has destroyed its claims to objectivity by revealing its grounding in desire and imbrication within a whole social system.<sup>16</sup>

This last argument about the social assumptions of Kant's aesthetics is developed in "Economimesis", an offshoot to *The Truth in Painting* that benefited from the input of, among others, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean-Luc Nancy (Derrida 1987 [1978], p. 48). Together they note that the Kantian view of pure judgement aligns morality and culturalism in a way which inscribes politics into the heart of the system: reason is not only the most historically developed form of aesthetic contemplation, it is also the most ethical (Derrida 1981, p. 3). Once again, the more Kant attempts to keep this political element outside of his aesthetics, the more power he ascribes to it, although here we see an intersection of the problem of framing which Derrida explores in his early work with the questions of the institutional contexts of philosophy to which he, and we, turn later. Derrida's starting-point is that Kant's remarks on mimesis in the *Critique of Judgement* fall between two rare comments on salary and the contamination of art by financial gain, and the work persistently worries away at this question of whether art is natural or cultural (Derrida 1981, p. 4). According to Derrida's reading of Kant, *either* art is mimetic, natural, and capable of stimulating disinterested pleasure in the spectator, *or* it is artificial, cultural, and tainted with the outside world that his aesthetics tries so hard to exclude. The problem comes, of course, with Kant's equally strong conviction that the greatest art is the closest imitation of nature:

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<sup>15</sup> Supporters of Kant would point out that the first Critique deals with the legitimisation of synthetic a priori judgements, and even if we do not agree with the conclusions that Kant drew, he was profoundly aware that it was a substantial problem.

<sup>16</sup> In a close reading of "The Parergon", Irene Harvey notes that Derrida claims to "begin with [Kant's] examples", yet has already formulated a tentative law or hypothesis about what they will suggest (Harvey 1989, p. 62). For Derrida, this replicates what Kant has done in setting out examples in the third Critique that apparently rely on and reproduce some of the structures of the first two Critiques. Rather than finding anew in the field of aesthetics what he had explored in epistemology and ethics, Kant reproduces the predilections of his earlier work and thus invalidates his findings (Harvey 1989, p. 64). This image of Derrida as a commentator who deliberately reproduces and magnifies the errors of his source texts is both familiar and potent; for another effective example, see Johnson 1982 (1977).



The works of the Fine-Arts must have the appearance of nature and precisely in so far as they are productions (fashionings) of freedom. They must resemble *effects* of natural *action* at the very moment when they, most purely, are works [*opera*] of artistic confection.

(Derrida 1981, p. 9)

The "Fine-Arts" represent the height of man's aesthetic achievement, and form part of a larger matrix of moral and cultural hierarchies: "*Economimesis* puts everything in its place, starting with the instinctual work of animals without language and ending with God, passing by way of the mechanical arts, mercenary art, liberal arts, aesthetic arts and the Fine-Arts" (Derrida 1981, p. 9). Derrida follows through this imbrication of social and artistic with an investigation of a similar problem in Kant's aesthetics of poetry, which he sees as the apex of truth-telling in art, and so a founding element of a theory of aesthetic value. Yet the purity of this relationship between poetry and truth is constantly tainted by the oral nature of language, or its reliance on speaking and hearing which are nothing if not fallible, and which lead to precisely what should be excluded from the work of art, namely oral pleasure (Derrida 1981, pp. 18-19). Excessive consumption in real, social terms is undoubtedly a bad thing, and leads to immorality and unreason; however, the same appetite for art and specifically poetry is a sign of virtue, and a boon to any individual and their society. Whereas Kant attempts to use his aesthetic philosophy as a bridge between the individual and her powers of transcendental reasoning, Derrida suggests that he in fact undermines the very authority of transcendental reason, and most certainly its claims to objectivity. It is, in several senses, the product of a social system; which, when Kant turns to the explicitly intersubjective problems of ethics, is clearly of help.

Derrida's ethical thought is, as we shall see in Chapter Five, most heavily influenced by a tradition of irrationalism which runs through Kierkegaard, Heidegger, and Levinas, and that relies on an incalculable obligation between individuals rather than a morality which could be outlined and legislated. Yet this in its own way develops Kant's assertion that reason must leave room for faith, or to phrase this in Derrida's own terms, "The act of faith demanded in bearing witness exceeds, through its structure, all intuition and all proof, all knowledge" (Derrida 1998a [1996], p. 63). Derrida's writings on ethics, like his more fragmentary comments on the significance of the Enlightenment, try to balance the necessity of outlining a transcendental law with individual volition and responsibility, and the historical investigation of this tension features

Kant as a central figure (Derrida 1992 [1980], p. 11). In one of the works central to his late moral interest, the *Politics of Friendship*, Derrida uses Kant's ethical thought to explore such an antinomy of trust and secrecy. Kant's definition of a true friend is one who will be able to hold both his and your own opinions secret, even from an interrogatory government; however, in Derrida's understanding of the concept of the secret, something can only truly fulfil the conditions of secrecy if another knows that you know something they do not (Derrida 1997 [1994], p. 257).<sup>17</sup> The tension this produces between the individual who must keep the secret, and the society and state which must recognise without violating this secret, is particularly telling when related to the ethical history of the independent individual and transcendental law gestured at above. A similar strain can be traced through the masculinity of friendship, on which again Kant insists, where the brother is privileged as the closest possible relation and the model of the friend. Yet "only the brother can be betrayed. Fratricide is the general form of temptation, the possibility of radical evil, the evil of evil" (Derrida 1997 [1994], p. 273). As elsewhere in Derrida's work, the most valuable structures only maintain their worth by being open to their opposite, although here a specific reference is made to Kant's notion of "radical evil". This is the malevolence innate to man's freedom that cannot be overcome by individual effort, but must be legislated against through social organisation and religion. Derrida notes the double bind here: on the one hand, the individual has an absolute duty to speak the truth to the other, to all others and at all times; and on the other, because the individual cannot be trusted, the whole machinery of state, police, and government is brought into being, and into conflict with the individual's right to self-determination (Derrida 2000b, pp. 69, 71). One of the statements of Rousseau on which Kant relied heavily was "the impulse of the appetite alone is slavery, and obedience to the law one has prescribed for oneself is freedom" (Schneewind 1992, p. 314). The reflexivity and self-awareness necessitated by the qualification, "one has prescribed for oneself" is too often forgotten by critics of Kant and recalled by Derrida in his investigations of the genesis and structure of systems of belief.

In *Of Hospitality*, Derrida outlines the basic structure of hospitality as complete freedom granted to the guest, on the sole condition that they recognise the ultimate authority of the host (Derrida 2000b, p. 73). This structure is repeated in his reading of the Kantian university, where

<sup>17</sup> According to Leonard Lawlor, Derrida draws his concept of the secret from Husserl's Fifth *Cartesian Meditation*, and the idea "that the psychic life of an other can never give itself in a presentation but must involve appresentation" (Lawlor 2002, p. 218).

complete freedom to question is granted to each and every student, so long as they acknowledge that philosophy retains the final power to evaluate their inquiries. Derrida has repeatedly demonstrated a concern with the teaching of philosophy and the institutions that transmit knowledge, and it is no surprise that one of his more rewarding analyses of Kant is a reading of his work on the university, "The Conflict of the Faculties". In this, Kant claims to justify the hierarchy of the university through reason and the abstract pursuit of knowledge, even though for Derrida it is clearly a *de facto* arrangement owing to the structure and organisation of German, indeed Prussian, society at the time (Derrida 1992 [1980], p. 5). What appears to be intellectual liberty is in fact bureaucratic licence; or to follow Derrida's deliberately Kantian terms, "university autonomy is in a situation of heteronomy, an autonomy conferred and limited" (Derrida 1992 [1980], p. 6). With the changes to the nation state since the late eighteenth century, this support for the university has been called into question, not least by the dissemination of information outside the control of either the university or the government, and the consequent operation of thinkers beyond the traditional pale. Yet Derrida also sees a more widespread and profound cultural shift which makes the Kantian university impossible: "The pure concept of the university is constructed by Kant on the possibility and necessity of a language purely theoretical, inspired solely by an interest in truth, with a structure that one today would call purely constative" (Derrida 1992 [1980], pp. 19-20). The problem is that language is always, and in a variety of ways, performative, and this performativity is, as we have learnt from "Economimesis" and sundry other texts, always bound up with politics and political decisions. While Kant assumed a steady-state model, based around the accumulation of knowledge and the inexorable progress of reason, Derrida works with a more temporally and conceptually complex form, where institutions and answers are constantly changing, not necessarily for the better. Deconstruction must operate within the institutions of academia themselves to reorganise the ways in which knowledge is developed, preserved, and transmitted, and, paradoxically, one of its first challenges must be to question the primary status of philosophy. In Kant, philosophy is the highest faculty as it is the basis for all others, and as such reserves the privilege of resolving disputes within the university; disputes, as Derrida notes, which the philosophical division of the university have fostered (Derrida 1992 [1980], p. 27). The only thing which can trump philosophy's power is the state, which suggests grave doubts firstly about Kant's belief in a pure critical philosophy, and secondly about modern academia's belief in a critical social role. Once

again Derrida seizes on a particular aspect of Kant's work and uses it as a lever to open the rest of his thought:

If *The Conflict of the Faculties* is not a code, it is a powerful effort at formalization and discursive economy in terms, precisely, of formal law. Here, again, Kantian thought tries to attain to pure legitimation, to purity of law, to reason as the court of last resort. The equivalence between reason and justice as "law", as "right", finds its most impressive presentation here.

(Derrida 1992 [1980], p. 10)

It is by claiming that philosophy cannot escape from political implications, and by retaining the consciousness of this engagement, that deconstruction hopes to become more than a philosophical critique.

As should be clear by now, Derrida enjoys a respectful and critical relationship to Kant, and is not averse to employing Kantian concepts as heuristic tools in his own work. For instance, he compares his concept of the gift, hovering between being freely given and being called for by a deep structure of obligation, to Kant's transcendental dialectic between thinking and knowing, another gesture of perpetual uncertainty and reflection (Derrida 1992 [1991], p. 30). (Here, we may note parenthetically, is a more mature reading of Kant, which emphasises his acceptance of ambiguity, as opposed to the early reading that underscored his readiness to make judgements.) However, Derrida is more interested in a wholesale interrogation of the certainties upon which Kant based his work than a superficial reorientation of those concepts. So in "*Différance*", for example, he notes how the titular concept undermines the distinction of sensible and intelligible; and that "Not only is there no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom", destabilising the Kantian ideal of a kingdom of ends (Derrida 1982b [1972], pp. 5, 22). This critical re-evaluation of Kantian concepts, and in some cases critical re-production, can be seen as a Heideggerian project of "destruction", the re-writing of a philosophical history for the uses of the current thinker. Indeed, Heidegger seems to colour Derrida's reading of Kant, as with so many other philosophical influences. In his book on Kant, Heidegger reads the Kantian transcendental imagination as beyond the distinction of spontaneity and reception, active and passive, and as a form of access to thought about ontology (e.g. Heidegger 1990 [1973], p. 134). Derrida extends this indeterminacy to writing, and by so doing allows a reflection on Heidegger's own assumptions about language and philosophy

(Hobson 1998, p. 82). Derrida also runs through a philosophy of language Heidegger's suggestion that it is a condition of our existence that we relate in specific ways to the world around us, a development of the "Copernican revolution" inaugurated by Kant. This recapturing of a philosophical history is something which Derrida has ascribed to "what are called great philosophers", and the examples he gives alongside Heidegger are Aristotle, Hegel, and "in a certain sense" Kant (Derrida and Mortley 1991, pp. 94-5). It is certainly fair to say of Kant that he attempts to wrap his system of thought around other philosophies – for instance, he demonstrates how the scholastic categories of *unum*, *verum* and *bonum* are encompassed and superseded by his own table of categories – yet Derrida's qualification is well-made, as it is a much less forcible re-reading than that of the other named philosophers (Kant 1969 [1787], p. 84). It is assuredly less violent than Heidegger's reading of Kant, which places ontology at the centre of his philosophy, a strategy and analysis that we will examine in Chapters Seven and Eight.

This section has attempted to follow some similarities, breaks, and continuities between Kant and Derrida, concentrating on aesthetics, ethics, and the interpretation of philosophical history. It has determined that there are specific and self-conscious areas of influence, and that Derrida's work can helpfully be seen as an extension of Kantian methods to the point of criticising their own assumptions. It would be wrong to conclude, however, without some thought as to the implications of interpreting Derrida in such a fashion. To place him within the Kantian tradition, as Norris has so persistently done, does not garner universal acceptance, and indeed perhaps runs the risk of neglecting certain other influences on Derrida.<sup>18</sup> It would also necessitate reinvestigation of some of our basic assumptions about Derrida and his work, and perhaps a reweighing of the canon to downgrade such "literary" works as *Glas* and *The Post Card* in favour of other, perhaps less well-known or well-cited, texts. A Kantian Derrida, foregrounding the significance of reason and its capacity for self-criticism, would lay the foundations for a genuinely interdisciplinary manner of thinking, rather than the extension of "deconstruction" as another method of literary criticism. It would also provide the means to see Derrida in terms of his philosophical contexts, and thus enable comparisons with other figures pressed into the service of literary theory. This is a project opened a little further in the Concluding Remarks.

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<sup>18</sup> For instance, Hegel, who for Rodolphe Gasché is as significant as Kant is for Christopher Norris.

### *1.5. Conclusion*

Both Derrida and Bakhtin are interested in extending the Kantian vision of reason, particularly as “criticism of its own powers”, into contemporary debates and problems, especially around the philosophy of language. They draw from Kant a range of preoccupations and methodological concerns, most notably the preconditions for human knowledge and the balance between subjective and transcendent influences on understanding. Furthermore, they are both interested in the limits of reason and rationality, the relationship of one philosophy to others, and (another methodological issue) how work should be divided between epistemology, ontology, and ethics. All of these are dealt with explicitly by Derrida in his series of commentaries on Kant, and implicitly or thematically by Bakhtin, whose predominant philosophical influences also draw in various ways on Kant. Bakhtin and Derrida also explore the linkage of ethics and aesthetics through a common philosophical method and develop this into a connection through experience, the proximity of the aesthetic act with everyday life, and hence with moral responsibility. They extend the fundamental role of ethics within Kant’s system so that its status as law, or formalising movements towards law, comes into question, and is directed instead towards primordial, pre-social, responsibility. The political elements to this are explicated in Derrida’s reading, while the early Bakhtin concentrates on the commonality with both the aesthetic impulse and the basic actions of perception. For Bakhtin, it is neo-Kantianism that provides much of the resolution for these various matters, although, perhaps wisely, he is less interested in it as a reading of Kant than as a self-contained philosophical school. Other responses to Kant – notably Hegel, Romanticism, and the strains of irrationalist philosophies which developed in the nineteenth century – are all of great significance to Derrida and Bakhtin, but it is the pre-eminent importance of neo-Kantianism for the latter that brings it next to our attention.

## 2. *Neo-Kantianism*

### 2.1. *Introduction*

Neo-Kantianism is significant to this text not so much because of the light it sheds on Kant's work, but more because of the strength of the Kant-interpretation and the direct impact it has on Bakhtin. The force of its reading comes from the way it brings together Kant and post-Kantian philosophies, alters some of Kant's founding arguments, and introduces new terms and movements into his schemes, all to pursue an idealist project which aimed to re-establish the methodological precedence of philosophy. It constitutes the re-working of Kant most prominent for *Lebensphilosophie* and phenomenology, and an institutionally-successful philosophy against which other movements reacted. Neo-Kantianism most heavily impacted on Bakhtin in his early works, which form the focus for this chapter, but also late in his career when other influences had ebbed and flowed. The fundamental importance that he ascribes to culture, the critical valorisation of logic, and the division of experience from a transcendental realm of value are all markers of this neo-Kantian affiliation. For Derrida, it is significant because of its influence on the nascent phenomenological movement, and as a paradigm for how institutionalised philosophies are tangled up in political situations which may not be of their choosing; both of these motifs are explored in a close reading of his article, "Interpretations at War: Kant, the Jew, the German". Neo-Kantianism is finally a helpful example of the difficulty of separating intellectual movements into discrete segments, as it involves both more immediate responses to Kant (notably Hegel), and contemporary movements such as *Lebensphilosophie*; the decision to locate this chapter before those dealing with chronologically prior movements is primarily ascribable to the centrality that neo-Kantianism has among Bakhtin's influences. The works of Rudolph Hermann Lotze (1817-81), Hermann Cohen (1842-1918), Wilhelm Windelband (1848-1915), Paul Natorp (1854-1924), Heinrich Rickert (1863-1936), and Ernst Cassirer (1874-1945) constitute a diverse but influential series of readings of Kant that bring together established motifs in the reading of Kant with contemporary concerns. Their watchword proposed by Windelband, that to understand Kant is to go beyond him, offers an orientation permitting all sorts of hermeneutical activity while still retaining a common point of reference in Kant. It is a

slogan that underscores the diversity of the movement, and the range of intellectual positions to which it could be affiliated.

## 2.2. Neo-Kantianism

The first problem in understanding neo-Kantianism is defining the common philosophical characteristics of the thinkers involved. Thomas Willey reiterates four typical hallmarks:

(1) They use the transcendental method as opposed to the psychological or empirical, that is, they seek the prior conditions of knowing and willing. (2) They are *conceptualists*, by which is meant that they deny intellectual intuition as a source for genuine knowledge and believe in the capacity of reason “for constructing a whole from its parts”, the capacity for synthesis. (3) Their epistemologies are *idealist*. “Knowledge is not the grasp but the construction of the object”. (4) To understand Kant is to go beyond him.

(Willey 1978, p. 37)<sup>1</sup>

Judy Saltzman, more pithily, offers three distinguishing features, most of which are encompassed within Willey’s:

(1) the notion of the *Ding an sich* as a “limiting concept”, but not an unknown, yet existing, entity; (2) the general rejection of both materialism and Post-Kantian Idealism, including Hegelianism; and (3) the development of transcendental idealism.

(Saltzman 1981, p. 63)

Neo-Kantianism, therefore, is an idealist movement, based in Kant but not limiting itself to him, with a downgrading of experience in favour of the role of reason. As will be unpacked below, neo-Kantian ontology is dominated by an epistemological perspective on being as a *task* rather than a *given*, so that perceptions of an object advance towards a transcendental realm of validity without ever reaching it, and questions of everyday existence become part of this limited participation in a transcendental reality. These ideas, and the different definitions of neo-Kantianism offered above, are inescapably broad, which leads one critic to see the construction of the movement as a convenient labelling device rather than a reflection of an historical school:

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<sup>1</sup> Willey ascribes these characteristics to I. M. Bochenski’s *Contemporary European Philosophy*.



from the very beginning the concept “neo-Kantianism” denoted – and in an extremely crude and misleading way, moreover – a phenomenon of the history of philosophy whose common denominator was at most an alleged recourse to Kant but which never represented an individual, definable philosophical tendency.

(Köhnke 1991, p. 137)

While this controversialism runs the risk of neglecting the extent to which Cohen, Cassirer, Natorp, Rickert and others recognised common ground in their intellectual endeavours, it is a useful reminder of how neo-Kantianism from the outset relied on many philosophers other than Kant. Neo-Kantianism was born out of the disappointment with Hegelianism and the evident failure of one unitary intellectual system, as well as a need to mediate idealism and materialism, and can helpfully be seen as a variation on these responses (Poma 1997 [1988], pp. 1-2; cf. Lotze 1888 [1874], p. 330). For instance, there are shared concerns between early neo-Kantianism and Romanticism, with an emphasis on national identity, the individual and her passions, and mistrust of totalising structures, perhaps at a deep level influencing the notably belligerent stance taken during the First World War by such leading lights as Cohen and Natorp (Willey 1978, p. 14).<sup>2</sup> Köhnke argues that the reference to Kant is merely incidental, and the roots of neo-Kantianism are best seen as a desire for a theory of knowledge, which emerges at a point where philosophy can no longer justify its own premises without regard to other disciplines (Köhnke 1991, p. 28). This argument is predicated on the assumptions that 1) the origins of neo-Kantianism can be found unconventionally early, before the 1830s, and 2) neo-Kantianism assayed problems that a non-speculative empiricist philosophy not invoking Kant could also have tackled (Köhnke 1991, p. 66). Köhnke also draws attention to the institutional factors which aided the rise of neo-Kantianism; for instance between 1860 and 1880 the number of teaching staff in German philosophy faculties almost doubled, and it was those studying around 1870, the dog days of neo-Kantianism, who benefited the most (Köhnke 1991, p. 203). Furthermore, Köhnke’s statistical analysis of the rise in courses on Kant and Kantian interpretations reveals that the movement was based around Prussia, the dominant geo-political force within Germany at the end of the nineteenth century, and as mentioned above, it was a

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<sup>2</sup> The general history of the German academic class, and its crisis around the turn of the twentieth century, is best explored in Ringer 1969, whose work, along with Köhnke, provides an excellent outline of the institutional history of neo-Kantianism.

philosophy that strongly identified with a conservative social order (Köhnke 1991, p. 206).<sup>3</sup> Lucien Goldmann, from a very specific political position, sees neo-Kantian “philosophy” (the quotation marks are his, and he tenaciously refuses to remove them) as a product of the limited social liberalism of the time, and agrees that it forms only a very limited reading of Kant (Goldmann 1971 [1967], pp. 108-17). To touch a theme, then, that will recur throughout this text, neo-Kantianism can be seen as a reaction to political and institutional dynamics no less than as a philosophical movement in its own right; similar patterns will be traced for Hegelianism, *Lebensphilosophie*, and other intellectual trends, including appropriations of Bakhtin and Derrida. There is no clearer sign of the end of neo-Kantianism than the succession in 1923 to Cohen’s professorial chair by the young phenomenologist, Martin Heidegger, nor of the political shifts that indicated.

Before adding a little more detail to these hastily-sketched contexts of neo-Kantianism, I would like to pause briefly on some of the specific features of neo-Kantian philosophy. The separation of realms of validity and sensorial experience has already been mentioned, and the narrow interpretation of Kant which this supposes should be clear: Kant argued that sensible experience followed a priori guidelines beyond the knowledge of the senses, and neo-Kantianism’s originary break is to concentrate entirely on this a priori, rather than the blend of sensibility and understanding which Kant suggested. The object of experience is actually *produced* by the process of its experiencing, hence the argument about being as a task rather than a given, and it is created along the precise lines of the a priori. Neo-Kantianism developed the transcendental realm of the a priori into the concept of *validity*, an eternal, unchanging zone of truth that followed logical principles and could, therefore, be deduced along mathematical lines. This idealism is expressed by Rudolf Lotze:

this conception of Validity [...] at once excludes the substance of the valid assertion from the reality of the actual being and implies its independence of human thought. As little as we can say how it happens that anything *is* or *occurs*, so little can we explain how it comes about that a truth has Validity; the latter conception has to be regarded as much as the former as ultimate and underivable, a conception of which everyone may know what he means by it, but which cannot be constructed out of any constituent elements which do not already contain it.

(Lotze 1888 [1874], pp. 209-10)

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<sup>3</sup> Curiously, this is a theme developed by Derrida in his reading of Cohen, under the broader heading of “institutions of interpretation” and their involvement within political contexts (cf. Derrida 1991, pp. 58-64).

The significance of experience in philosophy is as a bridge to this eternal validity: while the first appearance of universal truths “is invariably occasioned by some particular instance which exemplifies them, or some particular case presented by perception”, the overall “injurious influence” of experience is that it draws “the mind away from the apprehension of the universal and the unconditioned, by constantly introducing to it the particular and that whose validity is conditional” (Lotze 1888 [1874], pp. 313, 316). A further step in this argument is that validity is found not in individual consciousnesses but in *consciousness-in-general*, the sum product of human cultural endeavour, existing like the Platonic Idea beyond the flux of subjective existence. This bequeaths to neo-Kantianism an idealist epistemology at odds with the synthetic tendencies of Kant’s philosophy (Rose 1981, p. 6). Lotze’s argument can be taken as the broad position of the Marburg school of neo-Kantianism led by Cohen and Natorp, and much the same goes for the rival Freiburg school of Windelband and Rickert. However, instead of laying the primary emphasis on validity, the Freiburg neo-Kantians underscored *value*, the ethical imperative in all acts of perception and experience in the world. This led to a greater interest in the sensible realm of human experience, and in turn to the incipient movement of sociology.<sup>4</sup> The Freiburg school maintained the emphasis on logical validity but hitched it to moral value, so that Rickert can argue for a social determination of ethical value in a comparable manner to Lotze arguing for logical validity:

In regard to values considered in themselves, one cannot ask whether they are *real*, but only whether they are *valid*. A cultural value is either actually accepted as valid by all men, or its validity...is at least postulated by some civilized human being.

(quoted Willey 1978, p. 147)

Another way to see the difference between the two schools is that while the Freiburg neo-Kantians allowed a division between the sphere of thought and the sensorial manifold, the Marburg school presented them as two ends of a continuum, so that there is no pure matter or form, but rather constant intermingling of the two (Friedman 2000, p. 31).<sup>5</sup> Both variants of neo-

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<sup>4</sup> See Rose 1981 for an argument that sociology grew equally out of both Freiburg and Marburg schools of neo-Kantianism.

<sup>5</sup> One logical development of this is Cassirer’s philosophy of symbolic forms where all matter is perceived through culturally-determined forms.

Kantianism involve a radical reassessment of the modes of human knowledge and their methodologies, and in this way also follow the Kantian-Hegelian attempts to return philosophy to its primary importance (Willey 1978, p. 22). Yet because they see reality as reliant on human consciousness, determining the forms and conditions for that faculty of judgement becomes imperative in a manner unfamiliar to Kant, whose methodology grounds itself on open enquiry into the boundaries of perception rather than closed assumptions about transcendental validity. Neo-Kantianism as a movement adopts the Kantian solutions too far downstream to recognise the original problems from which they developed, and hence sometimes runs aground on the very dangers that Kant attempted to avoid.

From the beginnings of neo-Kantianism there is influence from other post-Kantian philosophies. One source of the confidence in pure reason characteristic of neo-Kantian thinkers was their Fichtean reading of Kant, whereby reason was something spontaneous and natural, and not the tangled, contested, uncertain force with which Kant had such difficulties (Köhnke 1991, p. 134).<sup>6</sup> Fichte synthesised Kant's three critiques and added a Spinozistic or Cartesian claim to absolute justification, something antithetical to Kant's "sceptical method", yet which enabled his work to become more closely integrated with the presumed systematicity of Hegel (Höffe 1994 [1992], p. 234). Lotze and other early neo-Kantians relied generally on Kant's first Critique, and most heavily on the first version of that text which Kant revised in order to refute the impression that he advocated a form of subjective idealism (Köhnke 1991, p. 129). It may be noted in passing how the history of ideas shades into the history of specific texts, a concern that becomes pertinent when investigating Bakhtin, but I will concentrate for now on neo-Kantian responses to other essential Kantian precepts. Kant investigated the *hypothesis* of an overlap between experience and pure thought, which could be developed to form a transcendental realm of validity. Neo-Kantianism takes this overlap for granted, and sets out to investigate only the transcendental side, without needing to ground it in experience. A similar pattern is discernable with the *Ding-an-sich*, which for Kant is something we cannot experience, and hence of which we have no knowledge; he intended it as "a methodological concept and not [...] a metaphysical notion" (to quote Höffe 1994 [1992], p. 105). Neo-Kantianism accepted that we would never have final experience or knowledge of the thing-in-itself, but that there were processes through

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<sup>6</sup> The influence of Fichte manifests itself in quite precise and institutionalised ways: one method of reintroducing Kant into academic philosophy was through birthday celebrations for his student, Fichte (Köhnke 1991, p. 124).

which we pass (and the collective implications of “we” are important, especially for the Marburg school) which constituted a form of construction, and hence knowledge of, the *Ding-an-sich*. It becomes established as a metaphysical notion, above and beyond its methodological utility, and leads towards a validity separated from its possible existence:

it is quite indifferent whether certain parts of this world of thought indicate something which has besides an independent reality outside the thinking minds, or whether all that it contains exists only in the thoughts of those who think it, but with equal *validity* for them all.

(Lotze 1888 [1874], p. 16, emphasis added)

In general terms, Kant begins with problems of perception and understanding and moves back to a formal logic, while Cassirer and other neo-Kantians begin with logic (most notably mathematics) and attempt to advance to human perception (Friedman 2000, p. 92). In one sense, this makes neo-Kantianism an easy target for Derrida, as it is clearly based on several untested assumptions; in another, it explains what Bakhtin found so attractive about neo-Kantianism, namely its understanding of human culture as a representative of deeper epistemological and ethical problems. Kant recognised the priority of ethics in the practical world as akin to the priority of science in the theoretical sphere, and indeed argued that “in addition to transcendental philosophy, [there are] only two pure sciences of reason; the one with a speculative, the other with a practical content – *pure mathematics* and *pure ethics*” (Kant 1969 [1787], p. 290; cf. Höffe 1994 [1992], p. 135). Yet admitting their typological similarity does not legitimate the direct superimposition which neo-Kantianism performs, nor the unification of all forms of knowledge under logic which this supposes:

In Mathematics where we find ourselves dealing not with existing things and their essence at all, in Moral Philosophy and Jurisprudence where we speak of virtues and crimes, which *ought* or ought not to exist, more than this, when in actual life we endeavour to arrive at a decision in a matter of importance by bringing the given case under a general notion: – in all these instances we meet with the universal and its laws, in dealing with objects which are given us as matter of knowledge although they are not things.

(Lotze 1888 [1874], pp. 267-8)

Gillian Rose argues that neo-Kantianism introduces new metaphysical terms of validity and objectification rather than following through Kant's arguments about the transcendent conditions for knowledge which, for her, would lead inexorably to Hegel (Rose 1981, p. 13). That said, the role of Hegel (or at least a highly-determined understanding of Hegel) in this reading should not be underestimated, as it was his impulse towards systematising knowledge that inhibited neo-Kantianism from looking at the internal inconsistencies throughout Kant's critiques, and shaped a strong idea of historical *telos*. Neo-Kantianism attempted simultaneously to preserve both the individual ethical voluntarism that Kant required and the communal orientation and legislation championed by Hegel, so that Bakhtin's uncertainty over the linkage of subjective and transcendental moral action is more than understandable.

As well as relying on post-Kantian philosophies, neo-Kantianism also interacted with contemporary movements in a manner that ultimately required the dissolution of its most basic principles. For instance, the appeal of *Lebensphilosophie* becomes immediately obvious when the extreme desiccation and abstraction of neo-Kantianism is appreciated; Cohen argued in 1877 that "*matter* is only a specific instance of consciousness, a 'type of representation'" and should not be especially privileged (Poma 1997 [1988], p. 59). Subjective experience and a whole range of other common-sense channels were devalued by neo-Kantianism, and helped hasten its fall from popularity. The political orientation of neo-Kantianism towards liberal socialism, a consequence of the construction of the objective world through co-operative acts of perception, is again traceable to early post-Kantian sources (specifically Friedrich Lange) and impeded the institutional survival of the movement in the more extreme political climate before, during, and after the First World War (Willey 1978, p. 90). Similarly, the valuation of ethics as a science subject to logical principles was being treated much more sympathetically during the 1910s by the Munich phenomenologists and their phenomenology of law, which at least began to take into account the conscious moral actor and her responsiveness to circumstance. When Windelband argued that "Philosophy can live only as the science of values", he effectively permitted non-neo-Kantian movements to stake their claims for being the most scientific approach to questions of value, and indeed phenomenology marketed itself precisely on being a scientific "first philosophy" (quoted Clark and Holquist 1984a, p. 306). Scheler offers the most significant version of a rejection of universal Kantian morality in favour of an intuition-based, act- rather than content-focused ethical system, most commonly sourced in Brentano, which is a straw in

the wind foretelling the demise of neo-Kantianism. Even established neo-Kantians like Paul Natorp moved away from this tradition after World War One. Natorp began by looking for a pure system of scientific concepts which would be based in mathematics, yet became disillusioned with this and searched instead for a “metaphysics of concrete totality” which turned him towards Hegel and away from Cohen’s critical philosophy (Willey 1978, p. 118). Natorp argued there was a primordial human reason that throughout history grows to encompass all knowledge and means of knowing, so that its destination is the union of knowledge and Being (Saltzman 1981, pp. 137-8). The Hegelianism of this vision is perhaps more obvious than the underlying mysticism, positing innate tendencies in man and seeing historical incident as a path to ahistorical unity, and this mysticism also comes out in Natorp’s criticisms of neo-Kantian theories of religion. He emphasises feeling as the origin of religion, even if it is the fear and awe inspired by myth, a deliberate refusal of the Cohen-Cassirer line about the continual *intellectual* development of morality (Saltzman 1981, p. 93). Nicolai Hartmann offers another way of synthesising Kantian and Nietzschean moral philosophies by suggesting the “primary ethical phenomenon” as the changing consciousness of good and evil and its manifestations throughout history (Hartmann 1932 [1926], p. 101). This is roughly similar to Cassirer’s development, which transforms Cohen’s eternal realm of virtue into an historically unfolding series of interactions with humanity, although Hartmann starts with a much greater interest in ethics (this sequentialism is made explicit in Cassirer 1996 [1928], p. 22, but is the founding argument of the entire project). In short, Cassirer’s expansion of neo-Kantianism brought it to a point of proximity with other, explicitly non-Kantian, philosophies, and it is all the richer for that. As Cassirer will be treated at several points in this work we will temporarily delay turning to him, and take as our model of neo-Kantian thought Hermann Cohen.

Cohen’s fundamental revision of Kant is to eliminate his dualisms, for instance that between intelligible and sensible, or noumenal and phenomenal; for Cohen, the object is in a perpetual state of discovery by the subject, and no hard-and-fast separations can hold (Saltzman 1981, p. 84). While the proximity to Hegel will become evident in the next chapter, it is important to recognise how deep-rooted is this change to Kantian philosophy, as it means that the world of the senses was real only insofar as it participated in the ideal, and no further (Poma 1997 [1988], p. 44). Cohen’s early work is concerned, like Lotze, to emphasise the role of individuals in discovering the transcendental; in 1871, in a work entitled *Kant’s Theory of*

*Experience*, he suggests, “The category alone does not make the object; sensible intuition must be added”. However, six years later, Cohen is already on the Platonic-idealist track that culminates in his logical idealism, as he recognises the significance of experience in much more limited terms:

It is precisely ideas that designate and guarantee that real that common sense believes that it sees in things, that it possesses in things. So things are not? And is idealism skeptical as regards all that is sensible? No! Things are, because and inasmuch as they are ideas.

(quoted Poma 1997 [1988], pp. 20, 44)

For Cohen, this necessarily comes with an ethical correlate, that all individuals are responsible for working towards the ideal, and the language of the following quotation will also serve as a reminder of the ambition of neo-Kantianism to be a total theory of knowledge:

We understand *truth*, the fundamental idea of *critical idealism*, as consisting in the *separation of idea*, as an infinite *task* for all the moral ends, both of the human race and the individual, of this *ethical* meaning of *idea*, from all *existing reality of nature*, and from all *historical experience*. Both are necessary: separation, but also *protection of both features* in their equal logical value, just as existing reality retains its value in the face of idea, and idea only grounds its meaning in the admonition and guidance with which it takes care of existing reality. This truth of idealism, which, at the same time, honors existing reality, ensures that all our thinking, investigating and acting be personally true.

(Cohen from 1914, quoted Poma 1997 [1988], p. 66)

Even the notion of idealism “honouring” existing reality forces them further apart, and makes it clear how alien Cohen’s work is to Kant’s attempted reconciliation of sensible and ideal. Cohen also divides the Kantian constants of time and space, arguing that the former gives shape to the inner, subjective image of nature while the latter creates the outer, objective image of nature.<sup>7</sup> This division fundamentally changes Kant’s intentions: “By making outer and inner, a distinction of reflection, into the fundamental characteristic of space and time, Cohen turns the forms of intuition into producers of intuitions; the forms of finite appearance turn into demiurgoi [creators

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<sup>7</sup> Note Cassirer’s sophistication of this argument, where there are certain forms of space that are designed by man and which affect his experience of existence; this is another step away from neo-Kantianism, and towards *Lebensphilosophie* and other modern forms of philosophy (Cassirer 1953 [1923], p. 96).



of the world] of infinite capacity” (Rose 1981, p. 43).<sup>8</sup> In other words, the Kantian revolution that posited harmony between the subject and her experience is forgotten in the heady rush of transcendental idealism. With this divide between sensible and valid, a transcendental figure is needed to reconcile the two extremes, and indeed give purpose to the communal construction of reality rather than face a Schopenhauerian refusal of endeavour (Poma 1997 [1988], p. 129). It is this which Cohen in his later works gives the name of God, and on which he brings Jewish thought to bear; the philosophical necessity predates the theological justification, and is only loosely related to Kant’s own belated turn to religion. For Cohen, it is Kantian ethics that provide the common link between German idealism and enlightened Judaism, and thus the basis of Germanic-Jewish culture, especially in the recognition of the infinite communal task of working towards the eternal good (Willey 1978, p. 106; Seeskin 1997, p. 789).<sup>9</sup> It is of note that Cohen’s theory of a correlation between man and God, experiential and transcendental understandings of the good, relies on a Kantian gesture of divine symmetry rather than on a more rigorously argued logical process, and indeed Cohen’s turn to religion as a whole represents a move away from the neo-Kantian logicism of the bulk of his career. Kant proposes one formulation of the idea that each individual has a moral imperative to join an ethical community to achieve the greatest good, which Cohen develops into an insistence on the specific type of moral community and its distinctive history (Wood 1992, p. 408). Similarly, Kant argues that we must *assume* the existence of God as it is well beyond man’s capacity to prove, leading to the argument for necessary faith; Cohen’s attempts to *prove* “religion within the limits of reason alone” misses this understanding of faith, upon which the Romantics, nineteenth-century irrationalism, and ultimately Derrida, build (cf. Kant 1969 [1787], p. 402). Cohen’s religious theories necessarily invoke a strong apocalyptic mood, a belief that a reconciliation of ideal and real will come about as an end to human experience, and while Cassirer moderates this into an emphasis on futurity in the experience of time, the whole mechanism appears outdated in twentieth-century philosophy next to Heidegger’s granting of prominence to finitude and man’s relationship to death (Cassirer 1955 [1925], p. 120; 1957 [1929], p. 182; 1996 [1928], p. 208;

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<sup>8</sup> For Kant on the necessary unity of time and space, cf. Kant 1969 (1787), p. 247.

<sup>9</sup> This equation of Jewish and Kantian ethical systems was criticised by other Jewish philosophers, especially Cohen’s student Franz Rosenzweig. He argued that to strip away the religion from Judaism and leave only the morality missed the unique divine claims that Judaism made. In particular, Cohen’s emphasis on rationalism neglected the power of revelation (Leaman 1997, p. 801). Interestingly, this point has been repeated by a modern critic in relation to Levinas, with a similar charge that the uniqueness of Judaism lies in its (juridical) relations with God (Rose 1993, p. 17).

e.g. Heidegger 1990 [1973], p. 20). Yet alongside this profoundly mystical streak of Cohen's philosophy, there is an equally deep rationalism and commitment to political engagement; for instance, he labels poverty rather than death as man's greatest evil, as the former religion can do something about while the latter is part of the divine mystery (Leaman 1995, p. 158). This contributes to a great humanist sentiment that rubs against the extreme logical formalism of much other neo-Kantianism:

the next man becomes the fellow man. For even if I had no heart in my body, my education alone would have brought me to the insight that the great majority of men cannot be isolated from me, and that I myself am nothing if I do not make myself a part of them. In these unavoidable connections between myself and the majority, a relationship arises...which produces a community.

(Cohen from 1919, quoted Kaplan 2001, p. 16, with original ellipsis)

As Willey argues, "It was Cohen who made Kantianism relevant to the predicament of the undereducated and unpropertied in the modern industrial state of the late nineteenth century" (Willey 1978, p. 116). The effectiveness of this project is another question, but perhaps some indication of the weakness of the position is suggested by Bakhtin's difficulty in sustaining a political commitment through his adapted discourse of neo-Kantianism.

German neo-Kantianism demonstrated how creative and adaptive the reading of Kant could be, and simultaneously how far-reaching the influence of his thought and formulation of problems. The logical consistency of the movement itself is of less interest than its effects, the disparate sources that it synthesised, and the goals that it proposed for philosophy as politically and socially engaged. While Cohen and neo-Kantianism have to some extent become bogeymen of earlier twentieth-century philosophy, and impact largely in negative terms on the main currents of the rest of the century's thought, the next section on Bakhtin will make it clear how significant they were for some thinkers and contexts.

### 2.3. *Bakhtin, Cohen, and Cassirer*

Neo-Kantianism forms one of the most significant components of Bakhtin's intellectual context, and enjoyed an institutionally and historically established presence in Russia. Hermann Cohen visited Moscow in 1914, and the journal *Logos*, published in Moscow and Tübingen, was

devoted to spreading neo-Kantianism in Russia. On its editorial board were Fedor Stepun, Sergei Gessen and Nikolai Bubnov, all of whom had studied with Windelband and Rickert, as well as German luminaries such as Husserl and Weber (Clark and Holquist 1984a, p. 303; for more information in neo-Kantianism in Russia, cf. West 1995). Voloshinov, Medvedev, and Bakhtin all refer directly or indirectly to material published in *Logos*, underscoring how the members of the Bakhtin Circle were part of the second generation of Russian neo-Kantianism, and that it was for them that it formed one of the dominant institutionalised philosophies (Hirschkop 1999, p. 100). Those who took part in the discussions in Nevel during the earliest phase of the Circle referred to them as “our Marburg”, and prime among the participants was Matvei Kagan, who had studied with Cohen, Cassirer, and Natorp in Germany between 1910 and 1918 (I. Kagan 1998, p. 9). As we shall see, his work has a special place in the understanding of neo-Kantianism enjoyed by Bakhtin, a priority which has only relatively recently been brought to prominence.<sup>10</sup> During the period of Bakhtin’s most vigorous engagement with neo-Kantianism, the end of the 1910s and throughout the 1920s, the movement is in decline, and Bakhtin is working with Kagan’s critical appropriation of Marburgian thought already synthesised with other contemporary philosophical interests, notably *Lebensphilosophie* and phenomenology. The fact that Bakhtin retains elements of neo-Kantian idealism even in his final writings of the 1970s speaks more to his intellectual persistence than to neo-Kantianism’s force, or even validity, of argument.

To begin by exploring Cohen’s specific take on an idea which will be treated more generally later, one of the main things neo-Kantianism passed to Bakhtin is an understanding of the importance of culture which encompasses both the political and the mystical. For Cohen, it is through the sphere of culture that each individual realises the universal human in himself and hence learns to co-operate on the project of constructing reality (Poma 1997 [1988], p. 153).

Bakhtin expands this Marburg school subordination of questions of value to questions of culture:

Cognitive and ethical objectivity is the impartial, dispassionate evaluation of a given person and a given event from the standpoint of an ethical and cognitive value which is or is held to be universally valid or tends toward universal validity. By contrast, the centre of value for aesthetic activity is the *whole* of the hero and of the event of his lived life, and all values that are ethical and cognitive must be subordinated to that whole.

(Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 13)

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<sup>10</sup> Kagan’s *On the Course of History* has recently been published in Russian (M. Kagan 2004).

It is only in culture that the whole of the individual is realised, and hence only through culture that such a project of social transformation can be effected.<sup>11</sup> A related idea Bakhtin develops from Cohen is that in order to be aesthetically creative, the author must possess a firm sense of his own being and fully accept the non-alibi of his own existence. Writing is an act of courage as much as of creativity, and the work of art is the aesthetic counterpart to the moral deed (Tihanov 2000, p. 45). This features in Bakhtin's early works with the frequent, and weakly-justified, turns to aesthetics as an exemplar of moral philosophy, and in the writings on the novel from the 1930s to the 1960s as a development of the traditional Russian critical motif of the author as moral sage (the key instances being Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 61; and Bakhtin 1984 [1963]). The significance of culture even impacts on the Bakhtin circle in a negative form, as Voloshinov's argument for a "science of ideologies" is a pendant to, and materialist contrast with, the neo-Kantian idealist "philosophy of culture" (Tihanov 2000, p. 92). One of the spurs to Voloshinov's redrafting of the neo-Kantian project is its mysticism, which comes out in Cohen's argument that all of human history is progress towards the Godhead (Poma 1997 [1988], p. 259). This teleological idealism remains constant, in one form or another, throughout Bakhtin's work, and while the later versions are more indebted to his understanding of Hegelian philosophy, the early formulation is quite clearly neo-Kantian:

the future not as a bare temporal category, but as a category of meaning – as that which axiologically does not yet exist; that which is still undetermined; that which is not yet *discredited* by existence, not sullied by existence-as-a-given, free from it; that which is incorruptible and unrestrictedly ideal – not epistemologically and theoretically, however, but practically, i.e., as an ought or obligation.

(Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 118)<sup>12</sup>

This attempt to fuse an idealist orientation of history with a more materialist understanding of the importance of everyday existence remains a persistent difficulty within Bakhtin's writings.

Some commentators on Bakhtin have taken this problematic as a specifically religious one, and

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<sup>11</sup> A similar idea is explored by Bakhtin's brother, Nikolai: "A work of art must be a generator of force, a life-shaping power. If it is not, it simply doesn't count and is not worth bothering about. [...] Art must teach us *how to live*" (Bakhtin 1963, p. 26). In his case, the general influence of Symbolism and a belief in a "Third Renaissance" of Western culture are more obvious, both themes explored in Chapter Five through Nietzsche.

<sup>12</sup> For an exploration of the specifically ethical implications of Bakhtin's arguments on redemptive history, and an apt comparison to Buber and Levinas, see Gardiner 1996.

indeed regard Cohen's primary influence on Bakhtin as theological (cf. Clark and Holquist 1984a, esp. p. 310). This runs the double risk of 1) assuming too much about Bakhtin's personal faith, a matter about which we know little, and 2) neglecting the specificity of Cohen's Judaic project (cf. Hirschkop 2004, pp. 393-4). It is a marker of the development of Bakhtin studies that the focus of interest has to some extent been shifted away from biographical speculation about private religiosity towards more historical-textual investigations of institutional context.<sup>13</sup> Bakhtin certainly associated with religious figures, and can be seen to deploy Orthodox motifs in his work, yet these ideas are not exclusively religious to begin with, nor does Bakhtin deploy them in isolation from philosophical parallels. For instance, the idea of the mortal individual being preserved in the immortal community that becomes so significant in the writings on carnival, and then again in the late works, is a neo-Kantian one. It therefore brings together an Hegelian reading of Kant with Cohen's argument about the historical distinctiveness of the Jews, to which Bakhtin in turn adds Nietzschean-inflected beliefs about the strength of the community, and vitalist arguments about a movement of life greater than the individual organism (cf. Hirschkop 1999, p. 284). Cohen's work is not a simple matter, nor is Bakhtin's adaptation of it for his own ends, which is why it might be more productive to consider the general impact of neo-Kantianism on Bakhtin's early writings.

In his early work on ethics and the difficulty for the individual of recognising her moral responsibility, Bakhtin suggests that "Our time deserves to be given full credit for bringing philosophy closer to the ideal of a scientific philosophy" (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 19). The main point of reference here, suggested by the idea of a "scientific philosophy", is neo-Kantianism, an ascription that becomes clearer in Bakhtin's criticisms:

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<sup>13</sup> This is not, however, to demean theological readings of Bakhtin's work, nor to presume they exist in isolation from more general philosophical contextualisations, as the work of the redoubtable Graham Pechey demonstrates (cf. especially Pechey 1998; 2001).

this scientific philosophy can only be a specialized philosophy, i.e. a philosophy of the various domains of culture and their unity in the form of a theoretical transcription from within the objects of cultural creation and the immanent law of their development. And that is why this theoretical philosophy cannot pretend to being a first philosophy, that is, a teaching *not* about unitary cultural creation, but about unitary and once-occurrent Being-as-event.

(Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 19)<sup>14</sup>

Neo-Kantianism can only tell us about the products of culture, the consequences of human intelligence, while what Bakhtin seeks is an explanation of the source of man's intellectual endeavours. This he thinks he finds in the concept of the act and its part in "once-occurrent Being-as-event", concepts as we shall see seconded from phenomenology and *Lebensphilosophie*, although in their own way more authentically Kantian than the neo-Kantian perspective. Yet the very fact that Bakhtin feels compelled to divide fact and value, experience and the meaning of that experience, tells of his basic neo-Kantian orientation (e.g. Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 2). There were certainly strong contextual-historical reasons for seeing them as united, both on the macro-level of the political upheaval of the 1920s and the micro-level of the Bakhtin Circle's incorporation of more materialist viewpoints, yet Bakhtin remains resistant to this for a surprisingly prolonged period, for instance in his 1950s work on discourse genres where he presumes separate realms of "life" and "language" (e.g. Bakhtin 1986 [1952-3], p. 63). Similarly, the vision of being as a task rather than a given is directly neo-Kantian, whether that is in the early examination of exotopy and the need for others – "in order to live and act, I need to be unconsummated, I need to be open for myself" – or the late return to the same theme, with the emphasis shifted on to super-subjective institutions – "the unity of a particular culture is an *open* unity" (Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 13; 1986 [1970], p. 6). Makhlin offers the felicitous phrase, a "social ontology of participation" to explain Bakhtin's early project, emphasise its distinctness from the later, more literary work, and note its synthesis of neo-Kantian motifs of participation with a philosophy-of-life concern with ontology (Makhlin 2001, p. 89). Even the

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<sup>14</sup> As noted above, the early Husserlian phenomenology with which Bakhtin was familiar also claimed to be a scientific mode of thought, and indeed strived for the viewpoint of a "first philosophy" that outlined the basic principles of perception. However, the reference to beginning with the objects of culture and working back to Being-as-event clearly indicates neo-Kantianism, as Husserlian phenomenology flows in precisely the opposite direction.

classically neo-Kantian question of validity comes under the critical lens of more modern philosophical movements, as Bakhtin sophisticates the idea of the eternity of truth:

The validity of a theoretical positing does not depend on whether it has been cognized by someone or not. Newton's laws were valid in themselves even before Newton discovered them, and it was not this discovery that made them valid for the first time. But these truths did not exist as cognized truths – as moments participating in once-occurrent Being-as-event, and this is of essential importance, for this is what constitutes the sense of the deed that cognizes them. It would be a crude mistake to think that these eternal truths-in-themselves existed earlier, before Newton discovered them, the way America existed before Columbus discovered it.

(Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 10).

Bakhtin denies there is a separate realm of validity where Newton's laws are always true, suggesting instead that it takes an intentional act – “moments participating in once-occurrent Being-as-event” – to grant them validity. This very strongly recalls Lotze's understanding of experience as the entry-point of the ideal:

Reality of Existence it is true [Ideas] enjoy only in the moment in which they become, in the character of objects or creations of an act of presentation now actually occurring, members of this changing world of Being and Becoming; but on the other hand we all feel certain in the moment in which we think any truth, that we have not created it for the first time, but merely recognised it; it was valid before we thought about it and will continue so without regard to any existence of whatever kind.

(Lotze 1888 [1874], p. 212)

Bakhtin develops this into an opposition to neo-Kantian consciousness-in-general, namely phenomenological intentional consciousness, although an investigation of the specific lineage of that phenomenology will have to wait until Chapter Seven, and clearly within the neo-Kantian tradition there were more experientially-weighted tendencies. Yet this recourse to individual intentionality throws into difficulty the point where we began our investigation of Bakhtin and neo-Kantianism, namely the privileging of culture as an intersubjective sphere. What Bakhtin has to do is emphasise both the individual's participation in culture and the latter's objective validity, leading him ever closer to a retrograde idealism: “The systematic unity of culture passes into the atoms of cultural life – like the sun, it is reflected in every drop of this life” (Bakhtin 1990 [1924], p. 274). This tension between a pre-existent model of culture in which individuals

participate, and a culture which is created from the interactions of such individuals, remains a primary engine for Bakhtin's thought.

In the work of Matvei Kagan, this vision of culture as the sphere of intersubjective unity is much closer to the Cohenian source, as he argues for a scientific grounding of philosophy to preserve the unity of cultural spheres:

This grounding must not be rooted in the old, particularist aspirations of a single specialised science, whether experimental, experiential or other, to usurp the role of foundation of all sciences. Otherwise in this respect the particularism and chaos that has dominated and still dominates the inter-relationships of separate spheres and domains of culture would remain in force.

(M. Kagan 2004 [1922], p. 198)

There are two sources for this unifying project that Kagan explores, *methodology* and *experience*, and we will deal with them in turn. Kagan follows Cohen closely:

All the ideas of philosophy are logical. Its ethics and aesthetics are logical. The same can be said of the method of ethics and aesthetics as well. Its logic is ethical and aesthetic; aesthetics is logical and ethical. Harmony reigns between the questions of philosophy not only objectively, but also subjectively in terms of method.

(M. Kagan 2004 [1922], p. 209)

This neo-Kantian granting of priority to logic only partly reflects the intricacies of Kant's transcendental methodology, yet can suggest creative applications. For instance, it impacts on Kagan's philosophy of history (such as his 1921 publication "How is History Possible?"), and Kagan's historical thought provides a useful link between Marburg neo-Kantianism and Bakhtin's writings. Iudif Kagan has proved an ardent champion of her father's works, attempting to restore them to their priority within the canon, and her summary touches on some of the essential points:

It was Kagan's view that "all problems exert some degree of historical influence". He wrote: "The system of historical being will always be open, becoming. Outside of *process* historical being is unthinkable. In accordance with the goal, there will be different directions within this process". Kagan considered that Antiquity, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and the Reformation did not just designate particular periods, but were constantly present in history as something like structurally recurring mythologemes.

(I. Kagan 1998, p. 11)



This last point about phases recurring throughout history is one of the ways in which Bakhtin resolves difficulties within his histories of genre, and the earlier acceptance of diversity within history ultimately unified in the goal persists throughout his work (Bakhtin 1984 [1963], p. 106; e.g. Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 28; 1986 [1975], p. 170). Yet there are integral differences between the two men's ideas: for instance, Kagan argues that it is specifically through labour that individuals enter history, while Bakhtin expands the focus to take *all* human activity as the cross-over between immanence and transcendence (Coates 1998b, p. 20).<sup>15</sup> Kagan, unlike Bakhtin, can be safely treated as a religious individual, and his Judaism tapped directly into his understanding of Cohen's work, for instance in his belief that the unity of humankind forged through constructing objects of knowledge could also be expressed by monotheism (Poole 2001b, p. 222). Methodologically, therefore, Kagan continues the Kantian and neo-Kantian attempts to unify the spheres of human knowledge, and by so doing improve the state of mankind. As for experience, Kagan posits it as one answer to "the question of the unity of all domains of culture and life, the sciences, the arts and so on", so that the diverse realms of validity are united through the individual's developing consciousness (M. Kagan 2004 [1922], p. 198). And this movement is explicitly linked with *Lebensphilosophie*: "Experience has foundations, principles, judgements that have ideational validity. The fact of being and the fact of the sciences is accepted as active. In this way an intimate, immediate connection of philosophy with life, with actuality, is established" (M. Kagan 2004 [1922], p. 199). We will now see how this gesture is repeated in Bakhtin's interpretation of neo-Kantianism.

As will be familiar, the primary orientation of *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* is towards "participative thinking" and an awareness of "once-occurrent Being-as-event" and away from ethical thought which "cognizes" the individual's moral responsibility and lifts it away from his non-alibi in Being (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 8). Bakhtin incorporates into his concept of the *subiectum* a phenomenological argument about the self as a bundle of acts, a series of ethical decisions and actions, a move that questions the abstract moral logic of Marburg neo-Kantianism, and attempts to re-engage it with its Kantian grounding in experience. Bakhtin seems more sympathetic to the Freiburg school's theory of ethics, and particularly Windelband's

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<sup>15</sup> The Hegelian ramifications of this point will, to some extent, be unfolded in the next chapter.

proposal that every human action, including actions of knowing, is accompanied by a “thou shalt”, an ethical imperative, an argument pursued at length in Bakhtin’s early work (Willey 1978, p. 136).<sup>16</sup> However, Bakhtin offers several explicit criticisms of this vision, notably a recognition of the difficulties in determining this transcendental ethical imperative, and an acknowledgement that the desire to act well must be justified from outside of ethics: from, perhaps predictably, life (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], pp. 5-6). Bakhtin argues that on the one hand, each act has universal validity, and on the other, the act is integrated within Being-as-event, although the mediation between them is less than clear: “The actually performed act [...] somehow knows, somehow possesses the unitary and once-occurrent being of life” (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], pp. 2-4, 28). To see acts from the first perspective is only a partial understanding, yet one that is essential in order to fulfil the Freiburg ambition of recognising a moral ought, even if it is constructed through life rather than granted transcendently (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 6). As will be explored later in this work, Simmel’s division of life and form is significant here, as it enables him to see each individual action as mediation between neo-Kantian ethical transcendentals, and personal intention and choice. Yet a second source for this tension is Marburg neo-Kantianism itself, and specifically the juridical concept of the individual with which it operates. This sees each individual as ultimately responsible for her own actions, regardless of social circumstances, and holds her finally accountable for what she has achieved. Once again this is possible largely because of the neo-Kantian erasure of the phenomenal/noumenal boundary, which in terms of the subject means her absolute moral essence is perfectly equivalent to her real-world moral actions. The conceit of the juridical individual allows neo-Kantian philosophy to treat everyday experience as the realm of moral certainty, and thus see responsibility and other experiential factors, rather than the Kantian categorical imperative, as the height of ethical action (Hirschkop 1999, p. 153). “The uniqueness or singularity of present-on-hand Being is compellingly obligatory” is Bakhtin’s legalistic phrasing of this, although he does work into the juridical scheme a more Schelerian, phenomenological, concept of intersubjectivity, so that alongside this absolute responsibility of the individual before the transcendental law there are social considerations as to his behaviour

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<sup>16</sup> It has been suggested by Bakhtin’s editors that his term “transgredient” is an attempt to translate Windelband’s concept which opposes “immanent” and which underscores the individual’s unique and irreplaceable location within Being (Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 233, n. 11).

and judgements (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 40; Brandist 2002a, pp. 38-9).<sup>17,18</sup> In “Author and Hero” Bakhtin has the grace to be conscious of the cultural determination of this idea, as he traces a schematic history of the individual: “The legal idea of man: man-as-the-other” runs one of his brief notes, to which the editors add a footnote to Cohen (Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 58). Curiously, the preceding comment deals with the “Rehabilitation of sexuality in Romanticism”, as if the two things formed a logical chain: is Bakhtin suggesting that the corporeality and human sensation that Romanticism recovered causes the absolute removal of the individual from his social context? If so, then Bakhtin certainly takes very seriously the Kantian, and subsequently Romantic, integration of human fallibility and corporeality into the natural sciences and indeed all acts of intellectual judgement (Holquist 1993, p. 169). In any case, Bakhtin’s double-vision of the juridical individual (the “I-for-myself”) and his determination by others (“I-for-others”) marks the beginning of a fertile tension in his work, and one that extends across all his areas of interest (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 54).

If we began this section by examining Bakhtin’s relations with Cohen, then it seems fit to end with his relations to Cassirer, Cohen’s student, and the one who did most to turn neo-Kantianism towards other modern philosophical trends. Cassirer is the most significant neo-Kantian influence on Bakhtin, and also acts as a filter for receiving other philosophers, notably Hegel.<sup>19</sup> Bakhtin’s primary interest in uniting aesthetics and ethics is recognised by Kant as a needful project, yet one not thoroughly or coherently attempted in his own work, but rather expanded by Cassirer in his monumental *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Here, Cassirer investigates the historical development of language, myth, and science into independent forms of knowledge, which, as they mutated and grew through time, affected individual perception and cultural formations. In other words, the neo-Kantian severance of sensible and intelligible is united within a strong historical frame, so that human history becomes a progression towards recognition of the eternal truth without demeaning the stages experienced along the way.

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<sup>17</sup> This synthesis of transcendental and experiential perspectives is most fully developed by the Munich phenomenologists, including Karl Stumpf, to be treated in more detail in Chapter Seven.

<sup>18</sup> Galin Tihanov has proposed that *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* represents a particular synthesis of the Marburgian juridical subject with the Kierkegaardian endlessly-responsible individual, while still forming part of a larger personalisation of the neo-Kantian argument (part of a question following Tapani Laine’s paper at the Eleventh International Bakhtin Conference, Curitiba, Brazil, July 24<sup>th</sup> 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Literature about the Bakhtin Circle and Cassirer is relatively extensive; the interested reader is referred to Brandist 1997; 2002a, pp. 105-9; Lähteenmäki 2002; and B. Poole 1998. I am indebted to all these for the following comments.

Cassirer does not impact on Bakhtin's work until the writings on the novel in the 1930s, although it is striking how his synthetic tendencies, bringing within neo-Kantianism disparate philosophical and intellectual movements, resonates with Bakhtin. To take one example from the many to be analysed throughout this text, Cassirer's ideas about language as a bond between individuals and a determinant on their understanding is enormously significant for the Bakhtin Circle. He explains how language allows the individual to move from his subjective, sensible limitations to objective understanding:

Reality could never be deduced from the mere experience of things if it were not in some way already contained and manifested in a very particular way, in expressive perception. And this manifestation does not automatically link the phenomenon of life with individual subjects, determinate and clearly differentiated I-worlds. What is primarily apprehended here is life as such far more than any individual spheres or centres of life; what originally appears in expressive perception is a universal character of reality, not the existence and facticity of distinct individuals.

(Cassirer 1957 [1929], pp. 73-4)

Here, the fragmentation of knowledge presumed by neo-Kantianism (both in terms of the emphasis on separate sciences, or means of knowledge, and the subjective dispersal) is overcome through language, at the same time as being shaped by it. In his 1930s works and following, Bakhtin will adopt a similar model of language, yet in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* is burdened with the naïve argument that language began "in the service of participative thinking and performed acts", an originally pure relation with being, but has subsequently become corrupted by abstract thinking (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 31). The idealism of this early work is tempered by exposure to the more historicist Cassirer, Hegel, *Lebensphilosophie* and others, not to say the influence of other members of the Bakhtin Circle. Yet from his earliest reception of neo-Kantianism, Bakhtin is interested in countering its tendencies towards abstract idealism, and reintroducing a potent concept of life.

#### 2.4. Derrida and neo-Kantianism

Whereas Bakhtin clearly draws a great deal from neo-Kantianism and actively engages with its concepts and problems, Derrida's extensive *oeuvre* comments little on the movement in any of its forms. There are undoubtedly good reasons for this: its unabashed idealism, its reliance on

logic, and its outstripping, in the eyes of most commentators, by later schools such as phenomenology would all serve to diminish Derrida's enthusiasm. It is simply not a model of philosophy with which he would be comfortable, or which appears particularly pertinent to his larger project. This section will, therefore, only skip through some of the possible points of influence and reaction between Derrida and neo-Kantianism, before concentrating on one of the rare points of contact, Derrida's commentary on Cohen and some of his wartime writing. This has sometimes been held up as a model of Derrida's insensitive and reductive technique, and does not enormously add to the store of knowledge about Cohen, but arguably attempts much more than the elucidation of another author's work. It is in this higher level of appropriation that Derrida's success appears to lie, and where the most telling connections between him and Bakhtin can be made.

Derrida's work is connected to neo-Kantianism if by no more than the fact that the thinkers on whom he draws the most – Husserl and Heidegger – were responding to neo-Kantianism in a range of critical and appropriative ways.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, Husserl's work takes a transcendental turn explained in the *Ideas* of 1913, which is remarkably similar to that performed by neo-Kantianism, although there remain differences especially over the existence and nature of the a priori (cf. Schuhmann and Smith 1993). Husserl's 1930s text *The Crisis of the European Sciences* has been called his "Kantian meditations", and another piece from the same period, "The Origin of Geometry", perhaps more provocatively has been described as a classic piece of Marburg neo-Kantianism (Schuhmann and Smith 1993; Rose 1984, p. 150). This last description is particularly fascinating, especially in light of the article on Cohen unpacked below, as it casts Derrida's critique of Husserl as a repetition or development of the phenomenological critique of neo-Kantianism. Another link sometimes formed involves Levinas, and his continuation of Cohen's explicitly Jewish perspective on philosophy, but from a phenomenological viewpoint, and more than that as a student of Heidegger's only too aware of the risks of combining politics and philosophy.<sup>21</sup> Derrida's early work includes one of the major pieces of Levinas-commentary published in English ("Violence and Metaphysics" from *Writing and Difference*), and makes frequent reference to his work; Derrida's later texts also rely on Levinas' ethical philosophy to an extent which has perhaps not been fully appreciated (Derrida 1981 [1967], pp. 79-153; e.g.

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<sup>20</sup> A point of which Derrida himself is cognisant (Derrida 1991, p. 41).

<sup>21</sup> This is to set to one side Levinas' personal biographical experiences in a prison camp for French soldiers.

Derrida 1997 [1994]; 2001 [1997]; cf. Plant 2003). Cohen ascribes to the Holy Spirit the power to inspire in men the desire for ethics, even in a pre-conscious state; Levinas similarly emphasises basic obligations to the other prior to any language or social bond; and this fundamental obligation is one of the things that Derrida developed most strongly (Srajek 1998, p. 66; e.g. Derrida 1997 [1994], p. 79, but see throughout his work of this period). Derrida distinguished himself from Levinas by emphasising his absolute openness to alterity, a gesture that he, perhaps unnecessarily, sees curtailed in Levinas, and would certainly regard as so in Cohen. One model for this radical openness which Derrida partially explored is Judaism, a structure of thought which rejects the certainty of an incarnated messiah in favour of a perpetually renewed relationship of expectation and futurity, and this can be seen throughout Derrida's work as deferral, the promise, continual mourning, and faith, to name but a few (Caputo 1997, p. xx). A certain form of messianism ("a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism") is used extensively in Derrida's late works to signify this openness towards the future which he privileges in Judaism, and in a loosely political manner which cannot help but recall Cohen (Derrida 1994 [1993], p. 59).<sup>22</sup> Yet Rose argues that in his commentary on Walter Benjamin and the article on Cohen we are approaching, Derrida neglects how both men's messianic arguments are integrated with quite specific political positions, and subsequently accuses them unjustly of irrational belief (Rose 1993, p. 82; the Benjamin text is Derrida 1990). Yet Rose is only partially correct; firstly because Derrida has his own reasons for downplaying specific socialist positions, and secondly because in both texts Derrida is using the figure of his commentary as a vehicle for his own thought. He does not pursue the detail or sophistication of Cohen's political philosophy because that is not his quarry, but rather the effects for which it strives and the consequences this has for conceptions of the perceived neutrality of philosophy.

Gideon Ofrat points to "Interpretations at War: Kant, the Jew, the German" as a *roman à clef* for Derrida's relations to Judaism, nationality, and a predominant philosophical influence (Heidegger, substituted by Cohen), which while perhaps proving too simplistic, certainly latches onto the significance of the text as the construction of a form of personal representation (Ofrat 2001 [1998], p. 27). The topic and the circumstances of initial delivery are all intimately

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<sup>22</sup> The precise political charge of this messianic structure, particularly within the quoted text (*Specters of Marx*), has not gone uncontested; Alex Callinicos, for example, has noted that a non-teleological Marxism has little to distinguish it from a left-leaning liberalism (Callinicos 1996, p. 40).

connected: it is a paper on Cohen, a philosopher who made specific links between Judaism and a unified national identity; delivered in Jerusalem, at a 1988 conference involving both Palestinian and Israeli academics; and around the theme, "Institutions of Interpretation" (most of this information comes from Derrida 1991, pp. 93-4, n. 1). Derrida is therefore interested in exploring the connections between academic ideas and state power, reason and unreason (with the possibility of violence), and the double necessity and risk of introducing consciousness of a specific subjectivity into academic discourse.<sup>23</sup> All of this is given a personal, contemporary reflexivity, in a manner that I hope to show is intimately related to Derrida's Kantian inclinations. In the broader terms of Derrida's work, it touches on the important idea of *affiliation* which has been claimed as one structuring principle for his concerns, in the multiple senses of bonds uniting thinkers, ideas, contexts, and necessary responses (cf. Derrida 1997 [1994], p. 146). "Interpretations at War" therefore stands as an excellent example of the complexity of Derrida's method, and the multiplicity of tasks which his writing attempts.

The central focus for the piece is Cohen's 1915 text *Germanity and Judaism*, which urged American Jews to prevent their country entering the war on the French side, and posited a German-Jewish, Kantian-socialist dual identity, superior to the decadent French. Cohen's argument about the identity of Jewish and Kantian thought has been touched on above, but Derrida explores it in some detail, emphasising Cohen's insistence that idealism is inherently both German *and* Jewish, and that Germany enjoys a privileged relationship with Greek philosophy (Derrida 1991, pp. 48-9, 57). Kant too is seen as continuing the Greek tradition, and is united again with Judaism under the motif of the responsible ethical individual operating under the transcendental law (p. 68).<sup>24</sup> Derrida sees Cohen as continually raising the stakes of his argument, so that this ethical self is also a model for the nation, making all nations intrinsically and spiritually German whether they realise it or not; and Derrida's point relies on noting the dangerous political implications of this idealist hypothesis (p. 80). If all nations, by virtue of simply being nations, are already German, then a German conquest of Europe would only be a materialisation of what has always been valid, and there would be no grounds for moral protest.

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<sup>23</sup> It is no coincidence that these topics are also explored in the text on Benjamin mentioned above, especially the ambiguity of the term *Gewalt* to signify both state justice and state power (Derrida 1990, p. 6).

<sup>24</sup> A subsidiary theme is Hegel's witticism at Kant's expense that he was Jewish, because his philosophy deals only with the law, and not with the love and community feeling which Hegel believes he has introduced (p. 69). Derrida expounds this at much greater length in *Glas*, a text with which we deal when examining Hegel (cf. Derrida 1986 [1974], p. 34a).

Cohen's particular integration of the Jewish ethos with the Kantian comes at the cost of transnational pacifism and tolerance, both of which are clearly privileged within the source materials. Furthermore, Derrida reads Cohen as arguing that both Judaism and Kant have special access to epistemological debates, the question of the truth, so that the question of national identity morphs into the "matter of interpreting the truth of truth itself in the origin of its institution" (p. 66). This last phrase, "the origin of its institution", recalls us to the theme of the conference, and another aspect to the paper, namely the determination of academic ideas by state power. The text therefore ends with a discussion of Kant's ideal of a world without national boundaries, and the suggestion that the military force that he delights in abolishing is only reinscribed at the higher level of his academic authority.

This is similar to the end of another article, "*Mochlos*; or, The Conflict of the Faculties", which again closes by gesturing at Kant's latent recognition of the violence required as a condition of possibility for academic work, and such parallelism draws out how Derrida is equally interested in Kant as in Cohen. Interpretation, therefore, is what Cohen does to Kant and Derrida to them both, all claiming methodological fidelity and intellectual respect to their forebears. Yet Cohen has been able to turn the philosopher of reason to deeply irrational ends, and indeed Derrida has found incipient weaknesses of reason there all along, not least the passage from the subjective to the objective. For Cohen in this particular text it is a hazardous journey, as his subjective interests (and perceived subjective interests)<sup>25</sup> continually interfere with his philosophical reasoning. And Derrida folds out of that an awareness of his own subject position as a famous Jewish philosopher with a particular relation to his supposedly native country, speaking in a homeland of the Jewish people as well as many others, in a manner which extends and deepens the Kantian technique of reflection. The unfortunate, to say the least, consequences of Cohen's argument can only be avoided through this sort of self-consciousness, as Derrida stakes out early in the paper: an end to violence in the Holy Land "cannot be accomplished without unceasing, well-informed, courageous reflection" (p. 40). This response to the Kantian philosophical tradition, attempting to use its own reflexive methods to move beyond it, seems central to Derrida's understanding of Kant, for example in his insistence on the "law and destiny" of the *Aufklärung* quoted in Chapter One. Such a technique of reflection is

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<sup>25</sup> A subsidiary theme in Derrida's text is why Cohen thought such a radical alignment of Jewish and German identities would be in the best interests of Jews the world over (Derrida 1991, p. 73).



also seen to extend Cohen's work, as he draws a distinction between the French and German experiences of the Enlightenment where the Catholic former were unable to analyse religion in the manner of the Protestant latter. Derrida adds to this the third term of Judaism, not as a synthesis (which is, to some extent, what Cohen attempts) or an alternative (note his comments elsewhere on the "Abrahamic" religions) but as an example of how analysing religion is not kept distinct from faith (e.g. Derrida 2001 [1997], p. 28). This necessarily questions Cohen's construction of his own Judaism and foregrounds Derrida's, perhaps in a manner which emphasises the continual dissolution and reconstruction of identity rather than anything more essentialist: to borrow an image from Levinas, imitating Abraham the wanderer rather than Ulysses the exile.<sup>26</sup>

All of this, given the circumstances of the original paper, and the larger contexts of Derrida's reputation, resonates. Throughout the explication and analysis of Cohen's argument, Derrida patterns the text with strangely disturbing moments: for instance, he makes some play of the fact that Cohen's perspective is nationalist *and* socialist, and that the translators of one work on German and Jewish identities chose "mentor", against the grain of the sense, as the equivalent of "*Führer*" (pp. 79, 50). He also includes references to Cohen dying before the rise of the Nazis, his wife perishing in the death camps, and the post-war formation of the state of Israel. Links are repeatedly offered between Cohen and Heidegger, as if to note that their chronological and institutional proximity might indicate a larger unity of their projects, even through political or personal weakness (e.g. pp. 42, 57, 85). The opening paragraph of the text makes this political engagement evident:

As will soon become easily apparent, the choices I have made for this paper bear a necessary relation to this very place: the university, an Israeli institution of Jerusalem. They bear a necessary relation to this very moment: the terrible violence marking once again the history of this land and pitting against each other all those who believe they have the right to inhabit it.

(Derrida 1991, p. 39)

Moreover, this is an Israel indebted to the "economic-technical-scientific-military power of the United States" through "an American-Israeli axis", which again calls into question Cohen's

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<sup>26</sup> On this point, one of the older pieces of criticism linking Derrida and Judaism is still very engaging, namely Handelman 1983.

desired alignment with American Jews (p. 61).<sup>27</sup> Towards the end of the piece, there is a reference to the historian Renan, who argued that for nations to be formed there must be mutual forgetting alongside mutual experience or recollection (p. 88). The specific context is Cohen's vision of Germany, but again the place of original presentation must be recalled, and similarly, while the text ends by outlining Kant's reliance on military power for intellectual work to exist, "an Israeli institution of Jerusalem" must also be intended. So, just as Cohen wrote his text for a specific geo-political purpose, perhaps at the expense of rigorous philosophy, so Derrida writes his, although with a much deeper awareness of what he is doing and the specificity of his subject position. He attempts to undermine the ideas of identity which Cohen seems to champion, to align himself with a Jewish identity only as perpetual reformation rather than essence, and to bring to the surface how the rationalism privileged by Cohen already relies on, and calls forth more, irrationalism. This is all gestured at in one of Derrida's summaries:

Kant, the Jew, the German. In this title, then, none of the attributes can be made minor, none is more essential. This is a cosubstantial reciprocity rather than a coattribution. This fundamental identification or this substantial alliance may rather be said to be *subjectal*. It is in the very subjectivity of the Kantian subject, of man as a subject of morality and justice [*droit*], free and autonomous, that the Jew and the German are associated. Their *socius* (alliance, spiritual symbiosis, psyche, and so on) is that very *socius* which makes of the *subjectum* a moral being and a legal being [*un être de droit*], a freedom, a person.

(Derrida 1991, p. 72)

Cohen attempts to keep these three different attributes simultaneously in play, while Derrida moves on to their determination under systems of power, and their eventual settling into a hierarchy: he knows, as Cohen does not, that Jewish and German identities were not on a trajectory of unification. By introducing a strong version of self-critical reflection, Derrida attempts to step beyond the possible naiveties of Cohen's work into something more assuredly post-Kantian.

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<sup>27</sup> Note also the recognition of overlap between technology and faith, itself a subject of at least one later article (Derrida 1998a [1996]).

## 2.5. Conclusion

While Derrida's response to Cohen takes a very different form to Bakhtin's, there are underlying similarities. Certainly Bakhtin is more wide-ranging in his appreciation of his predecessor, and perhaps more attuned to the possible virtues of his work, but, like Derrida, he is not slow to note the shortcomings. In particular, both he and Derrida criticise the movement towards ahistorical, subjectless philosophy that fails to take into account the groundedness of the individual in her particular context. Neo-Kantianism presents the wrong (idealist) kind of unity of knowledge, both in terms of the movement between subjective experience and objective fact, and for the role of philosophy as blueprint for all forms of human knowledge. According to Kagan, one of Kant's main achievements is to connect ethics with contemporary society, thus again marrying the pure and social sciences, and neo-Kantianism, explicitly including its methodological unity, extends this project (M. Kagan 2004 [1922], p. 205). This is the dream of universal harmony that Bakhtin never relinquishes, and indeed on which he concentrates in his final writings. Derrida too suggests that by finding structural weaknesses in language, he has provided the basis for a critique of all ways of engaging with the world, thus ascribing to his work a methodological significance which he would only partially accept (cf. McQuillan 2000, p. 4; Derrida 1981 [1972], p. 6). Both Derrida and Bakhtin deepen Cohen's ethical philosophy so that the moral obligation to one another is seen not as a juridical product of social interaction, but something hard-wired into ontology: to be is to be responsible. While Derrida attempts to avoid mystical connotations to this, both Bakhtin and Cohen are more comfortable with the language and imagery of religion. Bakhtin employs Cohen's ideas as part of a broader intellectual-political strategy, namely preserving idealist and religious tendencies under adverse conditions, while for Derrida, a similarly political agenda is designed to place them both in doubt. More generally, neo-Kantianism for Bakhtin plays a similar role to phenomenology for Derrida, determining the fundamental matrix into which fit other philosophical positions. For both, these elementary orientations grant the possibility of an over-arching method, irrespective of the degree to which their individual philosophies carry this out. Neo-Kantianism, as Chapter Eight of this work will elucidate, reached a definite end-point at the Davos debate in 1929, and arguably had fallen into disrepair long before then. One of the reasons for its decline in significance was its neglect of experience and sensibility, a disregard that involved not just a specific reading of Kant, but also a limited understanding of Hegel.

## 3. Hegel

### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter investigates the influence of Hegel on Bakhtin and Derrida, dealing in particular with Derrida's writings on Hegel, and Bakhtin's 1930s texts on the novel. George Wilhelm Frederick Hegel (1770-1831) developed a set of problems bequeathed by Kant in relation to the interaction of the individual and the world she perceives; the degree to which society influences subjective perception; the possibility of recognising historical development within this interaction; and the special role of art in mediating some of these questions. Derrida and Bakhtin carry forward these problems again, often aligning them with their other philosophical and contemporary-historical interests, and turning them to fit their general intellectual projects. This necessarily requires a development of ideas in the course of a career: Bakhtin, for instance, moves from regarding Hegel through a strongly neo-Kantian lens which emphasises his idealism to a more independent vision which can incorporate a greater sociological and historical awareness. The chapter foregrounds two different kinds of influence in the course of its investigations. The first, demonstrated by examining Derrida's relations with Hegel through the context of French Hegelianism, constitutes a form of direct influence: Derrida was taught by Jean Hyppolite, the French translator and commentator on Hegel, and his early works specifically react against a version of Hegel outlined by a previous generation. The second is a more diffuse, atmospheric kind of influence, marked here by the filtering of Bakhtin's relations with Hegel through other readings, most notably neo-Kantianism but also the latent Hegelianism of *Lebensphilosophie*. Bakhtin rarely makes explicit reference to Hegel (although given his casual footnoting practices, this is perhaps unexceptional), yet he helps determine an agenda of Bakhtin's concerns and approaches evident throughout the works of this period. Bound up with Bakhtin and Derrida's responses to Kant are other historical rejoinders, and the most chronologically proximate, and arguably direct, is that of Hegel.

### 3.2. Hegel

I would like to begin by clearing away some of the popular assumptions about Hegel and presenting a broadly canonical version of that thinker's work, to bring out more clearly the particular interpretations by Bakhtin, Derrida and others outlined below. This account is largely based on an Anglo-American tradition of criticism, and does not lay claim to any more direct access to Hegel's thought, but rather offers one established position against which more individualist readings can rub. It also underscores the connections with Kant, to emphasise firstly the impact of his philosophy, secondly the continuity of Hegel's concerns, and thirdly the way in which later schools of philosophy, especially neo-Kantianism, necessarily included Hegel in their understanding of Kant.

A useful starting-point is a strong reading of the term "speculative" in "speculative idealism", the conventional title for Hegel's thought. In Gillian Rose's adamant prose,

To read a proposition "speculatively" means that the identity which is affirmed between subject and predicate is seen equally to affirm a lack of identity between subject and predicate. This reading implies an identity different from the merely formal one of the ordinary proposition. This different kind of identity cannot be pre-judged, that is, it cannot be justified in a transcendental sense, and it cannot be stated in a proposition of the kind to be eschewed. This different kind of identity must be understood as the result to be achieved.

(Rose 1981, pp. 48-9)

Speculative philosophy, therefore, does not set out things as they are, or even as they should be; rather as they *will* be, regardless of whether or not we can know about them. The Kierkegaardian vision of Hegel as the dusty professor re-arranging his knowledge of the world to suit his philosophical system must at last be recognised as parody, a straw man that serves its own function in Kierkegaard's intellectual development.<sup>1</sup> Hegel was and remains a radical thinker, one interested in challenging the fundamental preconceptions of our thought, and he should not be reduced to a bastion of an academicism that he never represented. He is a creative worker within the Kantian tradition, as the transcendentalism which Kant took for granted becomes an unfolding process of continual proving, not only introducing an historical element to Kant's rather cryogenically-suspended description of knowledge, but also accounting for error

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<sup>1</sup> See 5.4. for more on the role of Hegel in Kierkegaard's thought.

(or the appearance of error) in a more convincing manner. Just as “speculative” must be read in a certain way to recover the drama of Hegel’s thought, so the other key term of his work, “idealism”, must also be carefully glossed. “Idealism”, suggests Findlay, “is the view that the world may, with great effort and without finality, be intellectually and practically mastered, a view which both permits and entails much that would ordinarily be called realism and materialism” (Findlay 1993 [1958], p. 104). Perhaps the key phrase here is “with great effort and without finality”, as some of the more common prejudices against Hegel rely precisely on caricaturing his work as a facile closure of human thought. This is also a traditional criticism of Kant, yet both philosophers would defend an open definition of idealism and the continual refinement of human understanding. Idealism, just like speculation, must unfold over time, and there is no certainty about where it is going: to think *becoming* in the place of *being* is one of the most important Hegelian projects. This clearly rebounds on Hegel’s understanding of Kant’s epistemology and arguments about the human capacity for knowledge. A fundamental breaking-point between the two philosophers is the possibility of questioning categories and categorical thought; for Kant, the categories are seen to presuppose all thought, and hence are outside of any reflective investigation; whereas for Hegel, for the very same reason, they require endless re-examination and development (Kaufmann 1965, p. 410). According to Hegel, the categories Kant discovered were not presented to him from reason alone, but from a social understanding of reason and hence a historically-determined position; they are not invalidated by this inquiry after context, but they are taken as part of a larger chronological development. One consequence which follows is the transformation of the Kantian perceiver’s passive procession through a series of categories and judgements into the continually unfolding Hegelian struggle between man and world, Spirit and matter, continuing the turn begun by Kant towards centring knowledge on the individual (Findlay 1993 [1958], p. 62).

Several other key terms in Hegel’s work also merit clarification. *Geist*, or spirit, is not intended to denote something other-worldly or spiritual, but rather the self-consciousness of reason, which is the heart of being itself (Houlgate 1991, p. 180). It exists only in historical circumstances, and is self-conscious knowledge of that historical development, a fulfilment of the intrinsically human capacity for reflective thought. As we shall see in the chapter on Romanticism, more diffuse definitions of *Geist* competed with Hegel’s, and the continental tradition of philosophy has not been kind to it; yet perhaps because of its potential breadth, it

plays a powerful role in Hegel's work by attempting to enclose what is unique about the human experience of understanding. Hegel's dialectical method is likewise deliberately non-transcendental, as contradictory propositions are retained in the synthesis, and the result is again an understanding of the process by which it was reached (Findlay 1993 [1958], p. 21). The mechanical formalism by which the Hegelian dialectic is supposed to be plagued simply does not appear in Hegel's own work, and indeed he mocks this form of thinking in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Kaufmann 1965, p. 168). The Kantian attempt to summarise and transcend previous forms of philosophy without bringing that philosophy to an end is perhaps instructive in this regard (Kant 1969 [1787], p. 84, and cf. p. 38). Kaufmann goes so far as to claim "Hegel's dialectic is at most a method of exposition; it is not a method of discovery", although here, as elsewhere, we should be wary of Kaufmann's interest in reading Nietzsche into Hegel (Kaufmann 1965, p. 175). At any rate, the epistemological and historical certainty that the dialectic is supposed to provide is another foreign imposition on Hegel's text. He closes his 1830 lecture series on the philosophy of history with a series of qualifications: "Now this is the standpoint of the present time, and the series of spiritual formations is for the present concluded with this. – Herewith, this history of philosophy is *concluded*" (quoted Kaufmann 1965, p. 70, original emphasis). The Hegelian notion of ethics can provide one final illustration of this openness. Again, we have a turn to history, where the re-grounding of reason in self-consciousness and social development shifts the base for Kantian morality from individual certainty to social approbation. The binding force for maxims and ethical decisions becomes another individual, who in turn requires legitimisation from another, and so forth, culminating in structures of the state and political organisation (Pinkard 2002, p. 227). Perhaps better than any other, Hegelian philosophy provides a framework for considering the historical development of subjective and social thought, and so a specific kind of relativism: all points of human development are equally essential and valid, and represent different degrees of self-consciousness in a progression towards the same innate knowledge (cf. Kaufmann 1965, p. 370). This Hegelian vision of history is perhaps an asset when it comes to considering the history of the interpretation of Hegel, for the concerns of this thesis, primarily by Derrida and Bakhtin.

### 3.3. *Hegel in France*

One of the things intended by this comparison of Hegel's philosophy of history with the history of Hegel's reception is an explanation of the changing deployment of Hegel in the work of Derrida. In particular, it helps to explain how Derrida turns from an early understanding of Hegel, strongly mediated by the French Hegelianism of the 1930s through to the 1950s, to his own more mature reading, becoming more conscious along the way of both Hegel's work and its application to his own philosophical project. To rephrase this, Derrida begins his career reacting against a certain vision of Hegel, a reaction which forms part of a general ground-clearance of contemporary philosophy, and which serves rhetorical expediency as much as intellectual necessity. Once this is achieved, he can produce a more detailed and thorough analysis of Hegel (primarily through his 1974 work, *Glas*) which, while functioning as an intelligent critique of Hegel, can be seen to only reinforce and re-inscribe some of Hegel's arguments at a higher level. I will develop this in more detail, and explain some of the ways in which Derrida can be seen to extend rather than overthrow Hegel's work, shortly; but first, a brief history of the understanding of Hegel in France.

The two principal figures whose contribution to French Hegelianism will be discussed here are Alexandre Kojève (1902-1968), a Russian émigré and post-liberation civil servant, and Jean Hyppolite (1907-1968), a famous teacher and guide to a generation of post-structuralists including Michel Foucault, and, of course, Jacques Derrida. This section does not pretend to be an exhaustive history of the period, and it elides many major figures, only some of whom (primarily Bergson and Merleau-Ponty) will be picked up in later chapters.<sup>2</sup> Rather, it tracks a series of moments in the French reception of Hegel from the 1930s to the 1970s, beginning from the lectures and classes given at the *École des Hautes Études* by Kojève between 1933 and 1939, attended by many of the best and brightest French thinkers of the day, and ending with *Glas* some 40 years on. Two substantial reasons for Hegel's popularity in France at the start of the period should immediately be marked: firstly that Hegel's thought provided an alternative to the intuitivist metaphysics of Bergson and *Lebensphilosophie* which retained a continuity of interest through the investigation of ordinary experience; and secondly that it was a means of engaging

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<sup>2</sup> For the best histories of this period, the reader is directed to Heckman's introduction to Hyppolite's commentary on Hegel, Butler's focussed work on the motif of desire in the period, and Roth's excellent but dense investigation of Hyppolite, Kojève, and Simone Weil (Heckman 1974; Butler 1987; Roth 1988).



with Marxism, and the genuine political alternative which that seemed to offer (for more on Marxism and Hegel in France, cf. Heckman 1974, p. xv *et passim*). Hegelian phenomenology also seemed to anticipate, or even go beyond, Husserlian phenomenology, one of the other rising tides of 1930s intellectual fashion; the Hegelian critique of natural consciousness, with its investigation of the conditions for self-consciousness and the social-ontological grounding of the self, sat well with modern phenomenology, especially in its Heideggerian revision.

Kojève's series of seminars, and the equally important informal social meetings which grew out of them, were attended by such assorted intellectual luminaries as Lacan, Bataille, Breton, Weil, and Merleau-Ponty, and formed one of the most significant lenses through which the French reading of Hegel was to be conducted.<sup>3</sup> Kojève's interpretation places at the heart of Hegel's system the dialectic of master and slave, and so transforms the interaction of consciousnesses and progression of knowledge into an endless struggle for dominion, authority, and individualised freedom. He picks up on the narrative of the self's development which Hegel sketched in the *Phenomenology* and transforms it into a play of passion, so that each individual's self-consciousness is purchased by the subjugation of others, a violent appropriation of what is desired, and ultimately an encounter with death. The master's desire for freedom requires him to enslave others, yet he is in turn enslaved by his need for their recognition of his mastery, causing him to quest ever onwards, engaging the outside world – in Hegel's scheme, matter – in the pursuit of self-knowledge (Kojève 1969 [1947], p. 10). This clearly affects the idea of man:

Man must be an emptiness, a nothingness, which is not a pure nothingness (*reines Nichts*), but something that *is* to the extent that it *annihilates* Being, in order to realize itself at the expense of Being and to nihilate *in* being. Man is negating *Action*, which transforms given Being and, by transforming it, transforms itself. Man *is* what he is only to the extent that he *becomes* what he is; his true *Being (Sein)* is *Becoming (Werden)*, *Time, History*; and he *becomes*, he *is* History only in and by *Action* that negates the given, the Action of Fighting and of Work.

(Kojève 1969 [1947], p. 38)

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<sup>3</sup> For a full list of participants in the seminars, see the appendix in Roth 1988, pp. 225-7. For a translation of Kojève's work, the Anglophone reader is reliant upon Allan Bloom's selective edition, used in this thesis. However, the reader should be aware that several important texts were left out from this collection, in particular those where an argument about death and negativity is developed which clearly impinges on Bataille's work. For an example of this, the reader is referred to Joseph Carpina's translation of a lecture on death (Kojève 1973).

This anthropocentric reading of Hegel is not necessarily one validated by his entire canon, although for Kojève it provides a means of bridging Hegel's philosophy with Nietzsche. Descombes is acute when he describes the attraction of this vision for Kojève's contemporary admirers: "It contains an element of risk and adventure; it endangers the thinker's very person, his *identity*; it reaches out beyond the generally accepted measure of good and evil" (Descombes 1980 [1979], p. 14). Yet perhaps one can go too far in emphasising the violence of this reading, both in terms of what it does to Hegel's philosophy, and the language through which it works; Hegel's reading of Kant already underscores the conflictual interaction of individual and world. The metaphors Hegel uses to describe the unfolding of *Geist* – an exploding bomb, metal transforming from solid to liquid – demonstrate his own partiality to dramatic language (Derrida 1986 [1974], pp. 106a-107a). We should also not forget the Anglo-American interpretation of Hegel (primarily manifested in Kaufmann) as revolutionary Romantic, which can find grounds enough for this reading without recourse to Kojève. It is a result of historical distortion to see Hegel as a philosopher of optimism and relentless progress, as when he argues "What experience and history teach is this: peoples and governments have never learned anything from history and acted according to what one might have learned from it", it is a pessimistic vision that is advanced (the 1830 lectures on history, quoted Kaufmann 1965, p. 258). While this basis for Kojève's endlessly unsatisfied relationship of master and slave should not be neglected, it should be considered on its own terms; namely, that Hegel himself continues the *Phenomenology* past this dialectic into community, *Sittlichkeit* or ethics, and *Geist*. The anthropocentric reading advanced by Kojève, and which proves the most influential model in the French reception, concentrates on the individual existentialist adventure at the cost of its possible social resolution (Butler 1987, p. 58).

One of the strongest influences on Kojève's interpretation of Hegel was the early Marx, and in particular the recently-discovered 1844 manuscripts; Kojève reads this anthropological theory of labour and alienation back into Hegel, and finds a philosopher consumed by questions of desire and human action (Butler 1987, p. 64). This Marxist Hegel argues that the Slave's proximity to death leads him to better understand Man than the Master, and so is the mechanism for completing History, although still within the terms of individual rather than social consciousness (Kojève 1969 [1947], p. 48). This proximity of Marx to Kojève's reading is attested to by one of his students, Georges Bataille, who saw Kojève's Hegel firstly as entirely

compliant with contemporary Marxism, and secondly as indistinguishable from his own, a rather surprising conclusion for the modern reader (Derrida 1981 [1967], p. 334, n. 7). After all, Bataille is supposedly the philosopher of extremity, excess, and unreason, all terms that appear antithetical for Hegel. Yet Kojève's reading carries with the negative more than Hegel's original, and repeatedly underscores the need to consider an overcoming of the animal fear of death as a condition for human self-consciousness: "to speak of the 'origin' of Self-Consciousness is necessarily to speak of a fight to the death for 'recognition'" (Kojève 1969 [1947], p. 7). By subordinating the elements of the *Phenomenology* that deal with (at least the potential for) social resolution and development, Kojève creates an intellectual framework where the individual's desire can be seen as the mechanism for developing consciousness. This is arguably a precondition for the involvement of Husserl and Heidegger within an Hegelian project (e.g. Kojève 1969 [1947], pp. 195, 259), as a certain slippage is allowed between an Hegelian phenomenology, designed precisely to work towards transcendental conditions for perception, and a modern phenomenology, which holds the investigation of such conditions at a distance. This configuration, with its attendant selectivity, will become more significant in the next generation of French intellectuals, as will Kojève's attention to Hegel's emphasis on language. Hegel consciously plays on the twin meaning of *Geschichte* as "history" and "story", and suggests "the real objective history of a nation cannot be said to have begun until it possesses a written historical record", as with writing comes self-consciousness, the possibility of freedom, and the entrance into a stronger concept of history (Hegel 1975, p. 13). Kojève guides the reader to this idea, and expands it into an epistemological premise:

The *concrete* Real (of which we *speak*) is both Real revealed by a discourse, and Discourse revealing a real. And the Hegelian experience is related neither to the Real nor to Discourse taken separately, but to their indissoluble unity. And since it is itself a revealing Discourse, it is itself an aspect of the concrete Real which it describes.

(Kojève 1969 [1947], p. 178)

This valorisation of language, contained within Kojève's broadly humanist, modernist reading, is developed by Jean Hyppolite during the 1940s and 1950s, with a late modernist scepticism towards the validity of humanism.

Despite Hyppolite's deliberate avoidance of Kojève's lectures – according to his widow, “for fear of being influenced” – the two commentators reach similar conclusions about the need to read Hegel alongside Heidegger and Marx, to re-open questions about the meaning and formation of history, and to discover anew the radicalism of Hegelian thought (Heckman 1974, pp. xxvi, xxxvi). Hyppolite retains the prominence granted to the dialectic of master and slave, although he casts this tension within a scheme of historical development perhaps more reliant on the Hegelian system as a whole. He suggests a reading of Hegel that still grants priority to individual self-consciousness, yet which perpetually moves towards a totality of social forms of experience, in particular the category of intersubjectivity whose modern phenomenological tone to some extent replaces the Hegelian concept of *Geist*. Yet it is the weight Hyppolite places on language that has had greatest effect in twentieth-century French Hegelianism. In Hyppolite's reading language is both symptom of and solution to alienated self-consciousness, as it provides both the means of self-knowledge and one of the strongest forces pulling away from that (Hyppolite 1974 [1946], p. 402). Language is seen to mimic the very action of the *Aufhebung*, preserving while it negates, and “the realm of Objective Spirit and culture is therefore the realm of language”, the self-consciousness referred to above in the philosophy of history (Tihanov 2000, p. 262).<sup>4</sup> Heckman adduces several statements of Hyppolite which demonstrate the significance of language:

Hyppolite stresses that for Hegel, “language is the Dasein of spirit”. Further, language is not a replacement for, or reflection or derivation of, anything *else*: “Language unfolds and determines itself without being previously given in an ineffable form”. “Language refers only to itself”. “Meaning as it appears in language, meaning as the becoming of the concept in speech, are prior in relation to the movement which seems to engender them. There is no meaning without language”.

(Heckman 1974, pp. xl-xli)

In one sense, Hyppolite is imposing the contemporary (1940s) interest in *language* on to Hegel's phenomenology of *spirit*, not least because language provides a clarity around the object of study which *Geist* determinedly avoids. Yet in another, this is a recovery of the Romantic interest in the philosophy of language, and particularly Hegel's adaptation of Herder's theories of the

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<sup>4</sup> Tihanov gives the authority for this emphasis on language as Koyré, citing in support “The history of language and the life of language is at the same time the history of the Spirit”, although this is a statement that could just have easily come from Hegel's own writings.

integration of national spirit within different languages (Rockmore 1993, p. 85). Repeated at a higher level, this concern with language as the means and obstacle to self-consciousness is a recurrent concern within Hegelian philosophy. Hyppolite underscores the Hegelian discourse of the subjectivisation of knowledge, so that absolute knowledge becomes

not a thing, a substance, or even a monad; it is subject, that is, identity of identity and non-identity; it is its own becoming. It manifests itself outside – it is external to itself – in order to posit itself and to reflect back on itself in its being-other.

(Hyppolite 1974 [1946], p. 110)

This, particularly in juxtaposition with the ideas of language explored above, suggests a starting-point for post-structuralism and the thought of relations (if not relativist thought) upon which a generation of philosophers worked. If absolute knowledge represents the ultimate collapse of subject and object, perhaps all such disintegrations of the subject mark valid kinds of knowledge. Hyppolite, like Kojève, ties in Hegel's concept of intersubjectivity with Husserl and Heidegger, which again should be seen as a significant move in creating an intellectual milieu for a new generation of thinkers (Hyppolite 1974 [1946] p. 323, n. 2, and p. 324, n. 3). And one final point of interest can be seen as a useful link between Hegelianism, existentialism, and post-structuralism. Action is a form of negation, yet it only leads to a determination rather than is a determinate entity in itself (Hyppolite 1974 [1946], p. 306; cf. Kojève 1969 [1947], p. 38). This is familiar Sartrean territory, in which we are the product of our actions; and also an intimation of the Levinasian/Derridean idea of the trace, which is neither concept nor action yet which sets difference in motion.

The gesture to Derrida is not merely fortuitous, as he studied under Hyppolite, and later worked alongside him in the *École Normale Supérieure*. In a footnote to his historical introduction, Hyppolite's American editor gives especial thanks to two sources for information "in arriving at an over-all picture of Hyppolite and the place he occupied": Mme Jean Hyppolite and M. Jacques Derrida (Heckman 1974, p. xvii, n. 4).<sup>5</sup> Hyppolite's respect and affection for his younger colleague is suggested by his 1963 inaugural lecture to the *Collège de France*, where he mentions Derrida by name and quotes sections of his writing on Husserl (Lawlor 2002, p. 253, n.

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<sup>5</sup> The connection here no doubt being facilitated by Derrida's professional relationship with Northwestern University Press.

4). Derrida's reciprocal gratitude is also publicly acknowledged, as in his 1980 thesis defence at the Sorbonne: "I want to salute [Hyppolite's] memory here and to recall all that I owe to the trust and encouragement he gave me, even when, as he one day told me, he did not see at all where I was going" (Derrida 1983b, p. 36). It is a relationship that has not remained unexamined by Derrida scholars:

Just as Hyppolite everywhere revealed the ironic consequences of the non-self-identical subject who presumes his own adequacy to self, so Derrida exposes the hubris of the philosophical sign's presumption to refer. In both cases, the critique of the principle of identity exposes the limits of human instrumentality, and constitutes a challenge to Hegel's anthropocentric presumptions.

(Butler 1987, pp. 178-9)

This anthropocentrism ascribed to Hegel is, of course, as much a product of the contemporary dominant interpretation as it is intrinsic to his own text. Yet one difference between Hyppolite and his student is that he wishes to retain the subject, no matter how ironic and internally contradictory, "while Derrida argues that the subject no longer makes conceptual sense if referentiality is impossible" (Butler 1987, p. 179). With the collapse of the possibility of simple self-presence, according to Derrida, faith in the referential capacity of language, and indeed the entire metaphysical apparatus that kept this belief in place, cannot be maintained.

### 3.3.1. Derrida and French Hegelianism

In his opening remarks to "The Pit and the Pyramid", a text about the significance of language in Hegel's *Logic*, Derrida notes how Hyppolite has already treated this matter in his *Logique et existence*, to which "we will be making an implicit and permanent reference" (Derrida 1982b [1972], p. 71). Indeed, Derrida's essay was first delivered at Hyppolite's seminar on Hegel, and published in a volume of papers under his aegis. We will analyse it in more detail shortly, but first it would be rewarding to work in a contemporary piece of Derrida's writing, the seminal essay "*Différance*". In this, Derrida sketches a brief history of concepts of difference and asserts that his understanding of the concept will be an alternative to them all, in particular to Hegelian difference, seen to be ultimately reincorporated into the same through the dialectic. This does not mean, however, that we can dispense with Hegel's thinking altogether:

*différance* thus written, although maintaining relations of profound affinity with Hegelian discourse [...] is also, up to a certain point, unable to break with that discourse; [...]but it can operate a kind of infinitesimal and radical displacement of it

(Derrida 1982b [1972], p. 14)

The argument here seems to be that Hegelian philosophy cannot continue in its traditional form yet cannot be abandoned, leading to a project of re-reading and re-writing which fits squarely with Derrida's Heideggerian model of philosophy. The very notion of *différance* is an endless movement of thought which never resolves itself into a definitive form, arguably a version of the dialectic which refuses any possible synthesis, preferring instead a scepticism towards the possibility of totality contrary to the different holisms of Hyppolite and Kojève (Roth 1988, pp. 4, 8). This response to Hegelian philosophy, rejecting its current manifestations whilst recognising its inherent necessity, characterises Derrida's brief comments on Hegel in the late 1960s, and provides the germ for the more independent deployment of Hegel in 1974's *Glas*.

"The Pit and the Pyramid" is a criticism of Hegel's semiotics, which works through the different contradictions into which Hegel's text falls, and the assumptions it makes about the superiority of Western culture; in particular, and typically for this period of Derrida's work, Hegel's connection between self-consciousness and language is criticised.<sup>6</sup> As with Derrida's (Heideggerian) critique of Husserl, temporality is returned to the fore as a possible interference in communication: "The process of the sign has a history, and *signification* is even history *comprehended*: between an original presence and its circular reappropriation in a final presence" (Derrida 1982b [1972], p. 71). Of course, this "final presence" is a moment of absolute fulfilment which Derrida sees the temporal conditions of signification as refuting:

The time of the sign, then, is the time of referral. It signifies self-presence, refers presence to itself, organizes the circulation of its provisionality. Always, from the outset, the movement of lost presence already will have set in motion the process of its reappropriation.

(Derrida 1982b [1972], p. 72)

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<sup>6</sup> It is one of the indicators of the sophistication of Derrida's thought about Hegel in *Glas* that he moves towards a critique of Hegel's teleology on grounds more rigorously philosophical than a general mistrust of the possibility of self-presence, and indeed in a more political fashion (Derrida 1986 [1974], pp. 207ai-211ai).

The sign is one (Derrida would like to argue ultimately the only) way by which the Hegelian Concept relates to itself in the element of spirit, meaning inexorably for Derrida that it will never relate as closely as Hegel desires, but endlessly slips away from itself (Derrida 1982b [1972], p. 74). Just as Derrida confronts Husserl's notions of presence and self-representation with a psychoanalytic argument about the difficulty of constructing linear chronologies, so Freud is used against Hegel to counter the all-embracing *Aufhebung* and the binary relations which (Derrida believes) it requires (Derrida 1982a [1972], p. 221; cf. Derrida 1973 [1967], p. 63). Hegel's theory of memory is also fair game for this psychoanalytical challenge, although Derrida does not make the meal of this here that he will do in his later work (Derrida 1982b [1972], p. 77; compare Derrida 1989 [1986]). Derrida has the grace in "The Pit and the Pyramid" to admit that he is deploying Hegel merely as an access-point to "the more general system and more ample chain of logocentrism", and perhaps indulges in a little tactical ignorance about the variety of possible interpretations of Hegel's work (Derrida 1982b [1972], p. 95). Certainly in another paper from this era, "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism without Reserve", Derrida creates a straw man from Hegel in order to bolster his own thinking. The trajectory of the paper can be sketched as follows: Hegel argues that in order for self-consciousness to develop, on individual and social levels, there has to be a meaningful encounter with death. Derrida objects to this, as an encounter with death cannot be authentic if there is the certainty that increased self-consciousness will result: it is, for Derrida, investment disguised as a gamble. Where there *is* a genuine encounter with the otherness of death, its terror and power, is in the work of Georges Bataille, which Derrida then turns to his own end. The involvement of Bataille is important, as it has convincingly been argued that Derrida's understanding of Hegel relies far too heavily on Bataille's, who, as the reader will recall, was a regular attendee at Kojève's seminars, and who advances that commentator's understanding of death, violence, and sacrifice into an independent philosophy (Flay 1989, p. 168). Derrida's understanding of Hegel, self-consciously or not, seems to rely on Kojève. While Derrida's argument has been thoroughly routed by Hegel scholars (in particular Houlgate 1996), it does flag up his concern with Hegel's thought, and specifically with the limits of the dialectic: what are the bounds of its powers of inclusion? Is there anything that can undermine its apparent all-devouring rapaciousness? Is there something to do with death that stands outside the system? With all of these early commentaries it is perhaps important to remember Derrida is struggling against a dominant



image of Hegel used to support readings of Husserl and Heidegger that Derrida regards as misguided. Derrida admits as much in a talk first delivered in 1968:

if one takes one's bearings from the terrain of political ideologies, anthropologism was the unperceived and uncontested common ground of Marxism and of Social-Democratic or Christian-Democratic discourse. This profound concordance was authorized, in its philosophical expression, by the *anthropologicistic* readings of Hegel (interest in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as it was read by Kojève), of Marx (the privilege accorded to the *Manuscripts of 1844*), of Husserl (whose descriptive and regional work is emphasized, but whose transcendental questions are ignored), and of Heidegger, whose projects for a philosophical anthropology or an existential analytic only were known or retained (*Sein und Zeit*).

(Derrida 1982b [1972], p. 117)

While this anthropologism had “furnished the best conceptual resources” to contemporary thought, it had also been “perhaps the most serious mistake” of the postwar period, a criticism which Derrida elaborates:

First of all, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which had only been read for a short time in France, does not have to do with something one might simply call man. As the science of the experience of consciousness, the science of the structures of the phenomenality of the spirit itself relating to itself, it is rigorously distinguished from anthropology. In the *Encyclopaedia*, the section entitled *Phenomenology of Spirit* comes after the *Anthropology*, and quite explicitly exceeds its limits. What is true of the *Phenomenology* is a fortiori true of the system of the *Logic*.

(Derrida 1982b [1972], p. 117)

Here Derrida suggests that contemporary interpretations of Hegel had lost sight of the complexity of his thought, and that a return to the original texts is required, although in personal terms for Derrida this is subordinated at the time of the 1968 works to a re-reading of, among others, Husserl. Hegel in France has, as have all philosophical luminaries, been repeatedly reinvented, often with an eye to contemporary schools, so that the figure received by each generation is over-determined and, ultimately, not necessarily congruent with the body of works bearing his name. Kojève revised Hegel to fit with Marx and Nietzsche; Jean Hyppolite independently worked in Husserl and Heidegger; and Jacques Derrida, Hyppolite's student, rejected Hegel in this alignment only to partially reclaim him in the names of Freud and, again, Marx and Nietzsche. This is a project effected in *Glas*.

*Glas* is an inordinately complicated work, so we will do well to tread the shallows before braving the depths. The text is laid out in two columns, one on Hegel and one on Genet, both marked by incisions of smaller text, sometimes acting as conventional footnotes, sometimes introducing ideas and themes which will be later adopted by the main text. This methodological approach, apparently so derisive towards Hegel and the Hegelian method, in fact represents its (or at least the Kojèvean) opposition and reconciliation of two distinct consciousnesses. This is pointed out by the text:

Consciousness posits itself for itself only through the detour of another consciousness that posits itself as the same and as other. So given there, standing up face to face, are two totalities. Singular totalities, since they also make up two, are two: absolute, insoluble contradiction, impossible to live with. The relationship can only be violent. The two consciousnesses structurally need each other, but they can get themselves recognized only in abolishing, or at least in relieving, the singularity of the other – which excludes it.

(Derrida 1986 [1974], p. 136a)

Similarly, a certain version of the Hegelian dialectic is adopted, perhaps parodically, in a manner that emphasises the discontinuity and jerkiness of (again) Kojève's Hegel. In the Genet column, Derrida ties back this jerkiness to sexuality (the moment of orgasm), and thence to the construction of Genet's texts: "In little continuous jerks, the sequences are enjoined, induced, glide in silence" (Derrida 1986 [1974], pp. 24b-25b). Suggested here is quite a profound understanding of Hegel's own vision of the dialectic, where the progress of *Geist* is reliant in the crudest possible fashion upon mankind, and therefore liable to fail; the example given in the 1830 lectures on the philosophy of history is slavery, which "ought not to exist" yet does so as "a moment in the transition towards a higher stage of development" (Hegel 1975, p. 184). What appears to be a parody of Hegel's thought reveals itself to be an engagement on grounds where Hegel's thought exists but is challenged – a displacement both "infinitesimal and radical" – in particular the question of whether anything is so undesirable that it will not be resolved in the progress of spirit.

Let us momentarily turn back to Derrida's early commentaries on Hegel to note some more continuities. In "The Pit and the Pyramid", Derrida had taken statements by Hegel such as "We *think* in names" to explore his representational theory of language, and this clearly spurs the

autonomia prevalent in *Glas*, where “Hegel” and “Genet” are both treated as ordinary nouns and their authority as stable, human points of reference diminished (Derrida 1982b [1972], p. 96). In his Bataille article, Derrida quoted Genet on Hegel and an outline of the master and the slave, where the master’s triumph is itself a form of servitude (Derrida 1981 [1967], p. 336, n. 24). The critique of self-presence common to Husserl, Hegel, and others in the 1968 works is brought to bear on *Geist*, whose reflexivity Derrida imagines “as if it kept itself awake by murmuring its very own proper name” (Derrida 1986 [1974], p. 22a). Finally, there is a repeated emphasis on language as both something above the object (its *Aufhebung*, replacement and improvement), and something confined to human frailty – hence an emphasis on *tongue* and speech as a fallible process (Derrida 1986 [1974], p. 9a). This is a further refinement of Hyppolite, as well as a clear development of Derrida’s own thought on language. It is therefore helpful, despite the deeply intimidating reputation and appearance of *Glas*, to note its continuation in theme and approach with Derrida’s earlier, more conventional, work.

One of the fundamental mechanisms of *Glas* is connecting elements of Hegel’s text in a manner that he perhaps did not intend, and the best example of this is the parallelism between *Geist* and the family. The self-presence, or action of self-presentation, characteristic of *Geist* is compared to the family, in that they both remain near one another in order to preserve freedom and self-consciousness (Derrida 1986 [1974], pp. 24a-25a). This reading of the family, along with the heavy emphasis Hegel grants it in his work on ethics, allows Derrida to introduce psychoanalysis and the family drama outlined by Freud. Here, the family is the locus for rivalry and sexual tension rather than mutual support and co-operation, once again returning apparently stable elements of Hegel’s thought to motion and conflict. As suggested above, psychoanalysis also interferes with the neat chronological development of the dialectic, and emphasises the temporal delay inherent to all interpretations of experience. To this already rich mixture, Derrida adds religion, as Hegel aligns the difference of Jewishness with circumcision, and, metonymically, castration: the cut marks the division between something which is part of the *Aufhebung*, and something which is surplus or excluded (Derrida 1986 [1974], pp. 41a-43a). Now, psychoanalysis – the Jewish science – insists that there will always be something left over, a remainder of trauma which cannot be worked out but rather worked through, an admission of failure which Derrida cannot conceive Hegel making. “What always remains irresoluble, impracticable, nonnormal, or nonnormalizable is what interests and constrains us here”, Derrida

argues, and part of the project of having two so different columns is to divide and pluralise desire in an attempt to slip into boundless play (Derrida 1986 [1974], p. 5a).<sup>7</sup>

Judaism therefore seems like one way to step outside of the *Aufhebung*, and by this simple action prove its fallibility, especially when the denial of the divinity of Christ is taken as a central feature: unlike Christianity, which makes God part of the family, Judaism keeps man and God separate (Derrida 1986 [1974], p. 51a).<sup>8</sup> Again this is not as frivolous as it may appear, as Christian structures have, by some commentators, been seen as the fundamental framework for Hegel's system, dealing as it does with problems of infinity, knowledge, and the reconciliation of ideal and real (e.g. Rose 1981, p. 108). Alongside religion, Derrida adopts and adapts some points of Marxist critique against Hegel, transforming the dialectic through Derrida's specific interests into a matter of economics, *oiko nomos*, the law of the household (Derrida 1986 [1974], p. 134a). This leads to the play of "*glas*" against "class", and the translation of Hegelian work as negativity into mourning: "Is not all work a work of mourning? and, by the same appropriative stroke [*coup*] of the more or less of loss, a *classic* operation? a violent opposition of class and classification?" (Derrida 1986 [1974], p. 86b). Whereas Hegel saw all work, and therefore all human action, as a form of negation ultimately recaptured within the absolute, Derrida suggests it is the work of mourning, retrieval only at the cost of irreplaceable loss. What we see here, and reproduced throughout *Glas*, is only a secondary scepticism towards Hegel's methods and intentions, with the main focus of Derrida's critique being the concept and possibility of totality. Derrida believes that he can produce forms of ironic and multi-referential textuality (for instance, the refusal to treat "Hegel" as a proper noun) that firstly evade the *Aufhebung*, and secondly mark the weaknesses in the model of language on which it relies. That he believes he has done so within the terms of his own interpretation of Hegel is indisputable. Whether in the eyes of other critics he has succeeded is another matter.

This would seem to be developing towards an argument that, just as Derrida is not as far from Kant as it may appear, he can also be constructed as working specifically within an

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<sup>7</sup> It has also been argued that the two columns of *Glas* recreate the double scroll of the Torah, a comparison obliquely suggested by the text (Shakespeare 1998, pp. 242-3; Derrida 1986 [1974], pp. 241bi-242bi).

<sup>8</sup> To anticipate myself slightly: Matvei Kagan similarly saw an ethics based in Judaism as one way to escape determinist (in his reading Hegelian) views of history. This primarily came to him through his teacher, Cohen, and arguably influenced the early Bakhtin through an emphasis on individual volition in ethics, and the late Bakhtin through an attempt to preserve an open conception of history (cf. Poole 2001b; I. Kagan 1998; and esp. M. Kagan 2004 [1922]).

Hegelian revision of Kantian problems. As Judith Butler has noted, “it is striking to find how regularly even the most tenacious of post-Hegelians appear to remain faithful to the founding struggles of Hegel’s [...] subject”, and this is certainly true, perhaps self-consciously so, of Derrida (Butler 1987, p. 230). The “kind of infinitesimal and radical displacement” which Derrida offers of Hegel is significant both in its ascription of both similarity and difference. Whereas Hegel is interested in forming a totality of human knowledge and experience, Derrida is engaged in constructing a model which allows things to slip away, to violate rules of coherence and expectation; as suggested above, this may mean that Derrida can appropriate some of Hegel’s techniques without accepting the logic of the absolute which underpins them. That said, there are points where Hegel seems positively to anticipate Derrida: because modern consciousness is abstract and methodological, Hegel must open his *Phenomenology* with abstract, methodological statements in order to show the reader how his system will be different (Rose 1981, p. 151). Derrida repeats this trick in *Glas*, establishing a strictly dialectical method to bring an end to the dialectic. Similarly, for Hegel it is the aim of reflection to destroy itself and so go beyond the limits of reason; it is through speculation that the distinction between subject and predicate will be eroded (Gasché 1986, p. 41). This is not at all far from the immanent critique of deconstruction, nor its (partially Heideggerian) attempt to critique the philosophy of reflection from within. Derrida seems prone to an occasional tactical blindness towards Hegel to further his current concerns: for instance, in *Dissemination* where he contrasts a Heideggerian vision of difference without end, to an Hegelian one of endless progress and sublation (Derrida 1982a [1972], pp. 6-7). For any student of Hegel, this calls out for a gloss from his distinction of good and bad infinities, and a defence of the Hegelian *Aufhebung* as very much the former; and in *Glas*, Derrida demonstrates his familiarity with this argument (cf. his reference to “what remained infinitely calculable”, Derrida 1986 [1974], p. 1b). In Gillian Rose’s reading, this is part of a larger suspicion towards any sort of law, which leads Derrida to mistake speculative reason for absolutism when indeed it is the opposite; because “[Derrida] produces not a reactionary or a revolutionary reading of Hegel but a naïve one”, in one sense he misses what Hegel has to offer (Rose 1984, p. 163). Rather provocatively, she offers Derrida an Hegelian way out of his anti-Hegelian impasse, through a self-conscious and historically-grounded understanding of the origin and status of the law, an opportunity for him to cash in his rhetoric of the specificity of different instances of law (Rose 1984, p. 147). Similarly, although

more sympathetically, Rodolphe Gasché suggests that Derrida's thought *must* deal with the concept of system in order to fulfil its promises of openness towards the future, and foreclose the possibility of totalitarianism which a failure to consider system would produce (Gasché 1994, p. 20). This is a fundamentally Hegelian theme, as suggested in the lectures on the philosophy of history: "We must bring to history the belief and conviction that the realm of the will is not at the mercy of contingency" (Hegel 1975, p. 28). Derrida would not want to surrender to this irrationality, but nor would he chose the version of reason and divine ordinance which Hegel extrapolates from it; rather, he would probably want to keep open these two extremes, and shuttle between them. Rose once more provides a salient warning: "If the infinite is unknowable, we are powerless. For our concept of the infinite is our concept of ourselves and our possibilities" (Rose 1981, p. 45). Derrida would certainly be entitled to question whether an infinite which was knowable was, in the strongest sense, an infinite; yet his very engagement with this problem would seem to suggest a lingering within Hegelian thought. Perhaps one of the better ways of conceiving the difference between Hegel and Derrida, and Derrida and modern French interpretations of Hegel, is a matter of attitude. Hegel regards religion as a symbol, which allows its necessary finitude to be reconciled with the equally necessary infinity in which it is grounded (Hyppolite 1974 [1946], p. 538). The difference between this and Derrida's approach towards religion (or forgiveness, or historical redemption) is that Hegel is convinced of ultimate, absolute reconciliation, while Derrida would argue that Hegel's own logic does not necessitate this conclusion. Similarly, whereas Hegel is interested in the normative power of social existence, Derrida is engaged with the potential for subversion of these norms, of the endless resistance which they provoke (Pinkard 2002, p. 259). If something is transcendent and requires communal consent, then that consent can always be questioned and, on occasion, refused. Finally, it is not the preservation of contraries in the Hegelian dialectic that disturbs Derrida, given how concerned his own work is with preserving alternatives after the moment of choice. Rather, he is aware of the unequal retention of these elements, their political and linguistic hierarchies, let alone the psychological burdens that they may bear. Derrida's scepticism pushes the retention of contraries one notch higher, yet returns once again to an Hegelian problematic: our obligations to others by their nature cannot ever fully be known, for if they were, they would not genuinely represent the sum of our obligations (e.g. Derrida 1995 [1992], pp. 25-6). We need, therefore, a mechanism for retaining both absolute openness and a

capacity to act; and this, it has often been argued, can be found in Hegel's recognition of the social embeddedness of human thought.

### 3.4. *Hegel and Bakhtin*

Bakhtin's use and understanding of Hegel changes throughout his career. He moves from the early works and their understanding of Hegel through the mediation of neo-Kantianism; to the mid-period writings on the novel where specifically first Lukács then Cassirer, and more generally the contemporary debates on this literary form, shape Bakhtin's engagement; to the late works, where neo-Kantianism returns along with a more sophisticated understanding of Hegel to provide Bakhtin with a version fitting for his current philosophical concerns. Hegel stands as an underpinning interest in Bakhtin's canon, redeployed and reinterpreted throughout and rarely grappled with explicitly, yet a significant part of his intellectual machinery. Hegel's importance in the works of Bakhtin cannot be better expressed than in the leading thesis on the topic:

Key propositions that identify Bakhtin's adherence to Hegelianism include (1) the historical nature of values and moral absolutes; (2) breaking with the Parmenidian tradition of Western thought that champions *being* by adopting the Heraclitian notion of *becoming* and thereby shifting from the Aristotelian logic of identity and truth to a Hegelian dialectical logic of identity and truth; (3) the positing of becoming in the social domain of history through the adoption of the philosophy-of-life theory of the co-determinate opposition (or "dialectic") between life and culture resulting in spirit; (4) the belief that self-consciousness and self-determination is established through the co-determinate reciprocal relationship between self and other; (5) the concept that self-consciousness, knowledge and culture are *ab initio* social and historically becoming.

(Dop 2001, p. xiv)

All of these themes, in slightly different language and perhaps with an altered emphasis, will be touched on in the following section, and I am indebted to Erik Dop's work throughout.

Before chronologically working through the three main phases of Bakhtin's reception of Hegel – his writings on the novel from the 1930s and '40s, the *Rabelais* book, and the late methodological works – I will examine the way in which Ernst Cassirer's understanding of Hegel provides a crucial focus for Bakhtin, thus hoping to allay any presumptions about either the originality of Bakhtin's understanding or its accuracy. It would be a mistake to ground an

argument on Bakhtin's direct engagement with Hegel's own work, as there are few references in the texts, and those are of a general nature;<sup>9</sup> it is more the broad arguments that could be ascribed to Hegel, and his dissemination among various intellectual movements which are of interest. A brace of examples at this point may prepare the ground for the rest of the section. One of the projects assayed by Hegel is a history of cultural forms that attempts to blend the specificity of the social situation with the unfolding of the form's internal logic. This is aptly described by Kaufmann:

It is not enough to consider propositions, or even the content of consciousness; it is worth while to ask in every instance what kind of spirit would entertain such propositions, hold such views, and have such a consciousness. Every outlook, in other words, is to be studied not merely as an academic possibility but an existential reality.

(Kaufmann 1965, p. 133)

This is partly the historical typology of artistic and social forms which Bakhtin attempts in his earlier works (for example, "Author and Hero"), but more strongly the linear history of literary genres developed during the 1930s and '40s. However, Bakhtin's source for this project is equally the Romantic movement that developed a rather different idea of literary history, alongside a pre-existing interest in the processes of artistic creation. Because Bakhtin removes the ontological framework and the speculative concept of the Absolute, which, for Hegel, justifies the whole investigation, he replaces what is most distinctively Hegelian with a more flexible and diverse historical perspective. The second example pertains to Dop's propositions above, namely the importance of becoming in the work of both Hegel and Bakhtin. Hegel's emphasis on becoming stems from a desire to understand being on its own terms and to refute the abstractions of metaphysics and Kantian philosophy, and it provides a re-grounding of ontology which sets his whole system in motion (Pinkard 2002, p. 251). Dop is better placed than I to source Bakhtin's interest in this idea in Greek philosophy, but it is worth noting that the Hegelian version of phenomenology is in this aspect not far from the Husserlian form, and so arguably can be seen in the low-level understanding championed by Bakhtin in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, as well as in the later works and their emphasis on situational engagement.

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<sup>9</sup> I am thinking particularly of the passage in "Toward a Methodology of the Human Sciences", where Bakhtin criticises "the monologism of Hegel's 'Phenomenology of the Spirit'", without expanding or offering evidence for this point (Bakhtin 1986 [1975], p. 162).



The question of influence is therefore not simple, and perhaps a matter of broad cultural reception rather than specific personal understanding. Hegel enjoyed enormous popularity in Russia from the 1840s onwards, even if this is manifested in a readiness to use his terminology rather than grapple with the complexities of his work (Dop 2001, pp. x-xi). He also impacted heavily on neo-Kantianism, and in particular, the work of Ernst Cassirer.

While relations between Hegel and neo-Kantianism will be explored primarily with reference to Cassirer, it should be noted how the teleological structure, the ethical orientation, and the twin emphases on value and validity are all general neo-Kantian elements informed by Hegelian, and other, post-Kantian idealisms. Cassirer goes further in these trends than other neo-Kantians, from the logic of his own work as much as contextual influences (predominantly *Lebensphilosophie* and phenomenology) that led him away from more traditional forms of neo-Kantianism. He intended to call his whole *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, and not just the third volume, a “Phenomenology of Knowledge”, and the entire project realises the Hegelian ideal of a history of modes of knowledge (Cassirer 1996 [1928], p. xvii). One place where Kantian and Hegelian idealism differ is their conceived relations between knowledge and existence: for Kantians they are necessarily separate, while for Hegelians they are equally necessarily united. Cassirer therefore attempted to blend a Kantian epistemological analysis of fixed categories – *inter alia*, language, myth, science – with a Hegelian awareness of their development in time (Lipton 1978, p. 75). His main technique for achieving this is an emphasis on the symbol, which bridges thought and existence and therefore mediates between the historically specific individual and the larger structures of knowledge.<sup>10</sup> This mediating capacity is given by Cassirer the specifically Hegelian title of “*Geist*”, and forms part of a broader understanding of this concept which argues for the development of spirit through culture towards absolute knowledge (Cassirer 1953 [1923], pp. 111, 83). Even in the details of Cassirer’s argument a deployment of Hegelian forms can be found, as with the tripartite schema of expression, representation, and pure meaning in the development of language, a narrative of developing self-consciousness (Cassirer 1955 [1925], p. 235). Donald Verene has noted the parallelism between these three stages of

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<sup>10</sup> Cassirer also incorporated strong elements of Romanticism into this synthesis, most notably Humboldt’s notion of inner form, which suggested that each national language represents reality in a specific way – “every particular language represents its own ‘subjective world view’, from which it cannot and will not detach itself” (Lähteenmäki 2002, p. 197; the quotation is from Cassirer 1957 [1929], p. 341). This specifically nationalist understanding of language is explored in Chapter Four, including its particular relevance to Bakhtin’s work on the internal social fragmentation of languages.

symbolism, and Hegel's stages of consciousness (where the mind does not distinguish itself from the object), self-consciousness (where it forms that distinction) and spirit (where the mind reconciles that distinction and establishes a mutually constructive inter-relationship) (Verene 1969, p. 38). Cassirer recognises the value, perhaps the inevitability, of responding to Kant through Hegelianism rather than neo-Kantianism, and does his best to ground the idealism of the latter with the implicit materialism of the former, most notably in his analysis of social institutions and their effects on individual understanding.

To point to the influence of Cassirer on Bakhtin's work has become a critical commonplace; indeed one of the pioneers in this field has called the unifying feature of Bakhtin's work "Hegelian philosophy as modified by the work of Ernst Cassirer" (Brandist 1997, p. 20). To dilate on Cassirer's argument about language, he sees symbolic forms in general as having three main stages of development: mimetic, analogical, and purely symbolic. Mimetic is the initial state of language, and it breaks down when one culture comes into contact with another. Language then passes through an analogical phase, where the arbitrariness of signs in relation to their objects is recognised, until all ties are broken and it becomes purely symbolic. This mirrors precisely Bakhtin's theory of the development of the novel, and his ideas about the ties between language and ideology: only mimetic language is unreflectively bound to ideology, and thus with myth (Brandist 1997, p. 21). Bakhtin preserves the emphasis on language as a cultural form, although with further sophistications about the distinctiveness of both social levels and literary genres within a unitary language, not all of which enhance the coherence of his thought. As will be shown below, Bakhtin breaks away from Cassirer's linear narrative of the development of spirit in a more considered way than from Hegel's, as this latter rupture is a (Kierkegaardian) refusal of the possibility of absolute knowledge rather than the sociological revision of Cassirer's arguments which Bakhtin regards as necessary. The Hegelian connection between the development of the individual and the general development of a society or cultural form is given a prominence in Cassirer's work which is perhaps a misrepresentation of its original intention; Cassirer presumes the linkage as proof of and access to a Kantian transcendental truth, while Hegel, if not his followers, regarded it as the *construction* of that truth. This has further effects. While Cassirer, and following him Bakhtin, sees history as the progressive revelation of something transcendental, Hegel sees truth as a process of becoming, an unpredictable subjectivisation of what is already present in human life. For Cassirer, Bakhtin,

and neo-Kantianism, truth resides outside of human existence; for Hegel, it is inherent, if concealed, within it. It is this mis-interpretation of Hegelianism and the concomitant attempt to map a sociological poetics on to an idealist philosophy that provides Bakhtin with both fruitful inspiration for, and the ultimate frustration of, his project.

One of the few direct references to Cassirer in Bakhtin's work can be found in the late 1930s essay, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel", where the problem of "the ways time is reflected in language (the assimilation of time by language)" is best analysed in "the appropriate chapter" of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (Bakhtin 1981 [1937-8], p. 251). As the rest of this section shows, Bakhtin has taken Cassirer's theory of cultural forms and wrapped it entirely within his ideas of language, just as Cassirer had taken Hegel's theory of *Geist*, and enveloped it within an analysis of culture. Bakhtin's history of cultural forms is therefore in one sense more limited than Cassirer's, particularly as it is motivated as much by his personal interests and research directions (Rabelais, the ancient Greek novel, Dostoevsky), as by the desire for a strong narrative.<sup>11</sup> Yet Bakhtin unfolds these literary preoccupations back into a general theory of culture, so that the "historical struggle of genres, the establishment and growth of a generic skeleton of literature" becomes an exemplar of human activity and perception (Bakhtin 1981 [1941], p. 5). As Bakhtin's reading of Goethe makes clear, the criterion of *necessity* is fundamental for a concept of history, and Bakhtin follows Hegel in ascribing an essential importance to each stage of cultural development, with every step being required for the next (Bakhtin 1986 [1936-8], p. 39). This is an organic vision of history which, to refer to the distinction made above, Hegel would regard as an unfolding of form inherent to human existence, while Bakhtin sees it as progress towards an abstract ideal. One of the reasons that Bakhtin regards the novel as the finest genre for modernity is its existence as the first written form to incorporate and surpass its oral predecessors, and while its epic, oral antecedents stemmed from and preserved national tradition in an uncritical manner, the novel necessarily includes and cuts away its past through written language (Bakhtin 1981 [1941], pp. 3, 16, 21). If one chose, one could see here different stages in a dialectic, with the novel preserving and cancelling the form and perspective of the epic; however, this would firstly undermine Bakhtin's

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<sup>11</sup> This is evident in some of the patches which hold essays together; for instance, in the chronotope essay the teleological, determinate time of medieval Christianity and the vital, creative time of folklore are linked through Rabelais, not least because this is an author Bakhtin knows a great deal about and is clearly passionate in his knowledge (Bakhtin 1981 [1937-8], p. 206).

point about the harmonious co-existence of cultural forms in different stages of development (cf. Bakhtin 1981 [1937-8], p. 129), and secondly risk ascribing too much value to Bakhtin's very broad and questionable categories of "epic" and "novel". Where one *can* detect an engagement with an idea of Hegel is with Bakhtin's emphasis on the fixity of epic and its function in constructing the identity of a people and culture (Houlgate 1991, p. 155). The reason for linking this to Hegel, rather than anyone else in the broader currents of Romanticism, is the direct reference in "Epic and Novel" (Bakhtin 1981 [1941], p. 10). Here Bakhtin deploys Friedrich von Blankenburg's theory of the novel, "later repeated by Hegel", describing the progression from epic to novel and concluding that "the novel should become for the contemporary world what the epic was for the ancient". Indeed, agrees Bakhtin, but with almost all of the values changed: the fixity, coherence, and social conservatism of the epic are replaced by the endless mutability, openness, and radicalism of the novel (for an elaboration of this point, cf. Dop 2001, p. 141). Bakhtin is happy to employ Hegel's ideas, or the ideas of Hegel's sources, yet not the values and principles that he understands them to represent.

For Bakhtin, the novel comes into being at a time when the insufficiency of one language or social discourse becomes evident, at a moment of realisation that a single ideological perspective cannot explain the entire world (Bakhtin 1981 [1934-5], p. 367). It requires a shift from heteroglossia in-itself to heteroglossia for-itself, which is again tied to the awareness within one linguistic group that they cannot explain the manifold totality of human existence (Bakhtin 1981 [1934-5], p. 400). The obvious thing to say about these arguments is how they reflect a Hegelian development of self-consciousness as the development of human history, right down to the ascription of self-awareness to a human creation which logically should have no capacity for it (cf. Dop 2001, p. 131). Yet it is also run through a very neo-Kantian framework, as the mutual comprehension and inter-animation of languages is an unending process where the "ought" of their understanding never reaches an "is", once again converting the materialist overtones of Hegel's work into a firmly Kantian idealism (Brandist 2002a, p. 122). The Hegelian argument about changes in one area of human consciousness affecting both other areas of knowledge and the material practices which inform them is also played out in a specifically neo-Kantian manner which emphasises the eternal validity of certain ideas. Bakhtin makes the association between the development of consciousness through language, and the emergence of a new way of seeing, a new clarity over the laws of the universe:

Such a thing as Newton's law of gravity, in addition to its direct significance in natural and philosophical sciences, made an exceptional contribution to the visual clarification of the world. It made the new unity of the real world and its new natural law almost graphically visible and perceptible.

(Bakhtin 1986 [1936-8], p. 44)

The rhetoric of the argument suggests that Newton's formulation of his laws did not simply change the way in which the world was perceived, but moved it towards a greater state of truth, a neo-Kantian realm of eternal validity: "an exceptional contribution to the visual *clarification* of the world". It is perhaps telling that in one of his earliest works Bakhtin uses Newton as an example of the development of human knowledge, and here in an explicitly neo-Kantian sense, argues that "Newton's laws were valid in themselves even before Newton discovered them" (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 10). The Hegelian narrative of burgeoning self-consciousness is, in the 1930s works, set within the context of a neo-Kantian belief in the eternal, yet not directly accessible, realm of validity.

It is one of the more widely-applied arguments in Bakhtin's work that genres exist as social, interpersonal forms of cultural understanding and memory:

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 completely bypassing the subjective individual memory of their creators.

(Bakhtin 1981 [1937-8], p. 249, n. 17)

Yet it has been one of the many virtues of the recent critical trend towards historicizing Bakhtin to note how this idea, as well as others, such as the instability of the novel genre, in fact stands as a relative commonplace in criticism of the time (Tihanov 2000, pp. 139-40). Part of the reason for this is the high profile of the Soviet debates about the novel form during the 1930s, to which Bakhtin had access, and from the evidence of the essays seems to have followed; and these debates necessarily involved an Hegelian reading of the novel. First and foremost is the political context of the period, where Hegel was seen as the most significant precursor to Marx; but

secondly, there is the much more sophisticated Lukácsian reading of Hegel which informs his theories of the novel. It is no surprise, therefore, to see in the above quotation a weakly Hegelian argument for the objectivity of social forms and within them the persistence of certain cultural ideas. The linguistic determination of the individual's perception of the object represents in a similarly broad sense an Hegelian emphasis on the sociality of consciousness, although the reduction to language is already a Cassirerian variation on this (Bakhtin 1981 [1934-5], p. 276). A more rigorous influence from Hegel's social theory can be seen in "From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse", where the relation of "the public nature of the literary form and the private nature of its contents" fits precisely with Hegel's dialectic of the same in the *Philosophy of Right*. They are both concerned with the social mediation of individual desire, and both reach similar conclusions about the changes to the content which the public form requires (Tihanov 2000, p. 155). One of the key stages in this dialectic of public and private desire is also, for Hegel, a pivot of Western civilisation, namely the coming of Christianity, with its recognition of the equality of all before God and consequent advancement of freedom (Houlgate 1991, p. 20). Bakhtin grants the establishment of Christianity a similarly significant place, although it is a version which inherently is never sanctioned by the established church, and whose belief-system is constructed from a variety of pre-existing sources (Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 55). Indeed at times Greek culture, as one of the main currents in Christianity, seems more significant than the religious doctrines laid on top. Bakhtin privileges the world of the Greeks not least because of its proximity to folklore, which in turn is valorised as a "productive influence on literature", a connection of being and time which is culturally fruitful (Bakhtin 1981 [1937-8], p. 105; 1986 [1936-8], p. 52). The folkloric quite simply connects art to the people, as when a great man in a folktale is seen to represent a great nation; this emphasis on organicity, proximity to the cycles of nature and work, and the union of social and natural becoming, is a set of arguments which leads directly to the Rabelais book (Bakhtin 1981 [1937-8], pp. 150, 242).<sup>12</sup>

Galin Tihanov ties in *Rabelais and his World* specifically with the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, noting the coincidence of the cancellation of master and slave in carnival, "the unity of praise and abrogation, of vitality and death in the *language* of carnival", and the emergence of the generalised social body (Tihanov 2000, p. 271). All of this is indisputable, and will be

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<sup>12</sup> The subject of folklore and its relations to a social whole will be discussed again with relation to Marxism in 4.3.1..

unpacked below, but there are also more generalised points of influence from a broader reception of Hegel. For instance, the endlessly cyclical nature of carnival recalls the introduction to the *Phenomenology* and its Bacchanalian revel of truth in which no member remains sober, although Hegel (in this instance) avoids the social and political implications which Bakhtin is so eager to stress (Bakhtin 1984 [1965], p. 91). This large-scale overturning of carnival is repeated in the individual body, as eating and defecation, and ultimately parturition and death, are recognised not as contradictory processes but two points in the same cycle, an attempt to stress the permeability and openness to social influence of the human body (Bakhtin 1984 [1965], *passim*, but e.g. p. 317). In another example of Bakhtin following Hegel's general argumentation yet reversing the polarities of meaning, Hegel describes the grotesque as the parodic, violent conflict of form and meaning and a degenerate form of art, while Bakhtin reads the same in class terms and regards it as a tension between popular meaning and authoritarian form (Brandist 2002a, p. 142). He ascribes to it the same importance as he did the Newtonian revelation of the laws of the universe: "[I]n the grotesque concept of the body a new, concrete, and realistic historic awareness was born and took form – not abstract thought about the future but the living sense that each man belongs to the immortal people who create history" (Bakhtin 1984 [1965], p. 367). This is a corporealisation of the linguistic argument about the development of heteroglossia in the 1930s works, where what was previously an abstract openness and productive interaction between different world-views becomes the most physical, carnal form of intersubjectivity. The reference to "the immortal people" can also be seen as a weak Hegelianism, derivative from later Romanticism and Nietzsche as much as from Hegel's own linkage of individual and social development (cf. Tihanov 2000, p. 271; and Tihanov 2001). Corporealisation also links to Bakhtin's work prior to the 1930s writings on the novel, where the embodied Christ possesses a profound significance, and therefore again to Hegel and his recognition of the utility of Christ when exploring ideas of truth innate within mankind (e.g. Bakhtin 1984 [1963], p. 32; Rose 1981, p. 108).<sup>13</sup> The body also brings in the popular Bakhtinian theme of laughter, as in the Rabelais book there is a complicated dynamic between a Hegelian erasure of the distinction between subject and object, and a Young Hegelian attempt to recover a stronger conception of nature, of something which is beyond reason and therefore only part of the subject. Bakhtin

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<sup>13</sup> The particular route of reception here might well be Dostoevsky, whose influence from the Orthodox tradition brought this idea to the fore, or Vissarion Belinskii's critical writings on Dostoevsky that were heavily influenced by an understanding of Hegelianism.

argues for a layer of human existence which cannot be incorporated within reason or a dialectical philosophy, and which is most clearly revealed through his concept of laughter, derivative, as is well known, from Nietzsche, Bergson, and Cassirer (Zima 1989, p. 90). It is laughter that asserts our self-conscious humanity, or, to use more Hegelian terms, our existence for-and-in-ourselves.

With laughter and the body comes another key Hegelian concept, that of work. Bakhtin argues, “Human labor’s encounter with the world and the struggle against it ended in food, in the swallowing of that which had been wrested from the world. [...] [B]oth labor and food were collective; the whole of society took part in them” (Bakhtin 1984 [1965], p. 281). Hegel defines labour as man’s transformation of nature, and recognises the connection of social bonds forged through labour, and that society’s relationship with nature, all of which is part of the development of *Geist*. For Hegel, art creates a breathing-space in this workaday life, a tiny moment and space of freedom which can give the subject an experience of that to which she should aspire (Houlgate 1991, p. 137). This utopian vision of art is one of the basic motifs in Bakhtin’s work, although it is overlaid with a keen awareness of the too-lateness of any ritualised form of social resistance (Bakhtin 1981 [1937-8], p. 212).<sup>14</sup> Bakhtin had previously noted the imbrication of time with cycles of labour, and through Goethe had suggested that historical development only had meaning when seen as the advancement of human projects (Bakhtin 1986 [1936-8], pp. 25, 35). Yet whereas this suggests a linear chronological progression, the emphasis throughout the Rabelais book is on cyclical development, just as in Hegel historical advancement relies on the slave’s labour, even while at the same time this destroys the relationship between master and slave (cf. Kojève 1969 [1947], p. 29). Bakhtin has reached a more sophisticated understanding of Hegel that is brought to fruition in the late works, where the recurrence of history creates a salve for his epistemological uncertainty.

In the late methodological writings representing an end to his intellectual career, Bakhtin returned to the neo-Kantian version of Hegel that marked the start of his work.<sup>15</sup> However,

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<sup>14</sup> A motif that in itself recalls Hegel’s assertion about wisdom or philosophy always illuminating the situation only once it has been resolved.

<sup>15</sup> The textual status of the late works, and the essay cited below in particular, is one of the most pertinent cruxes confronting a reader of Bakhtin. Kozhinov, an early editor of Bakhtin’s work, combined notebook material from the 1940s, 60s, and 70s to form “Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences” and presented the typescript to Bakhtin, expecting the granting of his approval. The death of the author prevented this, and the text was published in 1975 under the title “Toward a Methodology for Literary Scholarship”. Kozhinov then returned the original materials to the archive in a form that suggested they comprised a single unit. This material was printed in 1979 purged of Kozhinov’s transpositions and interpolations, and with the 1940s material hived off into a separate text;



whereas the earlier texts had attempted to link knowledge and existence through language and literary form, the later notes separate the two terms only to reunite them on a higher level, what becomes known as the superaddressee. The separation first:

Meaning cannot (and does not wish to) change physical, material, and other phenomena; it cannot act as a material force. And it does not need to do this: it itself is stronger than any force, it changes the total contextual meaning of an event and reality without changing its actual (existential) composition one iota; everything remains as it was but it acquires a completely different contextual meaning (the semantic transformation of existence).

(Bakhtin 1986 [1975], p. 165)

*Becoming* is now the central category of Bakhtin's philosophical thought, and not as manifested in literary form or language, but in a much more diffuse understanding of every human action as a potential text for interpretation. There is a much greater sensitivity to the inexorable progression of history, and here with a better understanding of the Hegelian openness of history rather than the neo-Kantian progression towards a pre-determined Absolute. In the "Concluding Remarks" to "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" written in 1973, Bakhtin distinguishes between the chronotopic elements in every work, the acts of artistic perception which fuse time and space, and those which solidify into forms (Bakhtin 1981 [1937-8], p. 243). This is several things at once: a phenomenological revision of a certain (Soviet or mechanical) Hegelianism; a return to a Simmelian (and therefore blended neo-Kantian and philosophy-of-life) understanding of the constant interaction of life and form; and an awareness of the selectivity of history, its capacity to develop in a variety of ways. Unquestionably this had always been a feature of Bakhtin's work, yet here it is theorised more rigorously through the new emphasis on historical relativism. This interest in perspective is also contained in the revisions to the chronotope essay, where the reader's historical position is seen as a key determinant of meaning, and "every entry into the sphere of meanings is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope" (Bakhtin 1981 [1937-8], pp. 255-6, 258). While it would be erroneous to assert that these remarks could come directly out of the earlier work, there is a certain inherent logic to

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the fundamental conflation of notebook entries into a coherent essay, however, remained, and is carried over into the English translation. I am obliged to David Shepherd for his summary of these events, and the full story is given in volume six of the *Collected Works* (Bakhtin 2002, pp. 535-7).

those texts that culminates in this strong (hermeneutic) historicism.<sup>16</sup> Once the socialised nature of understanding is taken for granted, it must be placed within an historical framework, and the leading candidate for this in Bakhtin's world-view would be Hegel. That said, I would not want to over-emphasise a new understanding of Hegel at the cost of recognising how convenient this vision of history is for Bakhtin's contemporary preoccupations. There is a certain slippage in the late works between future interpretations being *possible*, and being *inevitable*, an equivocation which allows Bakhtin a neo-Kantian (arguably eschatological) optimism while avoiding a naïve, Hegelian determinism (Bakhtin 1986 [1975], p. 167). His belief in the capacity of history to recover all meanings allows him both an epistemological pluralism and a monism, where from all the conceivable interpretations to be made, there will be a sorting mechanism that reintegrates knowledge and human existence.

This is the juncture where the concept of the superaddressee is introduced. To recite the familiar passage:

in addition to this addressee (the second party), the author of the utterance, with a greater or lesser awareness, presupposes a higher *superaddressee* (third), whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed, either in some metaphysical distance or in distant historical time (the loophole addressee). In various ages and with various understandings of the world, this superaddressee and his ideally true responsive understanding assume various ideological expressions (God, absolute truth, the court of dispassionate human conscience, the people, the court of history, science, and so forth).

(Bakhtin 1986 [1959-61], p. 126)

“All the guises under which the superaddressee is said to have existed in this passage”, notes Dop, “have their semantic origin in Hegel's philosophy where they refer to the various expressions of the universal spirit as idea” (Dop 2001, p. 119). Here again, then, is the neo-Kantian revision of Hegel, where what has originally come from human society is transformed into something outside of it, imposed from above; yet at least there appears to be a closer engagement with Hegel than before. In his most famous comment apparently on Hegel, Bakhtin, as many commentators have noticed, refutes Hegelian philosophy with a Hegelian gesture: “Dialectics was born of dialogue so as to return again to dialogue on a higher level (a dialogue of *personalities*)” (Bakhtin 1986 [1975], p. 162). This return at a higher level is characteristic of

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<sup>16</sup> Although note Wall 2001 on the difficulties of regarding the chronotope essay as a complete whole.

the dialectic, and sits much better with Hegel's own concept of the dialectic rather than anything new (cf. Pinkard 1994, pp. 339-41; Houlgate 1991, p. 61; Kaufmann 1965, pp. 168, 174-5).<sup>17</sup> The Hegelianism of Bakhtin's rebuttal is expressed even more clearly a little further on, where he suggests "Thought knows only conditional points; thought erodes all previously established points" (Bakhtin 1986 [1975], p. 162). This openness and continual uncertainty is precisely what Hegel aims to promote, and it is a telling indictment against the second-hand versions of Hegel upon which Bakhtin has relied until now. Similarly, the critique of dialectics as a lifeless dialogue says little of interest about Hegel's own work, and much more about the way it was used and distorted in Soviet Russia (Bakhtin 1986 [1970-1], p. 147). The call to return dialectics to an interplay of "living words and responses" is an inherently Hegelian notion, attempting to reconnect dialectics and the unfolding of *Geist* with everyday life. Furthermore, the endless series of subjective encounters and challenges which Bakhtin sees as central to a concept of interpretation is much closer to Hegel's own understanding of dialectics than this caricature, and again lays the burden of historical progression with individual subjects rather than imposes it from without (e.g. Bakhtin 1986 [1970-1], p. 142; 1986 [1975], p. 106). Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic is a way of understanding the event or utterance in context, and can be applied to monologic utterances as well as dialogues. In this form as critical tool, dialogism is remarkably close to Hegel's dialectical thinking, providing the basic experiential structure over the Hegelian ontological structure of reality (Côté 2000, pp. 24, 28). The dialogic can also be seen as a Cassirerean reading of dialectics, which emphasises openness and inter-subjective cultural communication rather than the abstract development of thought, demonstrating how Bakhtin never really sheds his familiar sources, but rather re-orders and re-synthesises them in light of his current concerns (Dop 2001, p. 102).

One of the most helpful arguments of Dop's work is that Bakhtin's misreading of, or limited access to, Hegel often brings him closer to the source; for instance, in his opposition of Dostoevsky's social interplay of languages and perspectives with Hegelian abstraction, he touches on the social emphasis in much of Hegel's mature work (Dop 2001, p. 115). This chapter has suggested the truth of that assertion, as the writings on the novel, the book on

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<sup>17</sup> The dialectics referred to here have also been convincingly associated with structuralism rather than Hegelianism; this does not invalidate a recognition of the common ground between Hegel and Bakhtin, particularly given the limited understanding of Hegel in some key secondary works (Brandist 2002a, p. 167; cf. Morson and Emerson 1990, p. 49).

Rabelais, and the late methodological works, all deploy Hegel's thought and sometimes name to further Bakhtin's own unique synthesis of ideas. Cassirer already marks a step away from the neo-Kantian attitude towards Hegel, and Bakhtin continues by incorporating his own influence from *Lebensphilosophie* and phenomenology (two movements on nodding terms with Hegel), as well as the contemporary Russian context. Hegelianism is that which cannot be avoided in Bakhtin's work, and which keeps on returning: it does not, however, form a linear narrative, instead appearing as an accumulation of different, not necessarily compatible, meanings. And this conception of a diversity of meanings is, in a pleasingly neat fashion, one of the things that Bakhtin becomes conscious of in his very last writings, creating an in-and-for-itself of Hegelian understanding.

### 3.5. Conclusion

Bakhtin and Hegel, therefore, both develop understandings of Hegel that incorporate and dilate Hegelian motifs of self-consciousness, the preservation of contradiction, and becoming rather than being. They begin from interpretations that are heavily determined by contemporary contexts (whether that is French or neo-Kantian readings), and gradually move towards a more full acceptance and appreciation of Hegel's value. In Derrida's case, this involves a sustained engagement with Hegel's own writing in the form of *Glac*; for Bakhtin, while there is arguably greater exposure to Hegel demonstrated in the Rabelais book, the arguments offered in the late methodological notes could equally have come from other sources. Neither, however, accept the over-arching structures of Hegel's thought, and implicitly refuse the teleology of which Hegel has been frequently accused. One possible reason for this turn to Hegel is a recognition that the concepts of language onto which Bakhtin and Derrida have placed so much weight of mediation between the individual and society are not inimical to Hegel, but indeed could benefit from some of his arguments. This acceptance on the ground of language, which rapidly develops into a larger interest in Hegel's socialisation of Kantian epistemology, is aided by Bakhtin's reliance on Cassirer, and Derrida's involvement with Hyppolite and, more loosely, Kojève. While Bakhtin continues Cassirer's project of synthesising an idealist concept of knowledge with a materialist-inclined theory of knowing, Derrida develops to an (il)logical extreme his analysis of Hyppolite's connection of language and totality. This awareness of the motivations behind and

contexts of Bakhtin and Derrida's uses of Hegel is particularly important when considering their appropriation by literary theory. Derrida's *différance* and his structures of recognising contraries within unified systems of thought are indebted to a tradition of reading Hegel, as are Bakhtin's arguments about the social import of literature and the utility of open-ended dialogue as a model for the acquisition of knowledge, and a discipline which deploys these concepts without clarity over their background hazards limiting their efficacy. More of this in the Conclusion; for now, we will turn to the influence of Romanticism on Bakhtin and Derrida. Their understandings of Hegel, and those earlier readings proposed by Cassirer, Hyppolite, and Kojève, all operate with an awareness of the Romantic response to Hegel, and through that, to Kant.

## 4. *German Romanticism*

### 4.1. *Introduction*

The school of philosophers, artists, and cultural critics known as German Romanticism included August and Friedrich Schlegel (1767-1845, and 1772-1829), Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854), and Johann Herder (1744-1803). Their emphasis on the power of art (for the Romantics primarily literature, and within that poetry), the creativity of the individual, and the interaction of subjective and finite man with objective and absolute nature are all broadly disseminated in later philosophical and aesthetic trends. This chapter outlines some of the basic ideas of Romanticism and their later variations; it then connects these ideas with Kant and Hegel in order to demonstrate the complex continuities that exist in histories of reception. It turns next to Romanticism in its twentieth-century Russian adaptations, concentrating on the ideas of social identity in language as expressed by Nikolai Marr and Ol'ga Freidenberg; and finally, more briefly, to Derrida's place within a Romantic lineage. Whereas the influence of Hegel on Bakhtin and Derrida was partly traceable through direct comments and arguments, Romanticism makes a much more diffuse impression on the two authors, not as an explicit focus for commentary but rather as a deep-seated group of ideas which set an agenda and allow the formulation of certain questions.

One of the obvious starting-points in outlining German Romanticism and its twentieth-century influence is the weight that it places upon language. Language becomes an image for man, and in particular his capacity to perceive, cognise, and comprehend the outside world. August Schlegel argues, "Language is not a product of nature, but a reproduction of the human mind that deposits in language the origin and relationship of all representations, the entire mechanism of its operations" (quoted Behler 1993, p. 160), and it is clear from this how the Kantian investigation of the processes of human knowing can be modified into an enquiry after the capacities of language. More specifically, the Romantics saw literature as achieving a self-consciousness in language which matched precisely the Kantian ambition of understanding our processes of understanding; the Schlegel quotation continues, "It is therefore so that, in poetry, something already shaped is reshaped, and the formative capacity of its organ is just as limitless

as the ability of the human mind to return into itself through ever more highly developed reflections”. This concept of language as a microcosm of human nature is broadened to include representations of groups of individuals, specifically nations, so that a language is inextricably tied with national identity and the sense of a community, a natural harmony that unites part and whole. Like individuals, nations are seen as unique, organic, original, and originary, and the artist engages with the entirety of a linguistic tradition through her creative intervention at a specific point. This double capacity of language – to encapsulate both the individual’s experience and the common bounds of her nationality or humanity – is a mainspring of the Romantic idea of the author, who founds the work of art in her unique individuality, and perhaps more strongly, becomes an emblem for any perceptive individual. “Every man who is educated and is educating himself contains within himself a novel”, argues Friedrich Schlegel; “It is not necessary for him, however, to communicate it or to write it down”, suggesting that the very form of human experience is literary (Schlegel 1968, p. 128). While this emphasis on the author indisputably keys into a long tradition of aesthetics as a special representation of relations between subject and world, it does so in a highly individualistic manner, and with a particular set of Kantian precepts about the nature of this interaction. As in Kantian philosophy, there is a mysterious fit between the human capacity for perception, and the categories by which the natural world is ordered. The individual transforms her world by an act of understanding still harmonious with nature, and so transcends her own subjectivity and finitude.

It seems expedient, therefore, to regard Bakhtin’s and Derrida’s receptions of Romanticism as further variations on fundamentally Kantian themes. Probably the central manifestation of this is the imbrication of language with world-view, and more closely, the belief that literature’s self-consciousness in its use of language grants it special privileges in understanding human perception. As tacitly stated in the chapter on Hegel, this is cast within a frame of historical development and contextual variation, and the baseline argument about language’s power to represent, overcome, and mould subjectivity is clearly Romantic. The last chapter gave much attention to Derrida’s relationship with Hegel, so here less will be paid to his understanding of Romanticism that covers the same territory. To begin with, the Romantics and Derrida share an interest in questions of genre, subjectivity, the possibility of irony as knowledge, and the limits of expression; and at times Derrida self-consciously works within problematics formulated by the Romantics (the example suggested below is the idea of the

university). The argument has been advanced that the Romantic movement saw the birth of literary theory, or the delineation of an object named literature which provided its own tools for commentary, and hence of the entire project within which Derrida operates (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1988 [1978], *passim*). Derrida and other post-structuralists can be linked with the Romantics in that they were the first to propose theories of original languages and the possibility, or otherwise, of translation (Bowie 1997, p. 61). The more prolix way to put this is that a coherent consciousness of national identity *and* language *and* the representation of experience was not readily available before the Romantic period, and any further investigation of these topics must necessarily return to their original formulation. Bakhtin too relies upon Romanticism in a manner more fundamental than explicit which, given the long and deep history of Romanticism in Russia, is unsurprising. Literary criticism in Germany following Romanticism, and in Russia after both Romanticism and a native tradition, acts as a form of social criticism, a programme into which Bakhtin buys as his writings on the novel from the 1930s to the Rabelais book attest (cf. Holquist 1993, p. 159). Romanticism, which explicitly figured in Russian thought from the 1820s onwards, presented a different view of history from the predominant vision of static and linear development, namely an active and organic creation with a much greater emphasis on the individual being in step with the historical necessity of his time (Proctor 1969, p. 35). This clearly fits with Bakhtin's understanding of history, right through the early phenomenological works, which regard the subject as the constructor of transcendental frameworks such as morality, to the late writings, which invert the emphasis to make atemporal structures (such as the superaddressee) criteria for understanding the individual's behaviour.

Alongside this subterranean influence, and as shown below, Bakhtin's understanding of Romanticism is heavily mediated by its transformation in the avant-garde artistic and linguistic movements of the early twentieth century. This in turn is connected with the development of ideas in the early twentieth century about languages and social groups, and the preservation of communal memories and identities in linguistic form, motifs that again feature in Bakhtin's writing. This theme is recapitulated with reference to Derrida and *Lebensphilosophie* in the sixth chapter, and provides a ready and easy way to highlight the common preoccupations of the two men's linguistic philosophies without running them through an investigation of literature. That this literary theoretical path is already well-worn should be clear from the introduction, and that



it is arguably a misprision of two philosophical projects from the rest of the thesis; the concept of national languages also allows an introduction to the political elements of each thinker's work. This is, as I will hope to show, less politics in a general sense (most notably the idea that democracy can be unproblematically read out of Bakhtin's canon, and Marxism or cultural relativism from Derrida's), and more as specific reactions to localised, determinate projects (cf. Wall 1997, for the advantages of such a fragmentary reading of Bakhtin). Derrida defends the importance of studying philosophy in French schools because it is threatened by legislative reform; Bakhtin champions the voice of the common people at a time when it was precisely the contested mechanism of support for political absolutism (cf. Bakhtin 1984 [1965]; Derrida and Mortley 1991). It is these broad arguments about language, politics, and national identity that I roll forward from this chapter and develop through *Lebensphilosophie*. This point returns us to one final, perhaps unnecessary, qualification about the complexity of tracing the influence of any one movement. It was Schelling who had the greatest influence on Russian Romanticism, and in particular his critique of Hegel based on the desire for a fluid, continually-developing philosophy grounded in the concept of being (Neuhäuser 1974, p. 123; Beiser 1998, p. 351). This criticism is, to reiterate what is by now obvious, not very far from Hegel's works themselves; nor is it the sole instance of this kind of critique. It may therefore be worth seeing the proximity of Romantic philosophy (or at least Schelling) to Bakhtin and Derrida as at least partly due to its coincidence with 1) other influences (for instance, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and very different legacies of religious thought), 2) its overlap with more contemporary philosophical movements, and 3) Bakhtin and Derrida's existing prejudices against a vision of Hegel.<sup>1</sup> There do not have to be explicit references to Romantic philosophers for their work to influence later writings; and, as will now be unpacked, Romanticism's revisions of Kant and Hegel are still tightly bound up with those original authors.

#### 4.2. Romanticism

Kant's division of the understanding into faculties meant that the imagination, whose primary role is to grasp the multitude of experiences offered by the manifold, is still reliant upon other

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<sup>1</sup> This is particularly pertinent when it is recalled how Schelling's subjectivisation of nature is resisted, in very different ways, by Bakhtin and Derrida; by the former through a neo-Kantian subsumption of nature under human labour or culture, and by the latter through a more phenomenological refusal of non-linguistic intentionalities.

faculties to sort, organise, and aestheticise these impressions. The Romantics retained this compartmentalised structure of the human mind, yet placed a far heavier stress on the autonomy of the imagination and its capacity for spontaneous organisation, with a blend of natural understanding and formal social discipline (Behler 1993, p. 75). It therefore makes the subject even more crucial to the act of interpretation than does Kant's "Copernican revolution", as the individual no longer passively receives a manifold which she then matches up to pre-existent categories, but shapes and forms its impressions into a new, distinct, synthetic whole.<sup>2</sup> This subjectivisation clears the way for an innovative emphasis on genius and mysterious natural talent, as well as a foregrounding of the individual's unique experience which, in the terms of Romanticism, extends (literary) creativity to all acts of perception. The subjective power of the individual imagination to firstly *create* poetry and thus an image of the world, and secondly *read* poetry, and recognise its inner form and adherence to the imagination's own perceptions, comes partly from Kant's emphasis on subjective perception recognising the play of transcendent forms or laws, yet is muddled slightly by an attempted introduction of a social level to understanding. The nation, and in particular the national language, becomes a significant factor in the formation and development of the individual's perceptive capacity, so that for instance Herder, who attended Kant's lectures, can regard it as another a priori category (Höffe 1994 [1992], p. 14). While this resonates with Hegel's attempts to expand determinants of perception beyond the individual, one concomitant feature that is weaker in Romanticism is the development of thought over time. Romanticism does recognise a temporal unfolding within understanding, positing serial engagements between man and nature, but instead of Hegel's teleology it follows Fichte and his doctrine of thought and counter-thought, constant tension and movement rather than dialectical resolution (Behler 1993, p. 2). Fichte also impacts on Romanticism through his idea of spontaneous understanding, or the rejection of an Hegelian spiral of continual self-reflection which may never lead to certainty in favour of an instantaneous apprehension of one's self and the varying impressions to which it is subject (Bowie 1990, p. 66). This plays out in F. Schlegel's work through the concept of "*Witz*", comparable to the English "wit" in its reliance on immediacy in perception and understanding, and its agility and freedom of association. It is

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<sup>2</sup> One consequence of this is a renewed emphasis on the endlessness of intellectual endeavour; compare F. Schlegel's, "One can only become a philosopher, not be one. As soon as one thinks one is a philosopher, one stops becoming one" with Kant's, "we cannot learn philosophy. [...] We can only learn to philosophise" (quoted Behler 1993, p. 71; Kant 1969 [1787], p. 474). As we have seen, this motif impacts on Bakhtin and Derrida in various forms.

clearly a pre-rational, valorised term in Schlegel's work; he argues, for instance, that "Among the arts Romantic poetry is what wit is to philosophy, and what society, association, friendship, and love are in life" (Schlegel 1968, p. 141). This formal comparison across a range of existential situations points to another fundamental similarity between Romantic literary theory and Kantian philosophy, in that the quest to outline forms (specifically, for Romanticism, literary genres) through which we understand the world (again more narrowly, sensorial experience we process as if it were literature) mimics the ambition of analytic philosophy to discover how the world is divided. The mature F. Schlegel explicitly draws these connections between Kantian philosophy and art: "There is a poetry whose One and All is the relationship of the ideal and the real: it should thus be called transcendental poetry according to the analogy of the technical language of philosophy" (Schlegel 1968, p. 145). And just as Kant's transcendentalism stumbles on historical and social variation, so Schlegel's work both appears to speak more to one particular moment in intellectual development than to all time, and is vulnerable to an Hegelian critique of the historical unfolding of knowledge.

The high-point of poetry is, for the Schlegel brothers, self-awareness, which most strongly manifests itself as irony, the emblem of Socratic wisdom (Behler 1993, pp. 141, 147). This can be seen as a slightly cynical, flippant re-writing of the Hegelian argument about freedom as the continual development of self-consciousness, and it was one of Kierkegaard's criticisms of the Romantics that irony can only be a negative form of knowledge, pointing out our limits rather than our potential (cf. Behler 1993, p. 31). Hegel prefers to see the development of human understanding in a much more positive light, with what is unknown inevitably being discovered, therefore avoiding irony by its certainty.<sup>3</sup> This represents another turn to the problem of system explored in this period, as where Hegelian philosophy took from Kant a systematising desire and a wish for a structural explanation of everything, Romanticism emphasised the fragmentation and incoherence of existence and its necessarily limited unity within the subject. By wishing to collapse literature and philosophy – "all art should become science, and all science art: poetry and philosophy should be united" – Friedrich Schlegel manages to preserve and cancel the desire for totality by keeping it at an ironic remove (Schlegel 1968, p. 132). The forms of Romantic discourse (the fragment, the aphorism, the unfinished

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<sup>3</sup> Hyppolite, of course, recovered a version of irony within Hegel related to the subject's constant mis-identification of her own nature (cf. Butler 1987, p. 178).

work) all disavow totality while their content moves towards it, suggesting, again to follow Kierkegaard, not a resolution of the questions of totality but an evasion. It is through the language of an organic whole, into which all individual actions unknowingly fit, that much of this avoidance is performed (e.g. Schlegel 1968, p. 54). The synthetic desire, from another perspective, fails to appreciate the power and variety of negativity, a fundamental spur to Hegel's philosophy and one which separates him out from the broader Romantic movement (Gasché 1986, pp. 139-40).<sup>4</sup> Finally, as Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy note, the Romantic literary absolute is not poetry but *poiesis*, production or formation, and this fits with a Hegelian favouring of becoming over being (Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy 1988 [1978], pp. 11-12; cf. Bowie 1990, p. 76). While the interest in fragments and incompleteness clearly forms part of this, there is an obvious difference in attitude: for Hegel, parts are always, on some level, reclaimed into a whole, whereas for the Romantics, their distinction from the totality provides their very significance. It is this tension between individual variation and continuous tradition that Bakhtin attempts to resolve throughout his career in different forms, but most explicitly in his sketches of the history of the novel.<sup>5</sup>

#### 4.3. Romanticism and Bakhtin

It is an obvious similarity between Bakhtin and Romanticism that both lay an unusually heavy emphasis on the novel as the creative form of modernity, capable of incorporating all other literary genres and representing kinds of experience not always accessible to art. For the Romantics, it is the most significant genre because it is unfinished and unfinalisable, and the fullest expression of spirit. Todorov draws the connection with Bakhtin by rendering part of F. Schlegel's *Athenaeum* "Fragment 116" as: "Other poetic genres are now completed and can now be fully dissected. The poetic genre of the novel is still in becoming" (Todorov 1984, p. 87). This is, it should be noted, a partial translation, as the German reads "*Die romantische Dichtart ist noch im Werden*", which other translators give as "The Romantic type of poetry is still becoming" (Schlegel and Schlegel 1969, p. 118; Schlegel 1968, p. 141). Yet the emphasis on the

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<sup>4</sup> This of course pertains to Hegel's famous description of Schelling's Absolute as the night in which all cows are black (Kaufmann 1965, p. 386).

<sup>5</sup> This problem of continuity and innovation was approached, with a similar reference to Romanticism but a rather different set of concerns, by Galin Tihanov in his paper to the 2003 International Bakhtin Conference (Tihanov 2004a).

novel, the *roman*, is still there even if not foregrounded, and is present elsewhere in Schlegel's writings (e.g. Schlegel 1968, p. 123). A similar connection with Bakhtin is the novel's heterogeneity and willingness to include other forms:

I can scarcely visualize a novel but as a mixture of storytelling, song, and other forms. Cervantes always composed in this manner and even the otherwise so prosaic Boccaccio adorns his collections of stories by framing them with songs. If there is a novel in which this does not or cannot occur, it is only due to the individuality of the work and not the character of the genre; on the contrary, it is already an exception.

(Schlegel 1968, p. 102)

This can be compared with any number of points in Bakhtin where he discusses the generic open-endedness of the novel, especially in terms which bring to the surface the organic and naturalised development of the genre (e.g. Bakhtin 1981 [1941], p. 5; 1981 [1940], p. 49; 1981 [1934-5], p. 263). The philosophical grounds for this valorisation of the novel are the same for Bakhtin and the Romantics, namely the recognition that the individual is in a process of development and engagement with the world, a necessarily untidy process (Tihanov 1997, p. 284). Bakhtin casts this as, "The novel is the only genre in the process of becoming, and therefore it more deeply, more essentially, more sensitively and more rapidly reflects the becoming of reality itself. Only one that is becoming can comprehend becoming", while Schlegel's preferred forms of the fragment and aphorism, alongside his emphasis on the creative individual, make the same point across aesthetics and ontology (Bakhtin 1981 [1941], p. 7).<sup>6</sup> Yet Bakhtin is interested in the history of the genre much more than the Romantics who seem to engage with questions of precedence mainly to demonstrate their own age's superiority, and therefore in the social underpinnings of art perhaps more than the individual's creativity.<sup>7</sup> In this sense Bakhtin remains more of a Hegelian than a Romantic, although the commonality of this linkage of the novel and social forms during the 1930s has already been noted (cf. Tihanov 2000, p. 20). F. Schlegel operates with a concept of the novel as baggy as Bakhtin's, and he performs the same basic intellectual-rhetorical trick of regarding drama as interesting only in its possible contributions to the novel form (Behler and Struc 1968, p. 30; compare Bakhtin 1981 [1940], p.

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<sup>6</sup> The translation has been modified from the published version on the kind advice of Professor David Shepherd, in order to call attention to the specific echoes of Romanticism.

<sup>7</sup> The major exception to this argument about Romanticism's limited understanding of history, and one to be developed in the following section, is Herder, whose greatest contribution to Romanticism was the historical method of criticism, emphasising poetry's origins in the depths of an historical people (Behler and Struc 1968, p. 20).

79). This deep-seated prejudice in favour of certain prose forms brings with it a train of consequences, one of which is the desired quality (“the Romantic” or “the novel”) as a detachable, polyvalent characteristic, always present yet sometimes more effective than others. Schlegel puts this as, “the Romantic is not so much a literary genre as an element of poetry which may be more or less dominant or recessive, but never entirely absent”, while Bakhtin constructs a prehistory of the novel which allows novelistic elements to proliferate in non-novelistic texts (Schlegel 1968, p. 101). On a more local level also Bakhtin wavers between ascribing universality or specificity to certain characteristics; a particularly telling example is heteroglossia (*raznorechie*), where he begins an essay describing it as the internal stratification of language, yet ends by suggesting national languages can be surrounded by “an ocean of heteroglossia (*raznorechie*)” (Bakhtin 1981 [1934-5], pp. 263, 368).<sup>8</sup> It therefore turns on a Hegelian point of self-consciousness – “Heteroglossia-in-itself becomes, in the novel and thanks to the novel, heteroglossia-for-itself” – which recalls how this confusion of general and specific is embedded in an idealist problematic of *Geist* (Bakhtin 1981 [1934-5], p. 400). In the late Duvakin interviews, Bakhtin even conflates Schelling and Hegel; he claims about Kierkegaard, “He was a philosopher and a theologian. That’s right. A philosopher. He was a pupil of Hegel, studied with Hegel himself ...with ...Schelling”.<sup>9</sup> The Romantic, the novel, and language all appear as more materialist-oriented versions of *Geist*, representative of the individual *and* the social mass, an equivocation which enables both Bakhtin and the Romantics to respond to Kant while sidestepping Hegelian questions of totality. Bakhtin is already caught up in this debate, as his neo-Kantian inheritance argues for an idealist theory of knowledge while his phenomenological interest weighs in for the limitations of individual experience, and his engagement with Romanticism only concentrates the tension.

When Bakhtin argues that “The author (as creator of the novelistic whole) cannot be found at any one of the novel’s language levels: he is to be found at the center of organization where all levels intersect”, consciously or not, he is adopting a Romantic idea of the author (Bakhtin 1981 [1940], pp. 48-9). Schlegel argues “the best of novels is nothing but a more or

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<sup>8</sup> For comments on the difficulty of the term “heteroglossia”, see the Introduction. Unless otherwise specified, *raznorechie* is the Russian term when “heteroglossia” is quoted in the text.

<sup>9</sup> He also (after struggling to remember the name) talks about how close Schelling’s aesthetic theory was to his own, but more so to an early member of the Circle, Mariia Iudina. I am once again indebted to Dr. Craig Brandist and Prof. David Shepherd for the translation of these points.

less veiled confession of the author, the profit of his experience, the quintessence of his originality”, and there is introduced a belief in the linguistic power of the individual which remains constant throughout Bakhtin’s intellectual career (Schlegel 1968, p. 103). This is an example of how Romanticism can be seen as a fundamental determinant of Bakhtin’s work, running deeper than conscious acknowledgement, as well as how Romantic ideas become tangled with other influences, for instance the avant-garde concept of the supremacy of the artist or the phenomenological argument about the power of individual vision (cf. Palmieri 1998, p. 44). The individual’s creative power plays out in a variety of ways through Bakhtin’s career, in phenomenological, literary-historical, socially-responsible, and linguistic modes. The last of these categories, most fully developed in the essay on discursive genres, can be looped back to Humboldt, whose influence on linguists such as Vossler enabled them to see all linguistic acts as creative and open to study as poetry (Brandist 2002a, p. 78). While individualism in general provides a guiding-light for Bakhtin, there are some individuals he is more interested in than others. One of these is Goethe, in particular because of his capacity to unify distinct spheres of knowledge in one consciousness, and the consequent imbrication of scientific and artistic world-views which is so highly privileged for the Romantics (for praise of Goethe, see Schlegel 1968, p. 74; Bakhtin 1981 [1937-8], p. 233; and Bakhtin 1986 [1936-8], *passim*). Goethe’s capacity to “see time” is what engages Bakhtin the most, and perhaps represents a way of merging Kantian (transcendental) and phenomenological (experiential) arguments about perception without developing a Hegelian interest in schemes and totalities. Goethe’s concepts of innate form and the unity of disparate phenomena on a morphological level provides one source for Bakhtin’s recurrent interest in the problem of artistic and perceptual forms, and again can be reconciled with more modern schools such as *Gestalt* psychology or indeed neo-Kantianism.<sup>10</sup> Bakhtin is therefore capable of deploying Romantic precepts and figures from philosophical grounds different to their original context, and turning their ideals to his own ends. One final point of connection with Romanticism can be found in Bakhtin’s understanding of mythology: for F. Schlegel, correspondences are created which go beyond logic, directly engage the subjective reader, and inspire intimations of the Absolute (Bowie 1990, p. 53). A new mythology is required by modern poetry that will not, unlike the old, be a direct reflection of nature, but

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<sup>10</sup> The Goethean idea of genre as inner unity is most fully developed by Oskar Walzel, occasionally cited by Medvedev, who saw genres as products and informers of certain world views (e.g. Medvedev 1978 [1928], p. 52).

instead be “the most artful of all works of art” and “the infinite poem containing the seeds of all other poems”. It is, as this second quotation makes clear, another version of the “poetry of poetry” which Romantic philosophy will be, and a gesture towards knowledge through creativity (all of this can be found in the “Talk on Mythology”, Schlegel 1968, pp. 81-93). The persistence of mythology in modern literature is of course one of the keystones of Bakhtin’s 1930s works on the novel, and he shares the view that the novel’s strength comes from its creative, transformative relationship with myth (cf. Bakhtin 1981 [1941], *passim*). It is also a set of ideas which reaches him through Cassirer (himself aware of the significant Romantic contribution to the study of myth), and which provides a link to contemporary ideas of national identity in language, and the historical development of social and speech forms.<sup>11</sup>

#### 4.3.1. *Language and national identity (I) – Bakhtin and Romanticism*

We now turn to Romanticism in Russia, and in particular its influence on avant-garde movements of the early twentieth century and linguistic theories that originated from common sources. As we have seen, German Romanticism’s equation of individual consciousness with language can easily be dilated into a concern with national languages and the expression of “a national soul”, a phrase commonly associated with Schelling and his argument that the artist could intuit the essence of a nation. In Russia from the 1830s onwards, this fed into pre-existing debates in artistic circles about the suitability of ordinary spoken Russian for literature, and in historical linguistics over whether to emphasise Russian’s similarities with French or the connections with old Slavic (Leighton 1975, pp. 20, 50). Part of the issue was how to interpret the meaning of “the people”, *narod*, a word Bakhtin uses in his Rabelais book, where he plays precisely on a tension between a conservative notion of the people as cogs in the service of the greater nation, and a radical idea of the people as the essence of the nation itself.<sup>12</sup> This belief that art could unite and represent an entire nation is developed by Nietzsche, as we will see in the following chapter, and popularised in Russia by translations of Wagner, whose operas provided a

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<sup>11</sup> Cassirer ascribes importance to Schelling as the first philosopher to seriously analyse myth and hence move philosophy away from itself being a form of myth (Cassirer 1955 [1925], pp. xii-xiv).

<sup>12</sup> A tension visible, for instance, in the following alignment of the united community and the anti-authoritarian carnival: “In the whole of the world and of the people there is no room for fear. [...] This whole speaks in carnival images; it reigns in the very atmosphere of this feast, making everyone participate in this awareness” (Bakhtin 1984 [1965], p. 256).



model of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* desired by Romantics as the encapsulation of a living world (Kleberg 1993 [1970], p. 40). Wagner is one of the key figures in establishing continuity between the Russian avant-garde and their Romantic forebears, as his belief in the power of art and social role of artists meshed precisely with their desire to forge a new national culture. One prominent movement was Symbolism, which argued for a strong Romantic understanding of language as the treasure-house of a nation's soul. Its leading theorist, Viacheslav Ivanov, argued:

Symbols are the experiences of a lost and forgotten heritage of the soul of the people... They have been deposited since time immemorial by the people in the souls of its bards as basic forms and categories in which alone any new vision can be framed.

(quoted West 1970, p. 75)<sup>13</sup>

This brings together several themes – the inherent historicity of language, the connection between this and social identity and culture, the privileging of artistic vision – which will become prominent in the discussion of Marr and Freidenberg following shortly. Symbolism was only one artistic movement that deployed Romantic ideas, and others are perhaps as pertinent to an unpacking of Bakhtin's intellectual context. One of the projects of the early Bolshevik regime, spearheaded by Anatolii Lunacharskii, was the replacement of elements of old Russian culture with new revolutionary figures and ideas. In the pre-Revolutionary intellectual ferment this was known as “God-building”, as the structures of Orthodoxy were replaced with belief-systems and images belonging to the people; immediately after the Revolution, this was continued in the more explicitly Bolshevik guise of insinuating the Party and its doctrines into everyday life. A point of interest about Lunacharskii is that during his movement from the theologically-engaged “God-building” to the ideological Bolshevik work, the engagement with Romanticism remains constant: it is Lunacharskii's influence within the Party, for instance, which allows the translation of Wagner's *Revolution and Art* and *The Artwork of the Future* (for much more information on Lunacharskii, see Williams 1986). This Romantic belief in the need

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<sup>13</sup> If one wanted to tie in Symbolism with Bakhtin, it is worth recalling a passage from Nikolai Bakhtin's archive, written in 1925: “Look attentively into the life of a word, or just one word. ‘And scarcely visible as in a dewdrop you will see the whole face of the sun.’ So in the microcosm of that one word the whole riches of the antique world will be revealed to you” (quoted Wilson 1963, p. 9). Unfortunately there is not room to develop this line of argument here, but the interested reader can consult the second chapter in Craig Brandist's book, which deals with similar themes (Brandist 2002a, pp. 27-52). Symbolism and Ivanov will also be treated in the Chapter Five of this thesis.

for new forms of culture to represent new social organisations feeds into the dogma of Socialist Realism and an intellectual and aesthetic conservatism that reflects German Romanticism in some of its more pessimistic moods. There are continuities between the intellectual and artistic movements of the 1830s and 1920s which extend to their bipolar political potential, and which should be considered in discussion of the people and the nation.

Before examining in close detail the theories of linguistic identity held by Marr and Freidenberg which are of most relevance to Bakhtin, I would like to pause on another significant intellectual movement, the group of students of Jan Baudouin de Courtenay known collectively as the Leningrad school.<sup>14</sup> There are two principal aims: to more profoundly express the linkage of Romanticism and later linguistic philosophies; and to demonstrate the general reliance of Bakhtin on common linguistic ideas, and his specific, politically-motivated, reaction to them. Baudouin and his students established in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Russia the significance of studying both local dialects and folklore, and the links that these provided to analysing social formations in a process of historical development (Brandist 2003, p. 215). As one of the most significant members of the Leningrad school, Viktor Zhirmunskii, remarked, dialects are the remains of the “linguistic relations of the feudal epoch, characteristic of surviving social groups”, thus chiming with the Marrist vision of different historical epochs represented within and between languages while continuing the Romantic devotion to language as a communal bond (quoted Brandist 2003, p. 218).<sup>15</sup> Students of Baudouin also carried forward twin interests in politics and literature in relation to linguistics. Baudouin himself was imprisoned for writing a pamphlet advocating a democratisation of language policy in pre-Revolutionary Russia, while post-Revolutionary debates about alphabet reform and a common spoken and written language for a united Soviet people clearly engage with ideological issues (Brandist 2004a, p. 146; 2003, p. 222).<sup>16</sup> The literary interests feature most heavily in the Leningrad School’s privileging of the language of ethnic folklore as an alternative to standardised literary language, again working through the Romantic interest in organic creative production in opposition to formalised forces of centralisation, and anticipating the stronger

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<sup>14</sup> Throughout this section I am indebted to the work of Craig Brandist, not merely in the provision of facts, but the basic recognition of this school as a significant source for both Marrism and Bakhtin.

<sup>15</sup> Zhirmunskii is cited directly by Bakhtin in relation to his argument about differences between lyric and novel (Bakhtin 1981 [1934-5], p. 261, n. 1).

<sup>16</sup> Indeed, before the establishment of “socialism in one country” as an official doctrine in 1929, there were plans for a global system of language.

Marrist reading of folklore as an emblem of class struggle (Brandist 2003, p. 217). In his 1930s writings on the novel, Bakhtin heavily draws on one particular student of Baudouin, Lev Iakubinskii. Brandist has chased the specific points which Bakhtin owes to Iakubinskii, and noted how he fuses the linguist's account of the formation of the Russian language with a Cassirerean ahistorical account of the development of symbolic forms, so removing the institutional specificity and historicity while retaining the appearance of historical motivation (Brandist 2004a, pp. 146-51).<sup>17</sup> Brandist summarises: "Bakhtin's originality in [these 1930s texts] lies not in his description of discursive diversity of a national language but in his characterisation of how the novelist exploits that diversity" (Brandist 2004a, p. 152). In other words, it is a Romantic re-emphasis on a more modern philosophical or sociolinguistic concern, returning to literature as a special point of cultural determination. This is both a reaction to and an inspiration from the Marrist school of linguistics, which institutionally eclipsed the Leningrad school, yet in some ways marked a retrograde development.

Nikolai Marr's work enjoyed predominance in Soviet linguistics between the late 1920s and 1950, the year in which it was summarily overturned by Stalin's denunciatory article, and the influence of Marr's ideas spread beyond linguistics into many other intellectual disciplines.<sup>18</sup> His theories are too complex and variegated to receive justice here, but some key ideas will help us trace the connections between German Romanticism and the contexts of Bakhtin's writings on the novel. Marr suggested that all languages stem from one of four common roots, and pass through set stages dependent on social forms and the distribution of power. The emphasis on a shared origin meant that connections could be drawn between geographically and temporally disparate languages, and the historical frame of the theory allowed grand narratives to be constructed about the development, past and future, of any given language. What Marr takes most from Romanticism, and simultaneously changes most, is this idea of social identity. While the Romantics had underscored national identity through language, Marr emphasised *class* identity, often with recourse to the same arguments as the Romantics (the historical development of social groups, the preservation of both a culture and a world-view within language) but with

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<sup>17</sup> It has also been argued that Iakubinskii, in his capacity as postgraduate tutor at ILIaZV, would have read the work of Voloshinov that eventually became *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, and possibly helped add information about the directions of contemporary linguistics (Alpatov 2004, pp. 82-3).

<sup>18</sup> This is only a crude summary of Marr's work, and the reader is referred to Brandist 2002a, pp. 109-11, and especially Thomas 1957 for more detail

an essentially different intention. The dependence of linguistic forms on social structures is explained in this 1928 passage where Marr disavows the conventional rules of language development and ties *everything* back to the forms of social organisation:

language is genetically connected with society, and not only the concepts expressed by words but the words themselves and their forms – their actual appearance – issue from the social structure, its superstructural worlds, and, through them, from economics, from economic life...and...there are no physiological phonetic laws in speech. The physiological side of the matter is a technique adapted, changed, perfected, and ordered by man. This means that the conformity is to the laws of society; laws of oral speech...exist; phonetic or sound laws of the speech of mankind also exist – but these are social laws.

(quoted Thomas 1957, p. 94, with his ellipses)

This extreme reliance on a limited understanding of class-based social processes makes clear the initial appeal of Marr's work to Soviet Marxism. It is a nominalist theory of language, linking the origins of speech with the designation of tribal and ultimately place names, another tie back to Herder and Romantic theories of nation and language (Thomas 1957, p. 97). This connection of name and place relies on a belief that the failure to distinguish part and whole was characteristic of primitive mentality, an argument which can be found in Cassirer, but before him, in Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (Cassirer 1955 [1925], p. 51; Lévy-Bruhl 1966 [1921], p. 91 *et passim*). Lévy-Bruhl was an early French anthropologist and cultural theorist who employed Durkheim's term of "collective representation" to explain the symbolic forms (ultimately, language) that necessarily represent a social group:

[Collective representations] are common to the members of a given social group; they are transmitted from one generation to another within it; they impress themselves upon its individual members and awaken in them sentiments of respect, fear, adoration, and so on, according to the circumstances of the case. Their existence does not depend upon the individual. This is not because they imply a collective entity apart from the individuals composing the social group, but because they present themselves in aspects which cannot be accounted for by considering individuals merely as such.

(Lévy-Bruhl 1966 [1921], p. 6)

Human society's development beyond this "primitive mentality" is a narrative about the recognition of the artificiality of signs, and away from collective forms of culture embedded in

material objects and places, to abstract, individualist ideas (Lévy-Bruhl 1966 [1921], p. 140). Yet while these collective representations clearly carry a heavy weight of community, they also bear the internal divisions of different social groups, primarily between those versed in magic and ritual, and those from the laity. This quite clearly impacts on Marr's work, as he follows Lévy-Bruhl's privileging of the significance of magic in early societies, and indeed suggests the development of language as a direct result of tribal rituals (Thomas 1957, pp. 97, 113-4). The incipient materialism of Lévy-Bruhl's work transfers directly to Marr, although he, and others who adopted this style of anthropology in Russia, fundamentally altered one tenet of Lévy-Bruhl, namely the difference between logical and pre-logical thought. Lévy-Bruhl intended the prefix of "pre-logical" to follow that of "preconception", something that can be held at any point but capable of being changed. The Marrists and others saw it as an absolute historical period, and the point of transition to logical thought as a violent moment of rupture and revolution (Moss 1984, pp. 85-6). In other words, Marrism relied on philosophical traditions of anthropology and linguistics that had never strayed far from Romanticism, only replacing along the way the potential for historical self-consciousness and irony with a dogmatic confidence in theories of social development.

Marr's linguistic work was carried over into the field of literary studies by Ol'ga Freidenberg, where she developed his "paleontological" method of examining a current language or literary culture for remnants of the past. This is one of the moves that enable her to find a deep connection between myth and literature, in a Romantic manner similar to that discussed above. For Freidenberg, literary imagery and comparison do not hold apart two distinct terms, but rather recall their unity on a level of mythical (or primordial, to nod to Lévy-Bruhl) thought; for instance, in saying "the man was as brave as a lion", "man" and "lion" are not seen to have common characteristics, but are actually *identical* in a mythical stratum of thought (Moss 1997, p. 18). Language contains its own history, which is a history of social forms: myth itself is a fixed representation of lived, historic rituals, a point Freidenberg develops from Marr (who himself expanded it from Lévy-Bruhl), and welds to a Cassirerean idea of the significance of art and symbolisation in understanding cultural history. This makes the study of literary texts, in a clearly Romantic fashion, a means of writing histories of social consciousness (Moss 1984, pp. 90, 61). This historical method allows Freidenberg to read across genres and types of work in order to mark historical patterns of what Marr named "transformation", where the same material

is repeated across cultures without a concept of interaction or engagement, but rather explained by means of a common ancestry (Moss 1997, p. 3; 1984, p. 17). This can again be seen to follow Lévy-Bruhl, as in his work the pre-logical mind yokes together through an over-arching mystical unity phenomena which seem to us entirely discrete: despite dissonance at a superficial level, there is morphological harmony (Moss 1984, p. 89). To loop back once more to Romanticism, here we see a version of the tension between the individual's creativity and a pre-determined logic of forms which plays out in Schlegel's work, and which inevitably invokes a Kantian problematic of transcendent influence on subjective perception.

Now, according to Bocharov and the other editors of the *Collected Works*, in 1937-8 Bakhtin made a detailed summary of the central part of Freidenberg's *Poetics of Plot and Genre* in preparation for the work which would become the Rabelais book, and the methodological similarities between their projects are numerous (Perlina 2002, p. 249).<sup>19</sup> Freidenberg's technique of drawing comparisons across genres of ancient texts, for instance comparing apocryphal gospels with early erotic novels, is one of Bakhtin's intellectual tics, as are his repeated and not-necessarily-harmonious attempts to construct histories of different artistic movements (Moss 1997, p. 3). Freidenberg's core belief that a social attitude was discernable irrespective of the kind of text is shared by Bakhtin, as is the particular reliance on literature not merely as a creative transformation of popular attitudes but as a privileged site of cultural representation. However, significant differences remain, not least their institutional fortunes; Freidenberg was more successful than Bakhtin in academic terms, being founder and chairman of the Leningrad State University's Classics department, although because of the political climate she later had to distance herself from Marxism during the 1950s, rather as Bakhtin adopted certain elements of Stalin-influenced linguistics (Moss 1997, p. 1). While Bakhtin sees opposition within apparent unity in language, Freidenberg finds unity within apparent opposition; Bakhtin locates the ultimate meaning of a text with the reader, yet Freidenberg emphasises the meaning within the artefact (Moss 1984, p. 151; Perlina 2002, p. 254). Freidenberg pre-empts some of Bakhtin's later critics by seeing parody as a device of social control rather than rebellion, and her history of laughter pays greater attention to historical specificity than Bakhtin's more theoretical approach (Moss 1997, p. 22; Perlina 2002, p. 258).

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<sup>19</sup> There are also slight biographical connections: Medvedev and Voloshinov knew Freidenberg personally, and the former considered engaging on a joint project with her and another scholar (Brandist 2002a, p. 110, citing Iurii Medvedev in support).

This point about laughter allows us to look, Janus-faced, back to the brief description of Lunacharskii above, and on to the analysis of Nietzschean carnival in the next chapter. Lunacharskii's speech, "On Laughter", was first given to mark the inauguration of a project on the history of satirical genres, a project that included work by Freidenberg. In the speech, Lunacharskii acknowledged the utility of the genetic approach Freidenberg had developed from Marr, thus fusing together the institutional and intellectual resources from which Bakhtin found himself excluded, and upon which he frequently drew (Shepherd 2003, p. 189).

While references to Marr have been editorially excised from Bakhtin's writings on the novel, it is Marrism that grants Bakhtin permission to privilege spoken language and popular forms of culture as being closer to what he could consider "natural forms of language" (Hirschkop 1999, p. 123, n. 32, citing a personal communication from Brian Poole in support; Brandist 2002a, p. 112). At points in his developing and non-coherent work, Marr comes close to suggesting that historical change is driven by linguistic development, not vice versa; in this connection it could be helpful to remember Bakhtin's confusion on the issue, as in his prevarication over heteroglossia as both cause and effect of social change or upheaval (e.g. Bakhtin 1981 [1937-8], p. 129).<sup>20</sup> These general typological similarities are all well and good, but it is the detail of Bakhtin's argument where the permeation of certain ideas about language is most pertinent, and especially in the 1930s writings on the novel examined above. The fundamental point about the internal stratification of languages, long cherished as an innovative Bakhtinian method of reconciling language and society, is of course one of the most familiar from the Leningrad and Marrist schools, and which Bakhtin could therefore source to a variety of authorities (e.g. Bakhtin 1981 [1934-5], p. 263). Indeed, the work of both Marr and Baudouin permitted more considered and thorough scholarship about internal social divisions, if we are to consider linguistics as the sole determinant; where Bakhtin adds his distinctive mark is by so strongly emphasising literature, a move which brings together native traditions of commentary with predominantly neo-Kantian ideas about the significance of human culture. Yet even in this literary field Bakhtin's work recalls Marr's, for instance in the connection it draws between the strong communal identity enjoyed by the heroes of Greek romances, and "*a folklore that predates class distinctions*" (Bakhtin 1981 [1937-8], p. 105). Marr too makes the links between

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<sup>20</sup> Cassirer engages with the same problem, for instance, at points where he suggests mythology does not simply either precede or reflect social change (such as the distinction of the individual from the social group), but is "an instrument of the 'crisis' itself", a playing-out of the tensions (Cassirer 1955 [1925], p. 178).

spoken language, egalitarianism, and folklore, and written language, social division, and the novel, although clearly Bakhtin unfolds this into a new theory only by meddling with the valorisation and re-emphasising the novel's potential to shape different kinds of equality (Brandist 2002a, p. 112). In "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel", there is an acknowledgement that some issues around the relations between literature and myth require consideration, as well as a nod to the significance of the pre-history of language (Bakhtin 1981 [1934-5], p. 369, nn. 36, 37). The general argument of this section is that language as a sacred carrier of meaning inevitably falls into a utilitarian means of communication, a mirror of the Marrisist argument about the development of language from ritual cries, although Bakhtin once again lightens the mood by suggesting "the flowering of the novel is always connected with a disintegration of stable verbal-ideological systems" (Bakhtin 1981 [1934-5], pp. 370-1). Yet some of the most culpable naiveties of the Marrisist position are also carried over into Bakhtin's work, most notably in the slippage between literature and reality. Bakhtin drifts from analysing the new fictional roles that emerge with the novel (primarily the Fool, the Rogue, and the Clown) to the social conditions they attack:

The vulgar conventionality that pervades human life manifests itself first and foremost as a feudal structure, with something like a feudal ideology downplaying the relevance of spatial and temporal categories. Hypocrisy and falsehood saturate all human relationships. The healthy "natural" functions of human nature are fulfilled, so to speak, only in ways that are contraband and savage, because the reigning ideology will not sanction them. This introduces falsehood and duplicity into all human life. All ideological forms, that is, institutions, become hypocritical and false, while real life, denied any ideological directives, becomes crude and bestial.

(Bakhtin 1981 [1937-8], p. 162)

Literature and society become indistinguishable, with nothing other than a one-to-one mimeticism posited as the relationship between art and life. Just as in Marr, a subsidiary theme develops in the suggested advancement of older forms of culture, closer to oral forms, ahead of modern, literate, social creations. This could be seen as a disappointment of the ambitions of the early works with their sophisticated (neo-Kantian) privileging of culture, and a lapse towards the vulgar belligerence of Marrisist narratives of social development, were it not for the sophistications and fruitful ambiguities elsewhere in the essays. One of the most noted examples of this latter virtue is the debate over what precisely Bakhtin intends by his categories of



“poetry” and “novel”, which in turn bears on his understanding of genre. The predominance of genre in determining meaning bridges the Romantic emphasis on form and the Leningrad School’s, specifically Iakubinskii’s, understanding of the significance of genre: “The poet is a poet insofar as he accepts the idea of a unitary and singular language and a unitary, monologically sealed-off utterance. These ideas are immanent in the poetic genres with which he works” (Bakhtin 1981 [1934-5], pp. 296-7). This idea is also picked up in the 1950s text “Discursive Genres”, arguably written in response to Stalin’s denunciation of Marrist linguistics, and an attempt to recover the value of Marr’s emphasis on a human rather than natural science (Brandist 2002a, p. 156). Yet whereas the earlier text had privileged the novel as the locus for creative, living speech, here that location is more plainly everyday discourse:

The sentence as a unit of language, like the word, has no author. Like the word, it belongs to *nobody*, and only by functioning as a whole utterance does it become an expression of the position of someone speaking individually in a concrete situation of discursive intercourse.

(Bakhtin 1986 [1952-3], pp. 83-4)

In both cases, Bakhtin grafts his literary-historical understanding of genre on to more strictly linguistic categories, thus permitting the simultaneously historical-ahistorical oscillation noted above.<sup>21</sup> The teleological progression towards the novel which Bakhtin sketches in the 1930s in some respects marks an elusion of deeper questions of history which Marrism also attempts, substituting Romantic-idealist generalisations for harder Hegelian sociologies.<sup>22</sup>

The very *morphological* perspective which Bakhtin adopts, examining types across instantiations, and constantly questing back to more original and originary forms, is a Romantic view, and one which began with biology and Goethe, although it became equally evident in linguistics and Marr (Steiner 1984, pp. 71, 84). By taking literature and its social forms, rather than language and its manifestations of *Geist*, as models of human forms of perception, Bakhtin attempts to ground in a philosophy-of-life manner the idealism presented to him through Romanticism and its contemporary interpretations (Tihanov 2000, p. 99). He responds to

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<sup>21</sup> Brandist records that Bakhtin’s work towards “Discursive Genres” explicitly relies on the neo-Kantian equation of actuality with objective validity, thus providing another link between apparently discrete periods of study (Brandist 2002a, p. 159).

<sup>22</sup> Bakhtin’s teleology, of course, sits on top of a neo-Kantian understanding of the development of knowledge, which often appears closer to the early idealist revisions of Kant than the neo-Kantians intended.

Romanticism, or at least the diffuse spectre of Romanticism, in a way that looks both to the Hegelian emphasis on historical development, and the Schopenhauerean/Nietzschean ascription of significance to the human body. He also, consciously and unconsciously, engages with its political implications. Romanticism and Marrism were useful to Bakhtin for their criticism of the presumed neutrality of language, not necessarily for the theories they developed from that, and Bakhtin's own arguments lead away from the holistic descriptions they both advance. The creativity in historical narrative displayed by Marr and Freidenberg arguably fulfils a deep political purpose in Bakhtin's appropriation, as it is intended to create stories for inspiration rather than accurate academic reflection, whether that is in compliance with institutionalised narratives or at odds. It is a means of shaping a world, akin to the more traditionally philosophical approaches of Bakhtin's early works, which thereby strives to change it, not on the grand scale of social revolutions (which Bakhtin, for good reasons, never regarded as effective), but on the level of individual consciousness and creative understanding. Another way to put this is by suggesting that language and narratives of linguistic development are useful to Bakhtin because of their symbolic relationship to consciousness and social existence, but more in their fragmentary aspects than their totalised wholes. To see language as representative of social or national groups, with all the divisions and fractures which that implied, was not necessarily a thoroughly linguistically-argued belief of Bakhtin's, but rather a vehicle for commenting on the changing political and intellectual climate, and suggesting that society could be organised in different ways. While Marrism and antecedent linguistic movements privileged such narrative elements as the development of Slavic independence, the erosion of the class system, and the growth of communal togetherness, Bakhtin reads the novel as an *unpredictable* outpouring of energy, a form which can find, envelop, and forgive all. To quote Bakhtin not with the political naivety occasionally brought to his texts, but with an awareness of the specific contexts in which he worked: "Reality as we have it in the novel is only one of many possible realities; it is not inevitable, not arbitrary, it bears within itself other possibilities" (Bakhtin 1981 [1941], p. 37).

#### 4.4. *Romanticism and Derrida*

In relation to Novalis, Andrew Bowie writes, "Anyone familiar with Derrida will recognise that something like *différance*, the deferral of signification as presence, occasioned by the signifier's

differential dependence on other signifiers, is part of Romantic thinking” (Bowie 1990, p. 78). While the specific proof for this is not within Bowie’s remit, the general tenor of the statement is quite helpful, and would perhaps be better, if less concisely, phrased as “part of Romantic thinking as interpreted by Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, and doubtless others”. Heidegger in particular enjoys a constructive relationship with Romanticism, principally Hölderlin, from whom he takes a special emphasis on poetic language as the bearer of truth; and this is an interest with which Derrida makes some play (e.g. Heidegger 1978, p. 187). One of the classic Heideggerian-Hölderlinian images is that of the plant, intimately connected with its soil and environment, and this is subverted by the Derridean images of the graft, the cut and the figure of transplantation, demonstrating a mistrust of the idealism to which Derrida sees Heidegger as ultimately subject (Caputo 1997, p. 305; cf. Derrida 1982b [1972], pp. 29-67). Similarly, as we have seen in the case of *Glas*, Derrida raises the question of the overlap between literature and philosophy, only to explicitly avoid any conclusions in favour of a more radical questioning of the presuppositions of writing. Through Nietzsche, Derrida receives an image of the Romantics which emphasised the collapse of the possibility of totality, and the fictionalisation of human understanding rather than a quest for lost unity; in other words, Derrida treats the Romantics as they treated Hegel, and indeed he has fallen foul of the same critique of failing to understand the variety of negativity (Rose 1984, p. 160). It has been argued that Derrida posits a “Romantic Wager” like Keats or Marx, proposing that we can do away with old metaphysical dependencies and superstitions, and come of age in an entirely, gloriously, human world, an argument which picks up on at least one implication of Nietzsche’s overman (Edmundson 1988, p. 634; Lawlor 2002, p. 43). Derrida inherits Nietzsche’s deep scepticism about the category of the subject, and, as has been argued in the chapter on Kant, deepens the philosophy of reflection to the point where it questions its own fundamental premises. In one sense, Derrida folds the debate within Romanticism about self-reflection back into ontology, so that in a Heideggerian manner he can argue, “What can look at itself is not one; and the law of the addition of the origin to its representation, of the thing to its image, is that one plus one makes at least three” (Derrida 1974 [1967], p. 36). Through this questioning he denies any original unity to the subject, and posits necessary division all the way down, thereby refusing one of the fundamental tenets of the idealist tradition.

Alongside this critique of individual reflection, Derrida explores problems of institutional self-consciousness, and the need for social bodies to be aware of the conditions which enable them to function (Derrida 1983a *passim*, but esp. p. 16). An important element to this is an attentiveness to the impossibility (as Derrida sees it) of grounding reason, and perhaps less controversially the need for irrational forms of thought to provide solutions which reason cannot (Caputo 1997, *passim* but esp. p. 158). This is one way to account for Derrida's recurrent interest in faith, in its everyday sense but more strongly in its religious meaning, and on the common ground between religion and other systems of knowledge: "all the Enlightenments in the world, reason, critique, science, tele-technoscience, philosophy, **thought** in general, retain the *same* resource as religion in general" (Derrida 1998a [1996], p. 59, original emphases). Here Derrida sounds rather like a traditional Enlightenment thinker, concerned with overthrowing the idols of the marketplace; the difference being that he seeks to replace them not with a single critical method, but rather with the continual watchfulness which constitutes the experience of the impossible.<sup>23</sup> This is a Romantic step away from Kant, as it calls reason itself into question, and involves both individual ethical responsibility (hence the turn to Levinasian moral philosophy in recent years) and social and institutional action on a variety of levels. Derrida has written on the Schellingian view of the university as a challenge to the Kantian model, where a college of arts is offered as an alternative to Kant's proposal, which, Schelling and Derrida agree, is too closely involved with a repressive and censorious state (Derrida 1984a, pp. 145-6; cf. Derrida 1992 [1980]). However, Schelling's proposal is seen as itself involved with a certain understanding of the state which is not as far from Kant's as he would like; and, in terms of making the debate contemporary, neither model fits with the current state of the university. This is an institution dominated by the interests of capital and with all critical reflection sanctioned by the state, so that the nightmare of the irrationally rational state has become real (Derrida 1984a, p. 150). Derrida's writing on the university will be revisited in the section on *Lebensphilosophie* where its political implications can be more thoroughly pursued, so for now we can observe that Schelling does not ultimately answer Kant, and pass on. Romanticism offers one critique of Kantian and Hegelian rationality, but it neither provides lasting and deep solutions, nor extricates itself from the prejudices it hopes to avoid.

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<sup>23</sup> A description offered by Nicholas Royle for Derrida's work (Royle 2003, p. 24). It also has currency as one of Heidegger's descriptions of death, of which Royle is probably aware (Ofrat 2001 [1998], p. 30).

#### 4.5. Conclusion

The Romantics attempted to think their way out of some problems presented by Kant's Copernican revolution, without definite success, yet presenting a range of interesting suggestions as they went. Some of those were adopted and adapted by Bakhtin and Derrida, as they too tried to come to terms with the reorientation of philosophy offered by Kant. Bakhtin's earlier works naturally incline themselves towards Romanticism and the set of concerns explored there, and this interest is fused with a contemporary revival of Romantic motifs and structures in Marr, Freidenberg, and other linguists. This leads to a strand in Bakhtin's writings about the idea of national languages, and the changing historical instances of popular representation, a theme that is quite deliberately directed towards socio-political ends. Plurality is not held up as an unassailable virtue, nor is democracy the natural consequence of social diversity; rather, artistic forms that offer representations of diversity call attention to the openness which is a necessary condition for genuine intellectual labour (cf. Hirschkop 1999, p. 9 *et passim*). Derrida does not spend a great deal of time on the Romantics, preferring instead to find their valorisation of art, the individual, and the irrational in the source works of Kant and Hegel. He, like Bakhtin, is interested in sophisticating the concept of the individual through developing the philosophy of language, taking this as an example of subjective interactions with an objective social structure. This relationship comes to the fore in the various irrationalist and anti-rationalist philosophies to be explored in the next chapter, namely those of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard.

## 5. *Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard*

### 5.1. *Introduction*

If the general drive of post-Kantian philosophy was towards placing the subjective individual at the centre of her own world of meaning, then this tendency is deepened and sophisticated in the works of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), and Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855). All three authors chase through a variety of post-Kantian themes which impact on twentieth-century philosophy in general, and Bakhtin and Derrida in particular. These include familiar motifs from Romanticism, for instance: the problematic of the individual's relations with her social group; the nature and effects of the human body on knowledge and perception; human existence within an irrational universe; and the special relationship that literary language can have with truth. In the work of all three, reason is unseated, and other forces granted more significant roles in determining human knowledge: for Kierkegaard this is religious faith, while for Nietzsche and Schopenhauer it is variations on the will, a pre-rational desire engrained in all human activity. This means, for Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, that the individual is not entirely in control of his own reason or processes of thought, but subject to exterior forces: the social determination of these powers is brought out by Nietzsche, and unfolded by Bakhtin and Derrida. The surrender of individual autonomy is slightly modified in Kierkegaard, in that the subject must change his allegiance from a socially accepted version of unreason to a Christian one, and through faith sacrifice the everyday for the unknowable transcendental. It is this model of faith that has greatest impact on Derrida and Bakhtin, although they both also develop Kierkegaard's closely-related ideas about the need to expand philosophical language to include fictional forms.

In what follows, the Schopenhauer section deals with a thematic concern, the concept of aesthetic intuition. The longer treatment of Nietzsche incorporates this, and widens the focus to include a history of the reception of Nietzsche in Derrida's works, and more generally in Russian sources relevant to Bakhtin. The closing section on Kierkegaard contains both those elements, and adds to them an exploration of the language of philosophy and the role of fiction, thus reflecting at a higher level on the status of Bakhtin's and Derrida's writings. The philosophies of

irrationalism treated in this chapter may not have been, in their own terms, persuasive, coherent, or true, but the mood they created, and the changes they effected to the philosophical landscape, were of enormous significance in the twentieth century.

## 5.2. Schopenhauer and artistic intuition

Schopenhauer is a case in point. He never held an academic position, produced only a handful of works, developed his ideas very little over a lifetime, and left only one significant adherent of any sort, Nietzsche, who modified most of Schopenhauer's ideas to the point of rupture.

Schopenhauer's philosophy forms a complex and detailed whole, and there is little space to explore it here; it therefore seems prudent to concentrate on one aspect that most strongly carries over to Bakhtin and Derrida, namely the concept of artistic intuition. While Kant saw the essence of man as reason and his first impulse as towards rationality, Schopenhauer relies on a similar essentialism but turns away from reason: man's fundamental impulse is the blind striving of desire, and in no way does this equate with a rational attempt to comprehend or operate within the world. *Will* is the one constant in human existence, permeating our every action and thought, and casting us between the contrary states of boredom and desire; the only possible route to happiness is a suspension of the will and acceptance of the world as it is. This valorisation of non-willing suggests the classical and oriental lineage of Schopenhauer's quest for something behind reason, yet also the continuation of the Romantic concept of the individual's desire moved away from positive images of creation and artistic endeavour towards more negative visions of suffering and human misery (Foster 1999, p. 220). Schopenhauer was one of the first to complicate the relationship between the will and the individual's experience, so that the Kantian suspicion of direct experience becomes a more universal scepticism towards the possibility of knowing without corruption by desire, a theme which clearly plays out in Nietzsche and, later, phenomenology (Young 1996, p. 177). The mechanics of this interference of the will in human knowledge are, for Schopenhauer, quite simple: there are only representations (*Vorstellungen*) and the thing-in-itself, and we penetrate the former and approach the latter only through exercising the will (Hamlyn 1980, pp. 4-5). The thing-in-itself cannot (as in Kant) ever be known, leaving us (as not in Kant) with only superficial impressions of the

world and no firm standard of truth.<sup>1</sup> However, we enjoy a different order of knowledge about acts of our own body because we rely not on representation but on the direct experience of our will, a valorisation of the physical and subjective which can be seen as a result of the Romantic underscoring of the Kantian individual's freedom (Hamlyn 1980, p. 83). Some critics have noted how this turn to the body has been extremely significant for twentieth-century philosophy, although the obvious point deserves to be made that there are ways of foregrounding the individual subject and her capacity for self-experience that are non-corporeal, and indeed Nietzsche was to explore some of these (cf. Eagleton 2001, p. 230). Despite the similarity of their concerns, it is also worth noting the differences between Schopenhauer and modern philosophy: for instance, while he famously asserts "The world is my idea", a creation of individual will, Maurice Merleau-Ponty argues "The world is there before any possible analysis of mine" (Merleau-Ponty 1962 [1945], p. x). Schopenhauer also valorises a natural power of intuition which modern continental philosophy relentlessly socialises and places within an historical context, and it is this power of intuition that concerns us most here. Schopenhauer believed that a genius could create works of art that did not in themselves exercise will, but rather provided exemplars or illustrations of that will in action.<sup>2</sup> This enables spectators of art to suspend temporarily their willing and intuit a glimpse of life as it would be without will; aesthetics is therefore a special zone of intellectual life which can potentially transcend the pessimism of the rest of Schopenhauer's world-view. This does not mean the body is forgotten, as indeed sight and hearing are accorded special privileges for their capacity to side-step the will and access the aesthetic object, again a motif discernible in Nietzsche, where music is taken as the paradigm of all signifying systems (Hamlyn 1980, pp. 112, 119; Rajan 1995, p. 155). Yet through intuition, the habitual restrictions of the body are overcome and the individual is liberated by the work of art, a powerful idea which feeds into a variety of avant-garde movements at the start of the twentieth century (Doss-Davezac 1996).

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<sup>1</sup> One of the ways in which to interpret Schopenhauer's intense dislike of Hegel and Hegelian philosophy is to see it as a dispute over the legacy of Kant, over whether to overcome the distinction of thing-in-itself and appearance, as Hegel does, or underscore it, as Schopenhauer chooses (Pinkard 2002, p. 334). This strong mis-reading of Kant enables Nietzsche to develop his relativist and competitive historical critique of epistemology without going down the Hegelian route of an optimistic narrative of continuous enlightenment. Where Hegel's grand narrative sees the development of self-consciousness and knowledge, Nietzsche's recognises only the abdication of responsibility for the human role in creating the world (cf. Simmel 1986 [1907], p. 20).

<sup>2</sup> Again the reliance on a certain reading of Kant should be evident, as this is not at all far from his definition of art as purposiveness without purpose (outlined Höffe 1994 [1992], p. 216).



It is partly through this artistic route that Bakhtin receives his knowledge of Schopenhauer, a figure on whom he rarely comments and with whom he shows more typological similarity than direct affiliation. In his early *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin refers to Schopenhauer in a section about empathy in aesthetic contemplation, comparing the empathiser's activity in projecting herself into the empathised object with Schopenhauer's argument about music (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 15).<sup>3</sup> As we shall see, this overlap in Bakhtin's early works between aesthetics and empathy is constant. Schopenhauer's point about music is that it represents a detached and distanced version of the will which the individual can contemplate and criticise, and is thus one of the finest examples of the power of aesthetic intuition (Hamlyn 1980, p. 119; cf. Foster 1999, p. 226). In his own work, this line of argumentation intersects with his thought on compassion and the need for distance between subject and object: Schopenhauer suggests "We suffer *with*" the individual in pain, "and hence *in* him; we feel his pain as *his*, and do not imagine that it is ours" (quoted Cartwright 1999, p. 279). This emphasis on the distinction of subject and object of sympathy anticipates Max Scheler's treatment of the same topic, a similarity that allows Bakhtin to develop his phenomenological argument about the ethical-aesthetic relationship of perceiver and perceived.<sup>4</sup> In Bakhtin's scheme, the intuitive power of art lies more in the work's capacity to intuit reality rather than in the ability of the viewer to access that reality through art. For instance:

Aesthetic form, as an *intuitively* uniting and consummating form, descends upon content from outside – content as its potential fragmentation and its constant state of being-set-as-a-task [...] – and transposes it to a new axiological plane, to the plane of detached (isolated) and consummated being [...] – to the plane of beauty.

(Bakhtin 1990 [1924], p. 282, emphasis added)

In more subjective terms, the author's reaction to "the *whole* of the hero as a human being" is aesthetic because it "assembles all of the cognitive-ethical determinations and valuations of the hero and consummates them in the form of a unitary and unique whole that is a concrete, intuitable whole" (Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 5). "Intuitable" is glossed by the editors as equivalent to *anschaulich*, what is given in intuition rather than conceptual or abstract,

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<sup>3</sup> Bakhtin's editors give references to German sources where Bakhtin could have accessed this idea, especially Theodor Lipps (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 90, n. 53).

<sup>4</sup> For an excellent comparison of Scheler and Schopenhauer, see Gorevan 1996.

suggesting a collapse of the distinction between the author's and the reader's perceptions of the hero: the intuition of reality granted to one is extended to the other (Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 233, n. 7). This develops into Bakhtin's concept of empathy, where the subject, like an author, must both perceive-from-within and complete-from-outside the empathised individual. Both are gestures of aesthetics, both come at the same moment, and neither is reducible to reason (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 15; cf. Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], pp. 25-6, 81-7). The collapse of aesthetics and empathy facilitates Bakhtin's emphasis on the author's *love* for his hero: aesthetic seeing permits "an all-accepting loving affirmation of the human being", and "In the aesthetic event [...] the hero's own consciousness" is "lovingly *consummated*" by the author" (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], pp. 63-4; 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 89). Bakhtin's emphasis on intuition, and the running together of aesthetic and empathetic interaction, is very much in tune with the Russian avant-garde of the early twentieth century; Symbolism, for instance, underscoring the instantaneous apprehension of spiritual truth through art (cf. West 1970, p. 55). It is also a model of cultural crisis and redemption, as art is seen as salvation for first the individual and then the masses, and as the recovery of forgotten truths from within language. The mechanism of culture as salvation has enormous appeal to Bakhtin in his early works and, as we shall see, is also significant in his 1960s writings on carnival, which draw more heavily on Nietzsche (Brandist 2002a, pp. 28-30).

To my knowledge, Derrida has not written specifically on Schopenhauer, and demonstrates little interest in his philosophy. The slightly devilish argument could be made that Derrida neglects Schopenhauer because he is too interested in Hegel as *the* post-Kantian philosopher; this would parallel his neglect of, say, Sartre, because of his over-concentration on Heidegger. Yet the critique of immediacy and intuition in Derrida's works on Husserl can easily be turned against Schopenhauer's theory of artistic intuition. The temporality of human experience (emphasised by Heidegger, but frequently chased back to Husserl by Derrida) problematises both self-presence – how can I know what I am if I am constantly changing? – and the purity of intuition – given my consciousness of time, memory, anticipation and so forth, how can this moment of revelation be absolute? (Derrida 1973 [1967], *passim*, but cf. pp.6-7 for a relatively concise summary). Leaving aside what Derrida sees as the linguistic constraints on perception, there are also specific difficulties in the visual cognition of art (such as the question of where the frame begins and ends) which he exercises through a critique of Kantian aesthetics

(Derrida 1987 [1978]; 1981, and cf. Chapter One, above). Music, on the other hand, holds a special place within Derrida's canon, as it is one of the very few topics he has not explored.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, there are suggestions that it forms a redemptive space outside of the normal operations of criticism; in "Circumfession", he admits

that when I am not dreaming of making love, of being a resistance fighter in the last war blowing up bridges or trains, I want one thing only, and that is to lose myself in the orchestra I would form with my sons, heal, bless and seduce the whole world by playing divinely with my sons, produce with them the world's ecstasy, *their* creation.

(Derrida 1993 [1991], pp. 208-9)

This is matter for another thesis. If Derrida were to grant a special status to music, then it would more likely be from Nietzschean grounds of a confusion of the artist's body and artistic product than on the basis of a Schopenhauerian argument about the abnegation of the will. It is fair to say that Derrida's concentration on and development of Nietzsche indicate the directions of his interest, and make a return to the precursor of Schopenhauer redundant.

### 5.3. Nietzsche

Nietzsche has much more significance than Schopenhauer in modern philosophy in general, and Bakhtin and Derrida in particular, so the bulk of this chapter will be concerned with his thought and influence. As his work is relatively well-known, more time will be spent discussing the specific reception and transformation of his ideas, particularly within the Russian context, than outlining his specific arguments. I would also like to foreground some of the continuities with movements treated in previous chapters. For instance, Nietzsche can be seen to transpose Kant's argument that morality overcomes the individual's lower sensuous faculties into a more general, species-based key; the weak in mankind have to be defeated, through much cruelty and recklessness, in order for the best to be revealed (Simmel 1986 [1907], p. 166). This, by necessity, involves a rejection of the Hegelian solution of socially-mediated and -governed morality, which forms part of Nietzsche's larger antipathy towards Hegel's vision of historical development. He accuses Hegel alongside all academic philosophers of being anti-historical,

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<sup>5</sup> The only work I have found specifically applying Derrida's theories to music is the writing of the Dutch scholar, Marcel Cobussen (referred to in Warner 2004).

and sometimes casts this as parody: Nietzsche's "What is, does not *become*; what becomes, *is not*" both subverts Hegel's statement about the rational and the real while at the same time returning to his key category of becoming with renewed vigour (Nietzsche 1990 [1889], p. 35). Similarly, the opening of *The Birth of Tragedy*, with its talk of violent conflicts and periodic reconciliation, is much more Hegelian than Schopenhauerian, a feature which has great significance in the Russian reception of this text (Nietzsche 1967 [1872], p. 33). The crossover between Nietzsche's thought and early Romanticism has been quite well explored, and is evident in, for instance, the similarity of his work with Schiller's. Schiller suggests there are two drives in man that create art, the sensuous drive and the drive for form, which must both be relaxed and balanced through a drive for play before man is freed from moral and physical constraint (Megill 1985, pp. 13-14; cf. Kaufmann 1965, p. 57, for a similar argument about Schiller's influence on Hegel). These two drives can with relative ease be mapped on to the Dionysian and Apollonian, and were certainly interpreted this way by some of Nietzsche's readers. Nietzsche expands the Kantian/Romantic discovery of the individual even further, so that her agency comes not from morality, creative talent, or social responsibility but from her *will-to-power*. He also opens up, in a much more rigorous way than previously, questions about the restrictions on the individual created by social existence, and the consequent (de)formation of the concept of truth. The tension in Nietzschean-influenced and post-Nietzschean thought between the social mass and its creativity, and the individual's discipline and artistic control ties directly back to the tension between Apollonian and Dionysian. Individualist and collectivist readings of Nietzsche *can* be cast in these terms, although perhaps Nietzsche would not do so; the recurrence of this phrasing and structure of thought, however, suggests a great deal about the mediated Russian reception of the late Nietzsche through the early.

Nietzsche adopts some of Schopenhauer's language and imagery while fundamentally shifting his intentions and arguments: for instance his connection of the will with sexuality and with the individual body is taken by Nietzsche as a strongly positive aspect, the possibility of the dance and the forgetting of oneself in ecstasy (Nussbaum 1999, p. 349). The body does not become the will-loaded burden on happiness that Schopenhauer sees, but one of the fundamental constituents of our human identity. This is connected with the argument against Hegel, where Nietzsche notes "we are not thinking frogs" but bloody and physically-engaged human beings, and that dancing is a helpful representation of thought (Nietzsche 1910 [1882], p. 6; 1969 [1885],

p. 305). Nietzsche furiously refuses Schopenhauer's argument that because will causes misery, the only solution is to stop willing; Zarathustra implores, "No more to will and no more to evaluate and no more to create! ah, that this great lassitude may ever stay far from me!" (Nietzsche 1969 [1885], p. 111). More indirectly, Nietzsche parodies Schopenhauer's gloom in the figure of the prophet in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Nietzsche 1969 [1885], pp. 254ff.), and in *Beyond Good and Evil* criticises the Stoics for desiring an unnatural, indifferent life: "To live – is that not precisely wanting to be other than this nature? Is living not valuating, preferring, being unjust, being limited, wanting to be different?" (Nietzsche 1990 [1886], p. 39). Mankind is not subject to the universal flatness that Schopenhauer suggests, but rather is riven by essential internal differences, which enable pleasure, learning, and progress. Nietzsche specifically apologises for how he employed previous philosophical languages in bad faith, how he

tried laboriously to express by means of Schopenhauerian and Kantian formulas strange and new valuations which were basically at odds with Kant's and Schopenhauer's spirit and taste! What, after all, did Schopenhauer think of tragedy?

"That which bestows on everything tragic its peculiar elevating force" – he says in *The World as Representation* [...] – "is the discovery that the world, that life, can never give real satisfaction and hence is *not worthy* of our affection: this constitutes the tragic spirit – it leads to *resignation*".

How differently Dionysus spoke to me! How far removed I was from all this resignationism – [...] I obscured and spoiled Dionysian premonitions with Schopenhauerian formulations.

(Nietzsche 1967 [1872], p. 24)

The early Nietzsche recognises art as a potential point of access to pure reality, suggesting "The sphere of poetry does not lie outside the world as a fantastic impossibility spawned by a poet's brain: it desires to be just the opposite, the unvarnished expression of the truth" (Nietzsche 1967 [1872], p. 61), an idea not so far from Schopenhauer's faith in art as a suspension of will and the triumph of pure intuition, and subject to the same revisions later in Nietzsche's work. One of the fundamental points of difference between Schopenhauer's aesthetics and Nietzsche's is the latter's conviction that communities can be created and sustained by shared experience of art (Nietzsche 1967 [1872], p. 37). Here is a way of moving beyond the pessimistic tragedy of the individual that Schopenhauer outlined, and a good example of the polyvalence of Nietzsche's thought that allowed it to be applied in very diverse ways. Bakhtin, heavily influenced by Nietzsche's underground pervasion in the Russia avant-garde, emphasises this communal

capacity of aesthetics in his writings on carnival, while Derrida equally strongly affirms the individualism of Nietzsche's work and its demonstration of a capacity for meaning to be dispersed and contradictory. Similarly, while both Derrida and Bakhtin are engaged with ideas of anti-rationalism, a critique of humanism, and the prediction of new forms of culture, their different contexts of reception ensure that they put these motifs to work in very different ways. The argument sketched in the following sections, and shaded in after an investigation of Kierkegaard, is that Nietzsche sensitises Bakhtin and Derrida to the significance of language in philosophy in a manner instructive for us when we come to deal with their texts.

### 5.3.1. Nietzsche and Bakhtin

Nietzschean motifs, language, and symbols proliferated in Russia during the opening decades of the twentieth century. His work meshed with the reception of Romanticism, Bergsonism, anti-Hegelianism and a whole raft of other concepts, so that avant-garde theories and philosophies seem to be perpetually revolving around Nietzschean ideas. Here a word of caution from the expert on the topic would be prudent:

By Nietzschean ideas, I mean ideas indebted to Nietzsche directly or at one or more removes. One did not have to read Nietzsche to be influenced by him. The pollen of his ideas hung in the atmosphere for decades, fertilizing many Russian and Soviet minds.

(Rosenthal 2002, p. 2)

Nietzsche's work fed into Bolshevik and non-Bolshevik cultural theories, conservative and revolutionary political movements, philosophies of reason, unreason, realism and idealism, and all points inbetween.<sup>6</sup> Nikolai Bakhtin, Mikhail's brother, spent the greater part of his adult life outside of Russia, yet still felt strongly enough to describe his discovery of *The Birth of Tragedy* at age 11 as "a turning point" and defend the doctrine of eternal return against the "vulgar Nietzscheanism" of the 1920s and '30s (Wilson 1963, pp. 2, 10). Mikhail himself claimed towards the end of his life still to know large chunks of Nietzsche by heart, and the influence is most manifest in Bakhtin's 1960s writings on carnival. A central characteristic of carnival,

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<sup>6</sup> An indication of just how widely Nietzsche was assimilated is the Moscow Psychological Society, a bastion of neo-Kantianism, initiating philosophic discussion of Nietzsche in 1892 in its journal, *Problems of Philosophy and Psychology* (Rosenthal 2002, p. 52).

Bakhtin argues, is that it “absolutizes nothing, but rather proclaims the joyful relativity of everything”, temporarily suspending the order of everyday society and allowing the unrestricted interaction of all social elements (Bakhtin 1984 [1963], p. 125). One of the sources for this idea is Nietzsche’s early work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, which perceived the origin of art in ritual, especially the Dionysian festivals of self-abandonment, release, and orgy. This was a notion very much in the air of the early post-Revolutionary period, and it seems to have stayed with Bakhtin as his thought about carnival developed. Part of this “joyful relativity” is a collapse of the distinction between audience and actor; Bakhtin famously renders this as “Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people” (Bakhtin 1984 [1965], p. 7), while Nietzsche suggests

the public at an Attic tragedy found itself in the chorus of the *orchestra*, and there was at bottom no opposition between public and chorus: everything is merely a great sublime chorus of dancing and singing satyrs or of those who permit themselves to be represented by such satyrs.

(Nietzsche 1967 [1872], p. 62)

Another element to this celebratory vision of carnival is the notion of laughter as social critique, which features in the more mature Nietzsche through the laughter of Zarathustra, a topic that will be reserved until the section on Kierkegaard (e.g. Bakhtin 1984 [1965], pp. 20. 94). When Bakhtin refers to Nietzsche directly, it is often to dismiss him as overly-aesthetic, which can be seen as a product of his concentration on Nietzsche’s early works; he follows Nietzsche in arguing for a perspectivism and differentiation of power inherent in language, yet not to Nietzsche’s conclusion about truth being a twin product of power and language (e.g. Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], pp. 160, 229).<sup>7</sup> Nietzsche revised his early work on tragedy to suggest that something more – myth – is needed to create the highest possible forms of art. The artist is seen as weak and decadent, necessarily overcome by the prophetic and profound type of Zarathustra, commonly read as the superman of whom he talks (Megill 1985, p. 67). Bakhtin, and others interested in using Nietzsche to create new myths, profit from this overlap of social

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<sup>7</sup> An argument that sadly there is not space to develop here is the image of Nietzsche in Bakhtin’s early writings. In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, a perspectivism of ethics is outlined which is at least partially indebted to Nietzsche, as in every situation each individual participant has her own *ought*, and unitary truth is a synthesis, not a denial of these subjectivities (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 46). However, to concentrate on individual Being without accounting for the individual’s obligations to her *ought* is the “absurdity of current Dionysianism”, demonstrating once again how variegated the image of Nietzsche was in Russia from the beginning of his reception.

revolution and myth, and from the potential links back to Romanticism that it offers. The three themes gestured at here – the significance of carnival and ritual, the idea of the superman, and the creation of new forms of myth – are all crucial elements in the Russian reception of Nietzsche.

Viacheslav Ivanov (1866-1949), poet and literary theorist, was a significant conduit for the Russian reception of Nietzsche. He is commonly associated with Russian Symbolism, an artistic movement that believed in accessing a deeper and more profound reality through certain words, images, and works of art (West 1970). Art should be realistic in this stronger sense and provide a communal experience of transcendence, which also restores modern individuals to a more primordial belonging to each other and to the earth. To this end, Nietzsche's work is valued because it clears the path of presuppositions and cultural prejudices, although Ivanov has to manipulate it quite forcefully towards a spiritual and religious orientation. For instance, the individualism of Zarathustra is praised because it acknowledged the strength of humanity, but for the next stage, the Superman must be "no longer individual but, of necessity, universal, and even religious" (Ivanov 1982 [1905], p. 175). Individualism therefore must mean a growing together of the community under the auspices of a higher power:

The age of the epos has past: let the communal dithyramb begin. Our solo is bitter; the lament of a self-renouncing but not yet renounced spirit. He who does not want to sing the choral song should withdraw from the circle, covering his face with his hands. He can die, but he cannot live in isolation.

(Ivanov 1982 [1905], p. 177)

This reference to the "communal dithyramb" is an implicit nod to the same early Nietzsche on whom Bakhtin draws, even at this point where ideas of the superman (a concept introduced by the relatively late *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*) are being discussed. Just as the individual is subsumed by the greater power of the community, the details of a specific word or symbol are lost in the transcendental universal wisdom which it brings, ideas very closely connected to Russian Orthodoxy and the mystical union of man and God through contemplation of icons or images (West 1970, p. 55; cf. Fink 1999, p. 8). Yet this vision of a mystical penetration of a deeper reality at least initially relies on a dualist, conflictual model that is a little inimical to



Christianity – another reason why the early Nietzsche was attractive for Ivanov and many other contemporary thinkers:

We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics, once we perceive not merely by logical inference, but with the immediate certainty of vision, that the continuous development of art is bound up with the *Apollinian* and *Dionysian* duality – just as procreation depends on the duality of the sexes, involving perpetual strife with only periodically intervening reconciliations.

(Nietzsche 1967 [1872], p. 33)

This deployment of Nietzsche is again subject to certain modifications. Ivanov returns to the Hegelian subtext of this phase of Nietzsche's work and incorporates a teleology into his philosophy, an inexorable growth and development of mankind that is entirely foreign to Nietzsche. Following from this, Ivanov (like other theorists of the origin of culture) uses myth to provide a home for man in a universe where interpretation is endless and inevitable, whereas Nietzsche never regards it as more than a convenient fiction which should provoke a reconsideration of man's certainties rather than affirm them (West 1970, pp. 84, 189). Symbolism, which began as primarily an internal, spiritual radicalism, used such bridging devices as myth and language to turn outwards and set about this construction of patterns of human meaning. Ivanov represents a second generation of Symbolists, more concerned with the social and political, and in particular the national heritage of a language (Rosenthal 2002, pp. 33-4). In his 1910 essay *The Testament of Symbolism*, Ivanov looks back to the age of Greek civilisation when "The task of poetry was the incantatory magic of rhythmic speech, mediating between man and the world of divine beings", an argument which chimes with Marr's later deployment of the same idea, as well as points to the confusion between religious and social activity deliberately fostered by Ivanov (West 1970, p. 58).

According to Ivanov, Nietzsche had been right to recognise the social power of the Dionysian ritual, but wrong to dismiss it as purely an aesthetic phenomenon because the worship of the god Dionysus imbued it with an inescapably religious function (Rosenthal 1986, p. 20). Ivanov's corrective proposal was for a "Dionysian theatre", devoted to the creation of myth and collective artistic endeavour in a manner both religious – the audience determine what is holy and become themselves holy – and political – social boundaries and class distinctions are ecstatically overcome (Rosenthal 2002, pp. 43-4). This clearly harks back to a Romantic organic

unity of audience and drama, but adds to that two Nietzschean elements: firstly a strong sense of the social determination of ritual, and secondly an experience of the holy which is the product of human endeavour rather than anything transcendental (von Geldern 1993, p. 37). Ivanov suggests he understands by religion “not a definite content of religious beliefs, but the form of self-determination of the individual in relation to the world and to God” (quoted West 1970, p. 83).<sup>8</sup> This is a tolerant, experiential definition of religion that shifts the burden of faith on to the individual in a manner we shall encounter again in Kierkegaard. It also picks up on the polarities of individual and communal experience, Dionysian and Apollonian forces, which run through the Russian reception of Nietzsche, and which surface in both Ivanov’s and Bakhtin’s readings of Dostoevsky.

In 1916, Ivanov published *Dostoevsky as Tragic Poet*, a work with which Bakhtin’s text on Dostoevsky, in both its 1929 and 1963 versions, engages, and which can be seen as a bellwether for twentieth-century criticism. Ivanov, like Bakhtin, privileges Dostoevsky in the history of modern literature because of his role as a modern mythologist; he recognises the interplay of voices in the Dostoevskian text (and deploys musical analogies to comprehend them); and turns to a higher power (here religious mysticism, but for Bakhtin, society) in order to translate Dostoevsky’s literary discoveries into the real world (Seduro 1957, pp. 58-62). Bakhtin lectured on Ivanov’s work in the 1920s, and *Dostoevsky as Tragic Poet* is the first critical piece to be treated in detail in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (Hirschkop 1999, p. 157). While the concept of penetration of another’s world-view, and the necessity for each character to overcome his isolation and return to the community is praised, in general Ivanov is seen as being on the wrong track. By only dealing with this “ethico-religious” “affirmation of someone else’s consciousness” on a thematic level, Ivanov misses how it “becomes the principle behind Dostoevsky’s *artistic* visualization of the world, the principle behind his artistic structuring of a *verbal* whole, the novel” (Bakhtin 1984 [1963], pp. 10-11). This leads to the fatal error of assuming that Dostoevsky fits in with established genres (hence Ivanov’s hybrid of “novel-tragedy”), and “a whole series of direct metaphysical and ethical assertions which are not subject to any objective verification from actual material in Dostoevsky’s works” (Bakhtin 1984 [1963], p. 11). The interplay between Apollonian and Dionysian in Dostoevsky runs deeper than

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<sup>8</sup> This could conceivably be another return to Hegel, and his definition of religion as “simply the means whereby the individual consciousness becomes united with the divinity” (Hegel 1975, p. 106).

content, and in fact creates a new form of artistic commentary on social existence. Bakhtin also aligns himself with Ivanov in several more diffuse ways: for instance, in the notes towards the 1963 revision, he follows Ivanov in using Dostoevsky against Nietzsche's individualism, or a "decadent and idealistic (individualistic) culture"; he also agrees that Dostoevsky's work is similar to tragedy in that it is open-ended and irresolute, once again aligning it with Classical drama to suggest the recurrence of certain cultural forms (Bakhtin 1984 [1963], pp. 287, 26). Bocharov, in his commentary on the Dostoevsky book in the *Collected Works* calls attention to Lev Pumpianskii's 1922 work, *Dostoevsky and Antiquity* as a key mediator between Bakhtin and Ivanov.<sup>9</sup> Both Bakhtin and Pumpianskii reject Ivanov's characterisation of Dostoevsky's works as tragedy while retaining other elements of his framework, for instance the opposition to the Hegelian dialectic that Ivanov suggests as a Dionysian dyad, while Bakhtin offers dialogue. In response to Ivanov's outline of an aesthetic utopia Bakhtin offers the polyphonic novel, thereby exemplifying a division in 1920s cultural criticism between more Party-minded critics who sought to represent *the* voice of the people, and fellow-travellers who attempted the *voices* of the people (von Geldern 1993, p. 101).<sup>10</sup>

Anatolii Lunacharskii (1875-1933) is another Russian cultural linchpin and commentator on Dostoevsky who helped determine Bakhtin's understanding of Nietzsche. His significant reading of Dostoevsky, and its part in Bakhtin's work on that author, will be examined in a moment, but first a brief sketch of Lunacharskii's ideas and role. Commissar of Enlightenment for the ruling Bolshevik Party, Lunacharskii had been a significant cultural figure before the Revolution and used his limited powers during the 1920s to manage a diversity of artistic institutions and organisations until such tolerance was no longer accepted by the Party. As we have seen in the previous chapter, he was particularly associated with the programme of "God-building", where we can once again find the influence of Nietzsche. After the Revolution Lunacharskii spearheaded an explicitly Bolshevik project to create a new culture to reflect, foster, and facilitate the new forms of social organisation, which amounted to an attempt to found a new religion on science, humanity, and the collective endeavour of mankind (Williams 1986, p. 148). It absolutely taps into the super-humanism of the common Russian image of

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<sup>9</sup> I am indebted to Professor David Shepherd's characteristic generosity in sharing his notes on this commentary.

<sup>10</sup> There is a Russian-language article that deals with Bakhtin and Nietzsche, and in particular the mediating influence of Ivanov. The main point the English summary makes is that Ivanov also finds the origins of the novel in the ritual public theatre, but with an attitude of laughter rather than tragedy (Tamarchenko 2002).

Nietzsche, as well as the irrationalism with which he was seen to counter bourgeois philosophy and thought, even though this leads to some wild extremes: the credo that the death of the individual was overcome in the life of the collective is one example of the dubious political conclusions which can be drawn from an over-emphasis on the superman (Williams 1986, p. 99).<sup>11</sup> Like Ivanov, whose pre-Revolutionary St Petersburg salons Lunacharskii had attended, he develops from Nietzsche a strong anti-individualism:

The content of our consciousness, to the extent that it unquestionably breaks down the barriers of the individual and of his links with other people, leads a supra-individual life, more general, impersonal, independent of the individual who elaborated it. To collaborate in this is the supreme joy of artists, scholars, and politicians.

(From a 1909 article, quoted Tait 1986, p. 281)

This communal life was fostered (or forced) by Lunacharskii through the organisation of popular festivals and ceremonies, in which divisions between audience and participants dissolved in a mass celebration of the new collectivist era. This clearly drew on the early Nietzsche foregrounded in contemporary discussions, although it introduced alongside this ceremonial level an understanding of the importance of everyday life: the project of changing the consciousness of a new Soviet people included erecting public monuments and renaming streets and areas, in other words, changing the backdrop of quotidian existence (von Geldern 1993, p. 82). “Man does not need God,” Lunacharskii wrote, “Man himself is God. Man is a god for man”, continuing the confusion found in Ivanov between social and religious (quoted Williams 1986, p. 148). A revolution in consciousness must follow and foster political change, and the battleground for this revolt is culture.

Lunacharskii has a cameo role in Bakhtin’s *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, where his review of the 1929 version, *The Problem of Dostoevsky’s Art*, is welcomed for its recognition of the importance of polyphony and a variety of voices, but mildly criticised for reducing these to Dostoevsky’s historical and personal circumstances (Bakhtin 1984 [1963], pp. 32-6). A debt of gratitude is being paid here, as Lunacharskii’s positive review had been a significant factor in

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<sup>11</sup> Bakhtin gestures at something similar in his Rabelais book, although more from a conflation of Cohenian neo-Kantianism with broadly vitalist ideas (Bakhtin 1984 [1965], p. 256). The question of the political orientation of carnival has been given more consideration by Bakhtin’s sources and critics than by the author himself; see 4.3.1., above.

commuting Bakhtin's sentence from the labour camps to internal exile.<sup>12</sup> Lunacharskii's review essentially recasts Bakhtin's argument in more politically acceptable terms, praising him for his achievement

not only in describing more clearly than anyone has ever done before the immense significance of this plurality of voices in the Dostoevsky novel and the part played by this plurality as a most vital distinguishing feature of this novel, but also in defining the extraordinary individual autonomy and self-sufficiency of voices – quite unthinkable for the vast majority of other writers – which Dostoevsky developed with such shattering effect.

(Lunacharsky 1973 [1965], p. 81)

Just as Bakhtin has mutated Ivanov's concept of polyphony into a structural principle, so Lunacharskii transforms it into a statement about Dostoevsky's social reality. "The excessive contrast between the social realities of Russia and the intensified awareness which gradually came into being amongst the best people of the educated classes" is seen as the cause for Dostoevsky's technique of multiple voices, turning Bakhtin's non- or (allegedly) anti-Bolshevik book into a work of Party politics (Lunacharsky 1973 [1965], p. 92).<sup>13</sup> Lunacharskii's biological reductionism features here, as he suggests Dostoevsky's epilepsy heightened his sensitivity to social contradictions, and reaches the conclusion:

Dostoevsky is not master in his own home, and the disintegration of his personality, its tendency to schizophrenia, arises from his desire to believe in something not suggested by what he really does believe and to refute something which refuses to be finally refuted. All this together renders him as an individual peculiarly suited to create the agonising and essential image of the confusion of his epoch.

(Lunacharsky 1973 [1965], p. 105)

It was this political re-inscription of Bakhtin's work that helped commute his sentence from serving time in a prison camp to the less physically-demanding internal exile. A matter of interpretation, then, saves the life and works of Bakhtin for future scholars, and suggests that the

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<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, in a 1931 speech, Lunacharskii talked "On Laughter" and gave special mention to Bergson and Spencer. Bakhtin made notes from the subsequent article, although he is not thought to have used it for the Rabelais book (Tihanov 2000, p. 266).

<sup>13</sup> Morson and Emerson offer as one of the distinguishing features of the first Dostoevsky book a polemic against applying the dialectic as a key to understanding literary or creative development, which, rather ironically, is precisely what Lunacharskii does (Morson and Emerson 1990, p. 85).

appropriation of his texts for ideological purposes is not only historically valorised, but in some sense necessary.

One of the elements of Bakhtin's work that has received much attention in contemporary criticism is his construction of carnival as an epistemology:

Carnivalization is not an external and immobile schema which is imposed upon ready-made content; it is, rather, an extraordinarily flexible form of artistic visualization, a peculiar sort of heuristic principle making possible the discovery of new and as yet unseen things.

(Bakhtin 1984 [1963], p. 166; cf. 1984 [1965], p. 367)

For Bakhtin, Nietzsche, Ivanov, and Lunacharskii, carnival becomes a new way of seeing the world, one focussing lens of an irrationalist philosophy.<sup>14</sup> It also acts as a new way of conceiving the individual and her corporeal existence, which for Bakhtin can be traced as a changing concept of the author. His early works offer an all-embracing but individualist model of the author – “[Authorship] is an activity of the entire human being, from head to foot: he is needed in his entirety, as one who breathes (rhythm), moves, sees, hears, remembers, loves, and understands” – while the *Rabelais* book suggests a much more socially and corporeally open individual (Bakhtin 1990 [1924], p. 316; compare 1984 [1965], p. 26). Tihanov is correct to mark this as a development from a neo-Kantian to an Hegelian vision of the body, but it can also be seen as a shift within contemporary Nietzschean philosophy, from a model which emphasises the closed Apollonian artist to the unlimited Dionysian throng (Tihanov 2001). This is also a shift in political models, as Bakhtin moves from a quasi-elitist image of art that has to descend to life in his early works, to the carnivalesque model of art as a representation of popular social forms. A contrary movement is discernable in the career of one of Nietzsche's Russian champions. In 1922, there was a showtrial of non-Bolshevik politicians that featured a pre-selected mob bursting into the courtroom and demanding the deaths of the defendants. This was

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<sup>14</sup> One element to Bakhtin's understanding of carnival that falls between this chapter and the last is the influence of Nietzsche on Marrism and Freidenberg. In both cases, there is an attitude towards classical literature that sees it as still prescient (indeed, present), in modern culture, and a deliberately political deployment of cultural ideas. One of Bakhtin's main sources for his ideas and materials on carnival is Freidenberg's 1936 book *The Poetics of Plot and Genre*, even though they see carnival in different ways; for Freidenberg, it reinforces the values of a society by parodying them, while for Bakhtin the effect is explosively destabilising (Brandist 2002a, pp. 135-7). Perhaps the best conclusion to draw from this is that the permeation of Nietzschean ideas of carnival from the 1910s onwards was so deep that to hunt for single sources is to misunderstand the situation.

a new type of theatre, and one in which the audience had been carefully trained in their spontaneity. It is ironic, at least, that one of the prosecutors was Anatolii Lunacharskii (Rosenthal 2002, p. 175).

### 5.3.2. Nietzsche and Derrida

The question of politics in interpretations of Nietzsche is one that very much concerns Derrida, in different ways through his developing readings. Derrida's two most sustained engagements with Nietzsche are his 1978 work, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*, and the 1982 essay, "Otobiographies". Before turning to these, it could be worth pausing on some of the well-attested general similarities between the two men's works. Language speaks individuals, rather than vice versa; reason is a product of violence, which, while not negating its utility, makes it worthy of interrogation; texts constitute a field of force rather than a stable whole; there are interpretation and lower-case truths rather than naïve authority and upper-case Truth; and current social problems and weaknesses are best addressed through an historical framework. In one sense, Derrida extends Nietzsche's critique of the confusion of language and subjective consciousness: Nietzsche argues, "You say 'I' and you are proud of this word. But greater than this – although you will not believe in it – is your body and its great intelligence, which does not say 'I' but performs 'I'" (Nietzsche 1969 [1885], p. 62). Derrida agrees that there are levels of subjectivity beyond language, but prefers to see those in psychological terms, as well as recognising the role of language in creating even these unspeakable areas: "Constituting it and dislocating it at the same time, writing is other than the subject, in whatever sense the latter is understood" (Derrida 1974 [1967], p. 68). Both experiment with the style and language of philosophy, exploring, as will be seen below, the effects of introducing fiction, autobiography, and a no-man's land of fictionalised autobiography into texts that are conventionally impersonal and atemporal. Derrida's argument that faith only has meaning if it contains an element of doubt recalls Nietzsche's argument that morality is only meaningful if we discuss and interrogate it rather than accept it blindly (Nietzsche 1903 [1881], p. xxiii). Part of this historicising impulse is a radical scepticism towards origins – "The concept of origin or nature is nothing but the myth of addition, of supplementarity annulled by being purely additive", Derrida writes in 1967, and again, much later, "There is no nature, only effects of nature: denaturation or naturalization"

(Derrida 1974 [1967], p. 167; 1992 [1991], p. 170). Nietzsche, notwithstanding the early Soviet interpretation outlined above, consistently refuses such essentialism in favour of founding tensions created by conflicting manifestations of the will-to-power. It has finally been noted that *différance* is not a force, but, in a very Nietzschean manner, a relation between two forces which disrupts any notion of a unitary force, a motif discernible in the essay of this name (Bennington and Derrida 1993 [1991], p. 82). Indeed, Derrida's model of power in general seems to come from Nietzsche, as when he discusses political authority operating not "in terms of simple exclusion, but in those of differential force, *more or less*" (Derrida 1997 [1994], p. 293; cf. 1987 [1980], p. 405).<sup>15</sup> His concern with politics extends to the effects of Nietzsche's texts, given the determined histories of reception they have experienced, and he is keen to wrap this around the reception of other authors, in particular Martin Heidegger.

Derrida's first major engagement with Nietzsche is his 1978 work, *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*. This is a tremendously rich text operating on a variety of levels, and to pick the bare bones from it here is an injustice. The central thrust of Derrida's commentary is an emphasis on Nietzsche's style, the aestheticised surface that Bakhtin and others mistrust. Nietzsche suggests in *Ecce Homo* that "the meaning of every style" is "to communicate a state, an inward tension of pathos, by means of signs, including the tempo of these signs"; in other words, the surface of the text provides access to the depths (Nietzsche 1968 [1888], p. 721). Style is what conceals meaning at the same time as constructing it, providing a surface without depth, yet which is simultaneously all depth (Derrida 1979 [1978], p. 39). Nietzsche employs a multitude of styles to oppose the homogeneity, as he sees it, of Judaeo-Christian morality and bourgeois culture, and Derrida is surely right to describe this rejection with a nod to Hegelian philosophy:

For the reversal, if it is not accompanied by a discrete parody, a strategy of writing, or difference or deviation in quills, if there is no style, no grand style, this is finally but the same thing, nothing more than a clamorous declaration of the antithesis.

(Derrida 1979 [1978], p. 95)

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<sup>15</sup> It is also notable that he used the term "hegemony" to describe this relation of political forces, as he did in his lecture "Ethics and Philosophy" and other more political writings (Derrida 2002; e.g. 1998, p. 14). This does not in itself constitute an alignment with socialism, but it is indicative of a stronger interest in politics than is sometimes ascribed to Derrida.



The surface of the text becomes particularly relevant in the act of quotation, and here Derrida extends his discussion to include Heidegger's vision of Nietzsche. Heidegger acknowledges Nietzsche's argument that "the [Platonic] Idea becomes female", yet does not examine how, for Nietzsche, this means plurality, endless difference, and a lack of stable identity, but rather inserts his own ideas about the proper name of Being (Derrida 1979 [1978], pp. 83-7). Derrida finds in Nietzsche a series of equations between style, truth, and the figure of woman, all of which are seen as plural and open, a temptation for (male) philosophers but at the same time an impossibility:

There is no such thing as a woman, as a truth in itself of woman in itself. That much, at least, Nietzsche has said. Not to mention the manifold typology of women in his work, its horde of mothers, daughters, sisters, old maids, wives, governesses, prostitutes, virgins, grandmothers, big and little girls.

For just this reason then, there is no such thing either as the truth of Nietzsche, or of Nietzsche's text. [...] Indeed, there is no such thing as a truth in itself. But only a surfeit of it.

(Derrida 1979 [1978], pp. 101, 103)<sup>16</sup>

This weight on women, plurality, and the co-existence of contraries is what Heidegger finds so threatening, and Derrida so liberating. Derrida chases this plurality through with a not-entirely-serious analysis of Nietzsche's marginal annotation, "I have forgotten my umbrella". The conventional dismissal of this as a meaningless fragment is challenged on both terms: who is to say it is meaningless, and why should it be designated a fragment when that implies a larger totality into which it fits? (Derrida 1979 [1978], p. 125). Indeed,

The remainder [*restance*] that is this "I have forgotten my umbrella" is not caught up in any circular trajectory. It knows of no proper itinerary which would lead from its beginning to its end and back again, nor does its movement admit of any center. Because it is structurally liberated from any living meaning, it is always possible that it means nothing at all or that it has no decidable meaning.

(Derrida 1979 [1978], pp. 131, 133)

One of the final movements of *Spurs* is to suggest that the whole text might have been a joke or an unsolvable riddle, more meaningless because of its appearance of meaning (Derrida 1979

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<sup>16</sup> The layout of the text is perhaps worthy of comment; paragraphs begin flush with the left-hand margin and move raggedly out towards the right, mimicking the imagery in the text of waves, shorelines, and groynes.

[1978], p. 137); the concept of truth has to be approached ironically in order for the possibility of non-meaning to be (at least partially) contained.<sup>17</sup> To blunder in as Heidegger does with set ideas about the truth of Nietzsche's work is to neglect precisely what is most valuable: its interrogation of the possibility of truth.

However, this emphasis on indeterminacy must be yoked to an historical awareness and responsibility in order to avoid nihilistic relativism, and in Nietzsche's case this involves explaining his reception and use by the Nazi party. Four years after *Spurs*, Derrida returned to Nietzsche with "Otobiographies". This text deals explicitly with the understanding by the Nazi establishment of Nietzsche's semi-autobiography, *Ecce Homo*, and one of his lesser-known texts on the institution of the university. Whereas *Spurs* placed the emphasis on the plurality of Nietzsche's work and the necessity of holding options open, "Otobiographies" is interested in the coherence of Nietzsche's corpus, and what limits should be brought to interpretation to prevent an apparent legitimisation of terror. In constructing his autobiography, Nietzsche necessarily presents an image of himself which will be evaluated by unknown, innumerable others in the future:

He never knows in the present, with present knowledge or even in the present of *Ecce Homo*, whether anyone will ever honor the inordinate credit that he extends to himself in his name, but also necessarily in the name of another. The consequences of this are not difficult to foresee: if the life that he lives and tells to himself ("autobiography", they call it) cannot be his life in the first place except as the effect of a secret contract, a credit account which has been both opened and encrypted, an indebtedness, an alliance or annulus, then as long as the contract has not been honored – and it cannot be honored except by another, for example, by you – Nietzsche can write that his life is perhaps a mere prejudice, "es ist vielleicht bloss ein Vorurteil dass ich lebe". A prejudice: life. Or perhaps not so much life in general, but my life, this "that I live", the "I-live" in the present. It is a prejudgment, a sentence, a hasty arrest, a risky prediction.

(Derrida 1985 [1982], p. 9)

This is similar to the openness of interpretation outlined as Nietzsche's project in *Spurs*, but with a much clearer focus, through the lexis of contract and alliance, on the dangers of unbounded reading and the possibility of an understanding entirely contrary to any of the author's intentions.

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<sup>17</sup> There is also a subsidiary argument about the power of coincidence: when Heidegger argues that the forgetting of Being has too often been treated like an absent-minded professor of philosophy forgetting his umbrella, is he writing with a knowledge of Nietzsche's comment, thereby (for Derrida) implicitly undermining his entire reading of Nietzsche, or is it serendipity (Derrida 1979 [1978], P. S. II, pp. 141, 143)?

This difference is evident in the language of “Otobiographies”, which focuses on images of doubleness and division, rather than the boundless proliferation of meaning (e.g. the image of the double birth, Derrida 1985 [1982], p. 16). This also marks a continued interest in women, especially given that it was Nietzsche’s sister who helped transmit a limited selection of his texts to Nazi philosophers. This is channelled through an investigation of Nietzsche’s life and relations with his parents, culminating with an analysis of the place of the mother in Nietzsche’s work: “She gives rise to all the figures by losing herself in the background of the scene like an anonymous persona. [...] She survives on the condition of remaining at bottom” (Derrida 1985 [1982], p. 38). Certainly it is not Nietzsche’s intention to inscribe this or any other structure of subordination into his texts, but this is one of the ways in which he was read, and the real-world consequences of textual decisions cannot be ignored.

One subtextual presence throughout this essay is the figure of Heidegger, and his different relationships with the Nazi regime and the works of Nietzsche. In general, Derrida uses Nietzsche as the anti-Heidegger, representing an entirely different tradition of philosophical thought that shuns the traps of ultimate meanings and irreducible contents, in favour of play, plurality, and diversity (Behler 1991 [1988], p. 101). This is a visible concern in Derrida’s early works, as for example when he talks about the need “to save” Nietzsche from the history of metaphysics where Heidegger wishes to place him, or when he opposes a Nietzschean strategy of free play to structuralism (Derrida 1974 [1967], p. 19; 1981 [1967], p. 292). Yet while Derrida is concerned to distinguish the two thinkers, there remains the problem of their mutual appropriation by unsavoury political causes, or more broadly, their capacity to be read in an uncomfortable manner. It is central to Derrida’s intellectual project that no interpretation be rejected out of hand, yet acknowledgement must be given that some readings will have, have had, detrimental real-world consequences. One of the lessons of “Otobiographies” is that interpretation will never be ended, but that does not mean it is entirely unlicensed and should continue in wilful disregard for its effects; rather, a structure of accountability should be developed to encompass and forgive even the most divergent readings. And this is a line of argument we must extend to Derrida’s work, that while regarding him as a commentator on literature is not incorrect, there are more productive and faithful kinds of reading to be done. The ambiguity and polyvalence of his texts must be accepted and worked through rather than

dismissed as “literary”; as we shall see through Kierkegaard, to write in an aesthetic manner does not mean you limit your topic to aesthetics.

One final point about the idea of the individual to carry us over into a study of Kierkegaard. Both Nietzsche and Derrida are interested in re-writing the concept of the subject to such an extent that she has no individuality, but becomes the locus of the interplay of linguistic, social, and historical forces (Schrift 1995, p. 30). This is clearly a line of argument that will be developed in phenomenology, and which marks a Gordian-knot resolution to debates over humanism: what happens to the subject if you radically shift the parameters of her individuality? It can also be seen as a development from Romanticism, which conflated the individual with larger social forces; the difference is that Nietzsche, and much more strongly Derrida, refuse the relatively uncritical and unreflective concept of the nation, and its associations with historical and political determination. Their focus of interest is the individual and her capacity to respond to transcendent forces, in a manner creative, reflexive, and responsible.

#### *5.4. Kierkegaard, faith, and language*

If Nietzsche regards the social forces that build up the individual as barriers ultimately to be overcome, then Søren Kierkegaard sees them as distractions and detractions from the subject’s reconciliation with God. Kierkegaard, roughly thirty years Nietzsche’s senior, offers another version of irrationalism that has huge significance for twentieth-century thought, but also returns to philosophy a central concept, God, neglected since Kant. The project of mankind is not to lose itself in the everyday and trivial, but to concentrate on a transcendental divine truth, and continually strive towards it in full recognition that it may never be reached (Hannay 1991 [1982], pp. 12, 21). While this may bear some superficial similarities with certain readings of Hegel, it is a much more individualist project as the subject must go beyond the ethical (defined by society) and into the religious (defined by each individual’s relationship with God) (Hannay 1991 [1982], p. 206).<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the religious is directly opposed to the “world-historical”, as

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<sup>18</sup> Kierkegaard’s vehement prejudice against Hegel is best explained by his reception of that author through the late Schelling, who had his own grudges against Hegel, and indeed a philosophy which Hegel’s was supposed to render obsolete (Kaufmann 1965, p. 289). For arguments which construe Kierkegaard as, unconsciously, a Hegelian, see Westphal 1998, and Rose 1992.

something infinitely greater and more valuable, and reliant on an individual's faith which "cannot be mediated, for all mediation occurs precisely by virtue of the universal; it is and remains in all eternity a paradox, inaccessible to thought" (Kierkegaard 1992 [1846], p. 148; 1985 [1843], p. 85). The irrationalism of faith is continually foregrounded:

All along [Abraham] had faith, he believed that God would not demand Isaac of him, while he was willing to offer him if that was indeed what was demanded. He believed on the strength of the absurd, for there could be no question of human calculation, and it was indeed absurd that God who demanded this of him should in the next instant withdraw the demand. He climbed the mountain, even in that moment when the knife gleamed he believed – that God would not demand Isaac. [...] Let us go further. Let Isaac actually be sacrificed. Abraham had faith. His faith was not that he should be happy some time in the hereafter, but that he should find blessed happiness here in this world. God could give him a new Isaac, bring the sacrificial offer back to life. [...] Had it not been thus with Abraham he may well have loved God, but he would not have had faith; for he who loves God without faith reflects on himself, while the person who loves God reflects on God.

(Kierkegaard 1985 [1843], pp. 65-6)

It is Abraham's faith in offering his son Isaac as a sacrifice which makes him "a guiding star that saves the anguished" rather than someone "admired in the world", and Kierkegaard offers Abraham as a model of faith whom other individuals can try and imitate (Kierkegaard 1985 [1843], p. 54). This project of imitation without necessarily comprehending Abraham's motives, let alone reaching the same extremes of faith, necessarily involves wresting the Bible and Biblical characters away from established religion and returning them to their subjective, individual power: a project best performed by fiction. This plays out in Kierkegaard's writing through the use of pseudonymous authors, unreliable narrators, different kinds of texts bundled together into single books, and a deliberate engagement with the shallow and aesthetic forms of contemporary social life.

The differences from Kant, Hegel, and indeed neo-Kantianism could not be clearer. While they saw philosophy, aesthetics, and religion as different paths to the same truth, Kierkegaard absolutely refuses this proposition, and argues there are truths which can only be reached by religion and the subjective transformation which that brings (cf. Houlgate 1991, p. 127). This is sophisticated further in his *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, where the author argues that even the Bible is not enough for salvation because it is too earthly and unreliable;

rather, the individual must have her own passionate faith (Kierkegaard 1992 [1846], p. 23). I would suggest two reasons for this emphasis on the individuality of knowledge; the first is another point of distinction from Kant, namely the introduction of emotion and valuation into human knowing – because faith operates against rationalism, what is forcibly felt becomes as much a criterion for truth as cold logic. This clearly feeds into much twentieth-century philosophy, phenomenology in particular, as does the second reason. Between the believer in Kierkegaard’s time and the events she is supposed to believe, there are at least 1800 years, and as Kierkegaard asks: “There were countless generations that knew the story of Abraham by heart, word for word. How many did it make sleepless?” (Kierkegaard 1992 [1846], p. 38; 1985 [1843], p. 58). This is part of a larger disruption of traditional linear temporality in favour of a more modern emphasis on instantaneity. Whereas Kant underscored time as a constant condition of human experience, and Hegel had elevated this into the historical unfolding of *Geist*, Kierkegaard emphasises the moment, the point where eternity touches human time and the individual’s past, present, and future are all seen as one (Hannay 1991 [1982], p. 179). The irrationalist similarities with Schopenhauer’s aesthetic intuition are clear, as is the Nietzschean refusal to be determined by the history of others; and, to anticipate myself slightly, while Bakhtin is more receptive to the Kierkegaardian instant because of his links to religion and phenomenology, Derrida hearkens closely because of Kierkegaard’s sophisticated understanding of self-knowledge, where immediacy is continually mediated through language. This is intimately bound up in the presentation of Kierkegaard’s works, and their layers of referentiality and irony that underpin rather than undermine his argument about individual ethical responsibility.

For Kierkegaard, irony is a means of devotion that avoids vanity or taking oneself too seriously, and a brake on human arrogance rather than, as for the Romantics, the limit of human knowledge (cf. Cross 1998, p. 140). Irony is also indispensable for creating a distance from one’s own self, and hence the conditions of self-awareness for ethical action. While Kierkegaard’s texts engage specific mechanisms of ironisation, this is also something hard-wired into language itself: “The possibility of writing is the possibility of irony: it is the possibility of detachment” (Agacinski 1988 [1977], p. 76). Yet “Irony is like the negative way, not the truth but the way”, and while humour can place the individual in the state of doubt and expectation which Christianity requires, it cannot alone provide the final leap to the serious and ethical

(quoted Rose 1992, p. 28; Kierkegaard 1992 [1846], p. 272). Both the author and the reader have to work to reach Kierkegaard's concept of truth, demonstrating his commitment to an antisocial, anti-rationalist, individually creative epistemology which further extends the Romantic-Nietzschean line, yet which attempts to preserve (*à la* Kant) a transcendental reality which mankind cannot necessarily access (Green 1998, p. 257). Neither Kierkegaard's texts nor the everyday world can be read in a literal manner to reach the truth. "The problem itself is a problem of reflection: to become a Christian...when one is a Christian of a sort", as Kierkegaard phrases his task of shaking up institutionalised religion, suggesting that he aims not just to rationally persuade, but to bring the reader into a passionate embrace of the truth, something attainable through the provocations of fiction (Kierkegaard 1962 [1859], p. 43, original ellipsis; 1992 [1846], p. 311). In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard suggests "a poet is not an apostle, he casts devils out only by the power of the devil", and clarifies the different levels on which his immanent critique works: salvation is not from a position of moral superiority, but from everyday life, and can be reached through the mundanity of language and debased cultural forms (Kierkegaard 1985 [1843], p. 90). Part of the valorisation of language ties in with an ascetic tradition of refusing the body which is not far removed from Schopenhauer; other media, such as sculpture, are more directly sensuous, and it is only music that shares the privileges of elementally dwelling in time rather than space, and appealing directly to the intellect (Kierkegaard 1992 [1843], p. 79). What is significant about language for Kierkegaard is its ambiguity and intellectual address, something with which Nietzsche was also familiar, and which can be seen as a sophisticated return to Kantian concerns about the communication of experience. It is always worth recalling how Kierkegaard's ironic techniques carried over into his life: he made himself a personality or character to provide another layer of unreliability in his texts, for instance going to the theatre for five minutes a day in order to gain the reputation of being idle (R. Poole 1998, p. 59; Kierkegaard 1962 [1859], p. 50). This can be carried over into Bakhtin, who participated in the construction of his own life (the borrowed CV, the late interviews inscribing a version of his life, the prevarication over the disputed texts), while Derrida attacked the same matter in a much more self-conscious fashion (the films, the engagement with autobiography, the inscription of his own personal experiences into the text [for instance, *Memoires of the Blind*]).<sup>19</sup> It has also been something that has been thrust upon them, a

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<sup>19</sup> There is also Geoffrey Bennington's testimony that "J.D. has often explained why he had done everything he

project inherently bound up in the editing and translation of their texts – for example, the excision of references to Stalin in Bakhtin’s writings on discursive genres, and the preference in the Anglophone world for Derrida’s literary texts and texts on literature.<sup>20</sup> The temporally-bound subjectivities of the two authors are simultaneously the most important and the most problematic elements for the critic to reach, and it is precisely in the debate over their language that this tension is most clearly felt.

#### 5.4.1. *Kierkegaard and Bakhtin*

In one of the interviews towards the end of his life, Bakhtin claims:

I was the first Russian to study Søren Kierkegaard...Dostoevsky was, of course, unaware of Kierkegaard’s existence, despite the fact that they were nearly contemporaries. The sympathy, however, between the concerns of these two authors and the similarity of the depth of their insights is astounding.

(quoted Fryszman 1996, p. 103)

Bakhtin recalls elsewhere in these interviews that Kierkegaard was a pupil of Hegel’s and Schelling’s, and perhaps too quickly conflates Kierkegaard and Dostoevsky without considering either Nietzsche or the Orthodox mediations of this thinker, suggesting that neither his memory nor his powers of analysis were infallible. Yet Bakhtin was clearly very taken with Kierkegaard, first encountering his work while a gymnasium student in Vilnius and Odessa, and being so enthused by it that he (allegedly) began to learn Danish to read him in the original (Clark and Holquist 1984b, p. 27).<sup>21</sup> In “Author and Hero”, Bakhtin ranks Kierkegaard as a polyphonic author alongside Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Stendhal, and while the influence of some of his ideas is clear in Bakhtin’s early works, both the labelling of Kierkegaard as “obscurantist” by the Soviet authorities and the general shifts in Bakhtin’s thought away from the individual to the

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could to avoid public photography” until the 1979 Estates General of Philosophy in the Sorbonne (Bennington and Derrida 1993 [1991], p. 334).

<sup>20</sup> Stalin’s speech “Marxism and Questions of Linguistics” was “quoted in the body of [‘The Problem of Speech Genres’] but editorially deleted” (Hirschkop 1999, p. 187).

<sup>21</sup> This version of events has been disputed by Tapani Laine, who argues that Bakhtin first encountered Kierkegaard through an obscure Swiss philosopher named Hans Limbach, who was close to the Brenner linguistic circle (Laine 2003).



social mean a certain submergence after the 1930s (Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 20).

Based on the above, what Bakhtin writes of Dostoevsky can be read in relation to Kierkegaard:

What unfolds in his works is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*, combine but are not merged in the unity of the event.

(Bakhtin 1984 [1963], p. 6)

What is privileged is the relativism of the philosophical viewpoints, which can be sourced in Kierkegaard, a russified Nietzsche, or a more general tension in Bakhtin's work between the transcendent truths of neo-Kantianism and the perspectivism of phenomenology and *Lebensphilosophie*. Certainly, phenomenology draws the early Bakhtin towards the experiential level of human existence explored by Kierkegaard; compare, for instance, Bakhtin's assertion that "my entire life can be considered a single complex act or deed that I perform: I act, i.e. perform acts, with my whole life, and every particular act and lived-experience is a constituent moment of my life", with Kierkegaard's "Choice itself is decisive for a personality's content; in choice personality immerses itself in what is chosen" (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 3; Kierkegaard 1992 [1843], p. 482). Bakhtin follows Kierkegaard, and disagrees with Schopenhauer, in the manner by which we can apply aesthetics to this experience of life. "One of the most important tasks of aesthetics", argues Bakhtin, "is to discover an approach to aestheticized philosophemes, to create a theory of intuitive philosophy on the basis of the theory of art" (Bakhtin 1990 [1924], p. 281; cf. 1990 [1919]). Art, and notably the intuition of art, must take us into morality and ethics, and in the early Bakhtin this is cast in a more or less explicit religious framework. Realisable only in a transcendental divinity, the individual envisioned by Bakhtin and Kierkegaard is eternally fragmented and in search of completion and totality in an experiential, temporally-bound existence which cannot provide such resolution (Frishman 1994). In one of Bakhtin's lectures, this is phrased as:

Where, for moral consciousness, there are two people, – for religious consciousness, there is a *third* one: a possible someone who evaluates. [...] I am infinitely bad, but Someone needs me to be good. In repenting, I specifically establish the One in Whom I posit my sin.

(Nikolaev 2001, pp. 208-209)<sup>22</sup>

This subject-based religion relies on a God who has granted absolute freedom to His creations, an argument that Bakhtin develops through the literary motif of an author who distances himself from his characters. “The divinity of the artist consists in his partaking of the supreme outsideness”, suggests Bakhtin, in his *kenotic* emptying of himself to grant freedom and a meaningful possibility of salvation (Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 191; cf. Coates 1998a, p. 90). Of course, this requires the strong model of faith we have seen in Kierkegaard, and which for Bakhtin is an inescapable part of human existence (Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 127). The proposed distance between creator and creation matches with the necessary distancing effects of humour that create self-awareness and responsibility, as well as a temporal situatedness as regards an open future (e.g. Bakhtin 1984 [1963], p. 166). In Bakhtin’s mid-period writings on carnival, the significance of laughter shifts to a recognition of common humanity, and particularly corporeality, which rather alters the transcendental relationship suggested in the early works (e.g. Bakhtin 1984 [1965], pp. 20, 94). Some critics have seen this redefinition of the transcendental as a weakness of Bakhtin’s thought, a retreat from problems of individual responsibility, which are at the very least more evident in the earlier works (e.g. Morson and Emerson 1990, p. 43; Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 40).<sup>23</sup> Just as Kierkegaard’s religious responsibility is higher than the social, so Bakhtin’s concept of once-occurrent Being transcends the viewpoint of temporally limited human society. Yet morality is not something abstract and disembodied, but existent within specific acts:

There *are* no moral norms that are determinate and valid in themselves as *moral* norms, but there *is* a moral *subiectum* with a determinate structure (not a psychological or physical structure, of course), and it is upon him that we have to rely.

(Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 6)

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<sup>22</sup> Compare Bakhtin 1990 (mid to late 1920s), pp. 141, 144.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Wall 1997, pp. 679-80 for the difficulties in determining what Bakhtin intended by “ethics” over the course of his career

This is extremely close to Kierkegaard's argument that from an *ethical* standpoint good and bad exist only in performance, even if this perspective is in some ways surpassed by the religious (Kierkegaard 1992 [1843]). The linkage between experiential and transcendental responsibility is murky for Bakhtin, to say the least – the actually performed act “somehow knows, somehow possesses the unitary and once-occurrent being of life” – which perhaps indicates the significance of a subjective, irrational faith for these early works (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 28). There is a distinct shift between the early aesthetic works and the first Dostoevsky book: in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, the individual's *refusal* of her responsibility is sinful, while in *The Problem of Dostoevsky's Art*, it is the other's imposition of her will on the individual which is culpable (Coates 1998a, p. 86). This is a development within phenomenological standpoints that moves Bakhtin away from his youthful influences, and towards more socialised models of ethical responsibility. Different sorts of fragmentation and irony can be found in the writings of Bakhtin and Kierkegaard as completed canons, and a similar effect is achieved: the pointing to something beyond the author, and beyond any individual human. However, Kierkegaard, in charge of this project and relentlessly stylising himself, can ensure that this transcendent object is God; Bakhtin, less in control of his works and representation, becomes instead a genius underpinning relevant ideas from the period, and many other things beside. Kierkegaard's irony leads us to religion; the irony of the reception of Bakhtin brings us to idolatry and “Bakhtin myths” (in Ken Hirschkop's fine phrase). It is not until we have come to terms with the development and occasional outright contradiction of Bakhtin's ideas that we will do him justice as a distinctive, individual, author (cf. Wall 1997).

#### 5.4.2. Kierkegaard and Derrida

The main element of Kierkegaard's work that Derrida takes forward is his delimiting of the concept of responsibility, so that the individual is answerable not just to the social expectations of her time but to a not-necessarily-knowable exterior force.<sup>24</sup> This is clearly developed in Derrida's commentary on *Fear and Trembling*:

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<sup>24</sup> This is only a superficial and limited comparison of Kierkegaard and Derrida; for a much more detailed and expert analysis, see Caputo 1997.

By preferring my work, simply by giving it my time and attention, by preferring my activity as a citizen or as a professorial and professional philosopher, writing and speaking here in a public language, French in my case, I am perhaps fulfilling my duty. But I am sacrificing and betraying at every moment all my other obligations: my obligations to the other others whom I know or don't know, the billions of my fellows (not to mention the animals that are even more other others than my fellows), my fellows who are dying of starvation or sickness. I betray my fidelity or my obligations to other citizens, to those who don't speak my language and to whom I neither speak nor respond, to each of those who listen or read and to whom I neither respond nor address myself in the proper manner, that is, in a singular manner (this for the so-called public space to which I sacrifice my own so-called private space), thus also to those I love in private, my own, my family, my sons, each of whom is the only son I sacrifice to the other, every one being sacrificed to every one else in this land of Moriah that is our habitat every second of the day.

(Derrida 1995 [1992], p. 69)<sup>25</sup>

This is expressed more concisely later in the same text as, “responsibility is always unequal to itself: one is never responsible enough” (Derrida 1995 [1992], p. 51). A key similarity with Kierkegaard (and, not incidentally, Heidegger), and difference from Levinas and the mainstream of moral philosophy, lies with Derrida's willingness to sacrifice the “calculability of obligation”, to go beyond general ethical principles to transcendental beliefs which simply cannot be made norms (Caputo 1997, p. 206). Instead, Derrida attempts to remain faithful to

The singularity of the coming of the other ... I would say that the opening or expectation, a certain submission, a certain faithfulness to the coming, each time, of the singular other, has a dimension that can't be brought into what is called the domain of ethics.

(Hobson 1998, p. 143, her own rendering of an untranslated work)

A necessary consequence of unlimited responsibility which refuses the determinations of ethics is universal guilt: “We are all heir, at least, to persons or events marked, in an essential, interior, ineffaceable fashion, by crimes against humanity”, an argument to which Kierkegaard would readily subscribe (Derrida 2001 [1997], p. 29; cf. 1995 [1992], p. 25). This builds towards an individualist model of responsibility, again well-summarised by Kierkegaard as “All decision,

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<sup>25</sup> Alongside Kierkegaard, the main influence on Derrida's ethical thought is clearly Emmanuel Levinas. There is not space to explore this connection here, although there is a sizeable body of secondary literature on the topic (e.g. Critchley 1992; Plant 2003; Srajek 1998). Work has also been done on Bakhtin and Levinas, including a thesis by Jason Quinsey of the Bakhtin Centre; more accessible starting-points would include David Patterson's work, or the recent book by Michael Eskin (Quinsey 1999; Patterson 1988, pp. 98-127; Eskin 2000).

all essential decision, is rooted in subjectivity”, or “Only in subjectivity is there decision, whereas wanting to become objective is untruth” (Kierkegaard 1992 [1846], pp. 33, 203). Derrida readily subscribes to the sentiment of this, as his frequent citation of Kierkegaard’s “The instant of decision is a madness” attests, even though he would also draw out the objective factors that condition this individual (Derrida 1990, p. 26).<sup>26</sup>

One of the creative tensions this line of thought causes is a need to reconcile this transcendental responsibility with a sceptical model of faith that does not make any assumptions about the specifics of the object of belief. It would clearly run against the grain of Derrida’s thought to produce a theology, negative or otherwise, yet he recognises the historical and social role a transcendental figure has played, for instance in military actions motivated by humanitarian ends which are, “from a certain side, wars of religion” (Derrida 1998a [1996], p. 25, and see the rest of this article for an expansion of this argument). He is also interested in the construction of “the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion, even a messianic without messianism”, a control on human actions which locates them in a structure of final accountability (the quotation is from Derrida 1994 [1993], p. 59, but very similar ideas can be found in; 1998a [1996], p. 18; 1996 [1995], p. 47; 1998b [1996], p. 68). An immediate response to this might be to note the Jewishness of a messiah who is still to come, and a belief in the necessity of justice and equity and above all faith, rather than specific belief in a definite god (Caputo 1997).<sup>27</sup> Yet it would also be worth noting Derrida’s recognition of firstly a Christianity that shares this open-ended structure, and secondly a politics reliant on religion as little more than a heuristic framework (Derrida 1995 [1992], p. 28; 1994 [1993], p. xix). The immanence of the messianic structure draws us to another obvious similarity between Kierkegaard and Derrida, namely the valorisation of philosophy as an internal critique, casting out devils by the power of the devil, which is, for Derrida, always-already at work in any given text (Derrida 1974 [1967],

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<sup>26</sup> The “Curriculum Vitae” section of *Jacques Derrida* records Derrida first read Heidegger and Kierkegaard together, in 1948-9, with a feeling of “awe” (Bennington and Derrida 1993 [1991], p. 328). This further twists well-recognised similarities between the two men, and indeed the direct influence which Kierkegaard had on Heidegger; it also suggests that one of the ways in which Derrida would seek to question Kierkegaard’s individualism is through a more fundamental interrogation of Being (cf. the reference to “the animals that are even more other others than my fellows” in the long quotation above).

<sup>27</sup> Literature connecting Judaism and Derrida is extensive, if not uniformly convincing. The interested reader is referred to Srajek 1998; Shakespeare 1998; and Ofrat 2001 (1998) for a representative selection. The first of these usefully draws together some of Derrida’s statements about his own relations to Judaism: the anti-Semitism of Algeria affected him deeply, he was never that involved with the Jewish community, he would like to be located outside of such labellings... (Srajek 1998, pp. 7-10).

p. 24; 1989 [1986], p. 123). This relies on the active model of language outlined separately by Nietzsche and Kierkegaard, as well as on a separation between the author and her work to which Derrida would accede: "In a sense everything a writer produces is posthumous" (Kierkegaard 1992 [1843], p. 151). Folding this back on their own works, Derrida links Kierkegaard and Nietzsche (along with Freud) as authors who put their names (plural in each case) on the line when writing their philosophies, who insist on dispersing their historical existence through language (Derrida 1985 [1982], p. 6). In this respect, Kierkegaard is interested not just in confronting his reader with questions of truth, authority, persuasion, and so forth, but also in wearing her down: the proliferation of pseudonyms and the length of the texts themselves are surely designed to return the reader to contemplation of her own spiritual condition. Kierkegaard attempts to persuade readers of the importance of their religious salvation at the cost of his own social credibility, and so distorts traditional languages of philosophy to achieve the real-world effects it was always supposed to attain. For Derrida, Kierkegaard's vision of individual faith and the inevitability of falling short in responsibility move the individual beyond language, or certainly beyond the rendering of a linguistic account:

There is no language, no generality or mediation to justify this ultimate responsibility which leads me to absolute sacrifice; absolute sacrifice that is not the sacrifice of irresponsibility on the altar of responsibility, but the sacrifice of the most imperative duty (that which binds me to the other as a singularity in general) in favour of another absolutely imperative duty binding me to the wholly other.

(Derrida 1995 [1992], p. 71)

This is one of the ways in which Derrida attempts to go beyond Heidegger and his argument for the limitation of human consciousness by language, and the same step is made in Derrida's writing on Kant's concept of hospitality: "we have come to wonder whether absolute, hyperbolic, unconditional hospitality doesn't consist in suspending language, a particular determinate language, and even the address of the other" (Derrida 2000b, p. 135).<sup>28</sup> This is balanced, as Derrida would no doubt say, on the other hand by the need to delineate this situation of non-language as clearly as possible, which is precisely where irony, fiction, commentary, and

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<sup>28</sup> As a pointer to Derrida's reading of Kierkegaard with Heidegger in mind, it is worth recalling the fundamental gesture of faith which Derrida argues is required before using, or even conceiving of, "to be", a faith necessarily prior to any interrogation of what being is or could be (Derrida 1998a [1996], p. 61). Again, faith operates through and before language, and hence relies on that which cannot be cognised.

so forth comes in. The author's relationship to the reader is equivalent to God's to Abraham's: everything obvious, social, and immediate must be rejected to make room for genuine education. This will unquestionably strain the bonds of reason, but such tension is necessary to contain the complexities of truth.

### 5.5. Conclusion

When Kierkegaard asserts, "Abraham has faith and did not doubt. He believed the ridiculous", he touches on one of the central modifications to a trust in Kantian reason discernable in Bakhtin and Derrida (Kierkegaard 1985 [1843], p. 54). Bakhtin sees faith not "in the sense of a specific faith in orthodoxy, in progress, in man, in revolution, etc.", but as "a *sense of faith*, that is, an integral attitude (by means of the whole person) toward a higher and ultimate value" (Bakhtin 1984 [1963], p. 294). For him, it is beyond the rational expectations of everyday life, and, as the emphasis on "integral" points out, something fundamental to human existence. Similarly, Derrida is interested in faith as a constant undercurrent in social life, both as an unreflective belief in the referential capacity of language (and so forth), and as a more traditional transcendental experience: "The act of faith demanded in bearing witness exceeds, through its structure, all intuition and all proof, all knowledge" (Derrida 1998a [1996], p. 63). *The Gift of Death* ends with a turn to Nietzsche, and his attack on Christian morals that at the same time acknowledges their potency; as ever for him and for Derrida, the merit in faith is the doubt it imparts, not the certainty (Derrida 1995 [1992], pp. 113-15). This can be loosely tied in with Bakhtin, as his early phenomenological treatments of faith begin with the individual subject, her powers of intuition, and the special role art can have in mediating her belief. The 1960s works on carnival, treated in the section on Nietzsche, also deploy Christianity as part of a structure of social criticism, although strongly influenced by contemporary Russian ideas about the transformative power of non-religious festivals. For both Bakhtin and Derrida, reason must be shored up by irrational forces (art, community, religious faith), the individual must respond to, without being determined by, larger social influences, and fiction has a special role in expressing fundamental philosophical problems. Neither language nor the everyday world can be interpreted literally, whatever that means, but the complexities of human thought and perception must be reflected in modes of expression which can accept a diversity of interpretations.

Philosophies of life in the second half of the nineteenth century were largely determined by certain interpretations of Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Kierkegaard, and all three exerted a larger influence on movements of the early twentieth century, especially *Lebensphilosophie* and neo-Kantianism. Indeed, the anti-rationalist arguments explored above, alongside many other variations and diverse ideas, changed the philosophical landscape so much that even arch-rationalists such as the neo-Kantians began from the premise that Kant's "manifold" was an irrational "heterogeneous continuum" (Schnädelbach 1984, p. 148). Irrationalism took the place (and perhaps the totalising power) of the category of the Absolute, that great determinant of post-Kantian philosophy; where before there had been a quest for an order to man's universe, now it seemed the only order was man.



## 6. Lebensphilosophie

### 6.1. Introduction

*Lebensphilosophie* is significant in twentieth-century continental philosophy less in itself than for the developments to Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Kierkegaard that it attempted, and for its role anticipating the wider and longer-lasting movement of phenomenology. In the work of Bakhtin and Derrida, it unquestionably plays these two parts, but also another; for both, it occupies a special philosophical position neither would adopt, yet is capable of criticising other viewpoints and being developed into something more worthwhile. It is a nail used to drive out others, and regarded with the utilitarian lack of sentiment that suggests. By *Lebensphilosophie*, Derrida and Bakhtin primarily understand the work of Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), Georg Simmel (1858-1918), and Henri-Louis Bergson (1859-1941), although in what should be a familiar refrain of this text, they do not necessarily require direct access to the original sources in order to receive ideas. Among the main elements they draw from the philosophy-of-life is the significance of experience, in particular temporality as seen from a human perspective: what happens, asks Bergson, if philosophy is regrounded in the human experience of time rather than the forced, abstract timelessness of metaphysics? *Lebensphilosophie* picks up on the problem of distinguishing natural and human elements in society explored by the Romantics, and with a similar interest in language as a mediating force between different planes of human existence. Indeed, the first recorded use of the term *Lebensphilosophie* is in G. B. von Schirach's 1772 text, *On moral beauty and the philosophy of life*, and comes freighted with Romantic associations, especially: the valuation of art and science as different, yet equally valid, forms of perception; the projected integration of philosophy and life; organic conceptions of the unity of the individual and the social group; and the inherence of form to human experience (Gaiger 1998, p. 488). Furthermore, Schlegel discussed the problem of multiplicity within time, and Dilthey wrote on and admired Goethe, whose synthesis of artistic intuition and scientific analysis was held up as a model of the human capacity for learning (Douglass 1992, p. 376; Rickman 1976, p. 3). These connections all legitimise a general reference across the last chapter back to Romanticism as a key determinant on *Lebensphilosophie*, and a specific revisiting of a concern of that chapter, the connections between language and national identity. This time the theme is

explored through Derrida rather than Bakhtin, although with a similar argument about the development of politics in his texts as a localised phenomenon, arguing to specific points and causes, rather than forming a coherent, self-sufficient theory *per se*.

If the main thrust of the chapter is that Bakhtin and Derrida employ *Lebensphilosophie* in similar ways, then it would be as well to sketch out some of these applications now. The most obvious point is that the strong version of experience advanced by Bergson and others is taken as a challenge to the Kantian model of fundamental human reason: Kant's critiques are grounded on seeing reason as a precondition for experience, while *Lebensphilosophie* suggests that life is itself a precondition for reason, and indeed that reason may not provide the best route to experience. This is what Derrida and Bakhtin use *Lebensphilosophie* for, even if they both then question its conception of experience, and attempt to sophisticate it with different transcendental and anti-transcendental ancillaries. They both also attempt to return phenomenology to its interest in experience through recalling its origins in *Lebensphilosophie*, and, more tenuously, the Hegelian version of phenomenology as the construction of history from lived experience. Furthermore, Bakhtin and Derrida employ the sociological dimensions of *Lebensphilosophie* (principally Simmel) to emphasise a material historical realm outside the conventional ambit of philosophy. In Derrida's late works, explored at the end of the chapter, this manifests itself as a fascinating synthesis of experiential-biographical explorations, and historical-intellectual analyses. Bakhtin is as attracted to the methodological implications of *Lebensphilosophie*, especially Dilthey, as he is to the sociology of Simmel which impacts most strongly on his writings of the 1950s. For the early Bakhtin, treated in most detail below, *Lebensphilosophie* can be used as a whipping-boy for naïve, psychological views of experience, even though Bergson's concepts of the organic and its social regulation as routed through laughter are then deployed in Bakhtin's various writings on the novel. For Derrida, it is the subterranean connections between French Hegelianism, Nietzscheanism, and phenomenology created by *Lebensphilosophie* that prove the most intellectually rewarding. Bergson's concept of temporality in particular, and the experience of history which it entails, presents itself to Derrida as an alternative to more idealist views, even if he cannot accept many of its premises. The individual proposed by *Lebensphilosophie* appears inadequate to Bakhtin and Derrida, just as the Romantic conception had; the difference is, however, that the philosophy-of-life's vision can be easily articulated with phenomenology's, to the mutual benefit of them both.

## 6.2. *Lebensphilosophie*

Bergson is primarily remembered today for attempting to re-orientate the philosophy of time away from notions of a series of discrete, objective moments and towards a subjective experience of duration and length, and hence assay a re-structuring of epistemology, ontology, and the project of philosophy itself (Lacey 1998, p. 733). This reconstruction necessitates regarding the transcendental – even the transcendent – with more suspicion than the individual's *intuition* of a situation, making subjective experience, not metaphysics, the surest compass and guide to truth. "Intuition" has a strong meaning for Bergson, representing a blend of intelligence and instinct that underscores the corporeal (bestial) essence of man while not neglecting his higher faculties. It is opposed to *analysis*, the difference between them being the manner of investigation:

By intuition is meant the kind of *intellectual sympathy* by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible. Analysis, on the contrary, is the operation which reduces the object to elements already known, that is, to elements common both to it and other objects. To analyse, therefore, is to express a thing as a function of something other than itself.

(Bergson 1913 [1903], p. 6)

This broad valorisation of intuition can be seen as a development of the Romantic emphasis on subjective perception and the inherent uniqueness of discrete objects, while the narrow point about analysis requiring translation into terms alien to the object recalls Nietzsche's suspicion of the generalisations inherent to language. The touchstone of Bergson's project is that thought must begin from movement rather than stasis, inhabiting the object rather than attempting to board it from outside, a force that is evident in his concept of *durée*. This is both the subjective experience of time as a constant flow, although one varied in its intensity, emotional impact, and perceived duration; and the self-conscious reflection on that experience (Lindsay 1911, p. 114). In Hegelian or Romantic philosophy this would be cast as consciousness of the subject's own becoming, while for Bergson it also functions as an awareness of a primordial time-centred mechanism of life, which he named *élan vital* (Chiari 1992, p. 253). Both of these concepts prove fundamental to the various developments of Bergsonism as a mode of thought, not least because of the latitude they permit, especially in their perceived affiliations to other intellectual movements, as we shall see at length below. Yet according to Bergson, his work differs

crucially from that of other philosophers because while they privilege the coherence of meaning at the expense of the human experience of time, he does not, preferring to set the persistence of the *élan vital* above any human interpretation of its sense (Bergson 1977 [1932], p. 100).

Neither Simmel nor Dilthey take this turn towards a common constant thread; rather they attempt to analyse social forms as phenomena in their own right, not manifestations of something more primordial. That said, Bergson's definition of intuition is not as opposed to the more classical rationalism of Dilthey and Simmel as it may appear: in order for an individual to develop to her fullest human capacity, she must learn to synthesise intuition and analysis and personally bridge the subjective and the transcendental (Moore 1996, p. 8). Bergson grounds his philosophy of "thinking backwards", investigating the determining circumstances of our perception, firmly within the Kantian critique of knowledge and science. He claims the critique has settled into a dogma rather than the open inquiry with which it began, and that Kant's conception of the idea was as a relation between experience and reality, and thus something that should always develop (Bergson 1913 [1903], pp. 70-2).<sup>1</sup> Knowingly or otherwise, Bergson follows the Hegelian critique of natural consciousness, noting that what appears as most obvious can be most philosophically freighted: "Although common sense consists mainly in being able to remember, it consists even more [*sic*] in being able to forget" (Bergson 1921 [1900], p. 183). This *is* a development of a Kantian theme, yet in a manner alien to that of neo-Kantianism, which was happy to disregard common sense as an investigative category and concentrate instead on the abstract side of Kantian methodology.<sup>2</sup> While Bergson's approach may sound similar to Hegel's, and indeed the two schools were productively conflated at various points (not least that of France of the 1920s and 30s), there are key differences. Firstly, *Lebensphilosophie* marks a refusal of the Hegelian-Romantic philosophy of development, where progress is always implied, as well as a more general rejection of the conflation of the categories of time and space.<sup>3</sup> The concentration on the present and co-existing multiplicities removes the teleological underpinnings of Hegelian becoming, and offers instead a model of flux and continual genesis clearly influential on modern

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<sup>1</sup> This is one of the arguments that Heidegger adopts at the Davos conference, with the same intent of returning to Kant whilst avoiding neo-Kantianism.

<sup>2</sup> Although the similarities between Bergson and other philosophers who straddled neo-Kantian and phenomenological perspectives should not be neglected: Emil Lask and Johannes Daubert followed Bergson in turning to the quotidian world as the ultimate form of reality, and with a similar emphasis on the individual's activity in constructing her forms of perception (cf. Schuhmann and Smith 1991).

<sup>3</sup> Traces of this anti-idealism can be found in Dilthey's rejection of the paradigm of the human sciences, with their immutable laws of development, in favour of interpretive frameworks and methodologies.

phenomenology. And secondly, Bergson refuses the defined communities of Hegelianism and Romanticism in favour of much broader, arguably less rigorous, communities of human experience and perception. This is one of the directions in which Merleau-Ponty's work develops, towards a universal theory of perception rather than a narrower nationalist theory of identity, and which via phenomenology provides a starting-point for Levinas and hence Derrida.

Intuition was championed by Bergson as an alternative to philosophical schools and dogma, and an unbiased form of investigation open equally to all perceptive subjects (Bergson 1913 [1903], p. 32). While this argument may appear naïve to our more sceptical twenty-first-century eyes, it does go some way in explaining the mass appeal of Bergson and his work: he was an international academic superstar, with all of his major works translated into English, German, Polish, and Russian by 1914, and lectures so crowded that spectators stood outside on ladders to see through the windows (Antliff 1993, p. 4). The influence of Bergson on the contemporary artistic avant-garde is well-recognised, given their mutual mistrust of contemporary life, belief in an organic community as opposed to a political one, and an intellectualism which was violently non-coincidental with rationalism, yet Bergsonism also reached beyond the studios and salons (Antliff 1993, pp. 14-15). As a version of vitalism, it tapped into a popular anti-scientific mood in Europe in the 1910s and 20s, especially in Germany, and legitimised a mistrust of the natural sciences; it also renewed a Romantic line of political thought about the uniqueness of nations and the development of communal feeling (cf. Kusch 1995, p. 226). Given this cultural significance, whether visible or subterranean, it is no surprise that phenomenology hitched its wagon to *Lebensphilosophie*, with Husserl proclaiming in 1911 that "We are the true Bergsonians" (Spiegelberg 1982 [1959], p. 429). This assertion was a response to learning about Bergson's intuitionism from the French translator of Hegel, Alexandre Koyré, and undoubtedly some of Husserl's confidence is based on a coincidence of topic rather than continuity of method, for instance the human consciousness of time or the (Brentanian) problem of intentionality (Spiegelberg 1982 [1959], p. 239). As a leading scholar of phenomenology explains:

phenomenology was both less and more than a German version of Bergsonian philosophy; less: for it was not committed to Bergson's metaphysical use of intuition nor, more specifically, to his metaphysics of creative evolution; more: for it did not share Bergson's anti-intellectualism and his hostility to the analytic approach including his strictures on mathematics in particular. Moreover, it allowed for a specific intuition of

general essences that came very close to Platonism, which Bergson had always repudiated. Thus phenomenology could easily pass for a liberalized Bergsonism.

(Spiegelberg 1982 [1959], p. 429)

More general similarities and differences can be traced. Husserl fits in with early-twentieth-century pessimism about the divorce of man from authentic existence, although for him it is a modern failure to comprehend the roots of reason that produces a reduced and reified world, rather than, as Bergson held, something within reason itself. The transcendental reduction was supposed to recover this engagement with the *Lebenswelt* and prevent Europe from sliding into hostility towards reason, and hence barbarism (Sandywell 2000, pp. 96-7). If this project of re-comprehending reason forms an impulse for the late Husserl, for the early Heidegger Bergson's question, "What is life?" is a clear prompt for asking, "What is Being?" (Rousseau 1992, p. 15). The emphasis on hermeneutics and understanding omnipresent in *Being and Time* can be seen as a general debt to Dilthey, while Simmel's analysis of cultural spaces (such as bridges and doors) was developed in Heidegger's later works (Rickman 1976, p. 18; Simmel 1997, pp. 170-4; compare Heidegger 1978, p. 332).<sup>4</sup> Scheler wrote a great deal on Bergson and in general admired what he had achieved, but did not uncritically accept his philosophy; for instance unfavourably comparing Bergson's work on space to Husserl's, and suggesting that Bergsonian intuition required distancing from neo-Kantian idealism (Kusch 1995, p. 230). Bergson argued that emotions consist of an abstract transcendental core, which individual experiences buy into in varying amounts, creating variation through our subjectivity rather than in the emotions themselves (Moore 1996, p. 3). This partly derives from Brentano's theory of feelings, a notion that in the next chapter is explored through its Schelerian development, and adds credence to Scheler's charge against *Lebensphilosophie* of latent idealism. Certainly Simmel and Weber took inspiration from neo-Kantianism, in particular its attempts to regard the experiential social world as both constructive of and reliant upon transcendental realms of value and validity (Brandist 2002a, p. 17).<sup>5</sup> Finally, the notion that human projects outweigh their constituent

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<sup>4</sup> I would not wish to overlade an argument about Heidegger's indebtedness to Bergson: the phenomenologist's famous arguments about time and its bearing on man's existence draw more heavily on Aristotle, Augustine, Kant, and Hegel than modern works, and indeed Heidegger "rejected Bergson's ideas with almost surprising vehemence" (Spiegelberg 1982 [1959], p. 394).

<sup>5</sup> The inherence of the entire discipline of sociology within a neo-Kantian paradigm has been explored in its most intricate detail by Rose 1981.

discrete actions is key for Bergson, and adopted by thinkers like Sartre to explain, for instance, why writing a word is more than unreflectively stringing together a series of letters (Moore 1996, p. 58). This holism is very much in the air of the opening decades of the twentieth century, and consequently features heavily in Bakhtin, often through the mediation of other contemporary sources such as *Gestalt* theory (examined in the next chapter). Once again its flexibility is one of its strengths: it is easy to argue that human experience constitutes more than the sum of its parts, but much harder to determine of what those parts consist, and quite how they synthesise into a greater whole.

Another set of answers to these problems is suggested by Georg Simmel, one of the founding thinkers of sociology and a philosopher of life primarily occupied with the problem of the individual's relationship with culture. His basic model is that individuals in the flux of life create forms to comprehend, contain, and order that life; yet these subjective forms inexorably develop into objective cultural forms, distanced from life and inimical to its understanding:

Life, as it becomes mind, continuously creates such artefacts: self-sufficient and with an inherent claim to permanence, indeed to timelessness. They may be described as the *forms* which life adopts, the indispensable [*sic*] mode of its manifestation as spiritual life. But life itself flows on without pause. With each and every new form of existence which it creates for itself, its perpetual dynamism comes into conflict with the permanence or timeless validity of that form. Sooner or later the forces of life erode every cultural form which they have produced. By the time one form has fully developed, the next is already beginning to take shape beneath it, and is destined to supplant it after a brief or protracted struggle.

(Simmel 1997, p. 76)

From this it should be clear how Simmel sophisticates and strengthens some of Bergson's basic arguments, for instance accounting for the co-existence of subjective and objective culture with this intermingling of life and cultural forms, rather than ending the analysis with subjectivity and a retreat into mysticism (cf. Oakes 1980, p. 32). Simmel also investigates more closely relations between experiential temporality and history, considering the factors that make some events relevant only within their own time-frame and others significant on an historical level (Simmel 1980, p. 133). He is more sensitive to class factors that impinge on everyday social interaction and prevent it from ever being the neutral, unbiased meeting of minds that Bergson hopes to recover: "The social class to which [the person] belongs and the sphere of life which he shares

with his professional colleagues hover over the individual like an ideal atmosphere” (Simmel 1980, p. 161). In general, while the danger of Bergsonism is a tendency to drift into an undifferentiated and flat concept of life, Simmel’s work leads in the opposite direction, towards the innumerable variations of social interaction which modern existence offers us (e.g. Simmel 1997, p. 110). Simmel goes further than Bergson in dealing with some of the same problems as Romanticism within a more empirical framework, but not as far as phenomenology, which at least initially rejects the transcendentalism of Romanticism. To phrase this a little more sharply, he returns to the spirit of the Hegelian resolution of Kantian problems of experience rather than to its letter. Something very similar can be seen in the work of Wilhelm Dilthey, Simmel’s chronological and philosophical predecessor, treated last in this brief introduction because of his more passing influence on Bakhtin and Derrida and his distance from *Lebensphilosophie* as understood by subsequent movements. Simmel’s division of life and form relies upon Dilthey’s separation of subjective and objective spirit (*Geist*), existential human forms of cultural understanding, and their establishment as cultural artefacts (Ringer 1969, p. 97). The proper media for the study of these artefacts are the *Geisteswissenschaften*, the cultural sciences, which differ from the natural sciences in their emphasis on the constructedness of the objects of study, and the emphasis on interpretation.<sup>6</sup> It is only through the most human action, interpretation, that products of human endeavour can be understood, an emphasis on thinking from within that foreshadows Bergson, but with an awareness of the specific contexts of interpretation more fully developed in Simmel. Dilthey argues that “the fundamental relationship on which the process of elementary understanding is based is that of the expression to what is expressed in it”, in other words, the model of language (quoted Schnädelbach 1984, p. 124). This connection between what we can say and what we can know, already latent in Kant, Hegel, and neo-Kantianism, comes to the fore in phenomenology, and primarily through that path and others is transmitted to Derrida and Bakhtin.

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<sup>6</sup> This distinction between sciences, and the consequent argument that the mode of investigation rather than the object of study determines results, can also be found in the work of the Freiburg neo-Kantian Heinrich Rickert, and thus provides an interest in methodology transmitted to Bakhtin and Derrida by at least two routes.



### 6.3. Bakhtin and Lebensphilosophie

As with other figures and movements treated in this thesis, it is not Bakhtin's personal awareness of *Lebensphilosophie* that is of greatest significance, but the general cultural tone it established and the variety of ideas it enabled to be brought together. In the Russian context of the first two decades of the twentieth century, what calls for commentary is the assimilation of Bergson to native religious traditions, especially on the grounds of intuition and the recognition of the transcendental in the mundane; and the emphasis, shared with a range of avant-garde movements, on reconciling aesthetic modes of perception with the material of everyday life.<sup>7</sup> Russian has the word *byt* which can be roughly translated as "everyday life" but has more emotive connotations of a layer of genuine and free expression smothered by the moulds of habit, and this belief in a transcendental realm accessible only through ordinary existence provides a bridge between the aesthetic and religious to which Bergsonism is rapidly aligned (Steiner 1984, p. 48, n. 9). Indeed, the argument can be made that second-hand knowledge of an author may be enough for assimilation to a recognised cause; Hirschkop adduces the memoirs of a Russian philologist of the 1920s, who states "we knew the history of modern philosophy according to Windelband", and that "we knew only by hearsay" Dilthey and Rickert (Hirschkop 1999, p. 142, n. 70). It was therefore not necessary to know Bergson's works in detail, nor even works of Bergson's disciples, in order to recognise common, fruitful, ground. The appeal to a notion of ordinary life, already a mainstay of the Russian aesthetic tradition, was particularly pertinent in a time of massive technological and social change, when modern inventions such as X-rays, the cinema, the telegraph and telephone all prompted an urge to re-examine and hopefully recover fundamental aspects of human existence (Rudova 1996, p. 175). This is particularly evident in Bakhtin's early works, where the valorisation of everyday experience and "participative thinking" meshes with the sense of an urgent need to reinvigorate culture and aesthetics, and with some of the same emphasis on intuition, although, as I will argue below, equally directed by phenomenology as *Lebensphilosophie*.<sup>8</sup> There is a mistrust of systematic

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<sup>7</sup> The most detailed and erudite study of Bergson's reception in early twentieth-century Russia can be found in Fink 1999.

<sup>8</sup> A similar argument can be made about another critical commonplace, the linkage between Bergson and Bakhtin on the grounds of individual moral responsibility (Rudova 1996, p. 185; Fink 1999, p. 116). This does not emerge in Bergson's work as a strong theme until the 1930s while it is present from the outset in Bakhtin's, arguably more from Kantian and neo-Kantian sources, as well as the Orthodox philosophical traditions which colour Bakhtin's understanding of several thinkers.

thought common to Bakhtin and Bergson, and Bergson's formulation of the problems of time, especially the persistence of non-present elements within a subjective experience of time, enters directly into Russian debates about the use and understanding of cultural tradition, artefacts, and, ultimately, language (cf. Fink 1999, p. 83). Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope can be seen as a way of dividing up time without falling prey to the limitations of system, and an attempted resolution of a lingering Bergsonian problem: how to account for the social mediation of the subjective experience of time and, ultimately, history (Rudova 1996, pp. 178, 184). From different grounds, both *Lebensphilosophie* and neo-Kantianism encouraged Bakhtin to examine this problem of form, as well as to challenge positivism, and find the source of value in individual, distinct phenomena rather than general abstract laws (Tihanov 2000, p. 22). However, it was *Lebensphilosophie* alone that first encouraged Bakhtin to investigate cultural artefacts as a succession of experiential presents in a manner he synthesised with phenomenology and less happily yoked to a nascent Hegelianism.

The influence of *Lebensphilosophie* is most evident in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. As suggested above, the emphasis on "participative thinking" is a result of an interest in both phenomenology and Bergson, and the latter comes in for a deal of criticism by Bakhtin. He argues: 1) Bergson's concept of life is too indiscriminate, running together different elements without regard for their distinctness; 2) his concept of intuition neglects the role of the intellect, which for Bakhtin at this stage means neglecting the individual's awareness of his ethical responsibilities; and 3) because of these lapses, Bergson produces an overly-aesthetic vision of life which is no less distant from participative thinking than other, more idealist, schools of thought (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], pp. 13-14). Point (2) is developed by Bakhtin into a general criticism of philosophies which regard intuition and reason as antagonistic opposites, and can be traced quite specifically back to Nikolai Losskii. Losskii's 1922 work *The Intuitive Philosophy of Bergson* seems to be the main source through which Bakhtin received Bergson, as it argues that reason relies upon intuition in a manner which prevents their separation (Morson and Emerson 1990, pp. 177-8; cf. Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 13). Losskii's solution is to propose an intuitivist idealism that abandoned itself to the flow of life, an answer Bakhtin cannot accept, preferring instead a more neo-Kantian attempt to determine the transcendental elements of experience; the criticism of Bergson, however, remains valid. Indeed, as Tihanov notes, the main thrust of Bakhtin's argument against Bergson is that he does not go far enough, clinging

onto a theoretical framework that actually inhibits rather than facilitates the understanding of lived experience (Tihanov 2000, p. 32, n. 21). In “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity”, Bakhtin returns to the Bergsonian physical subject in relation to the importance of understanding experience from within: “The path followed in performing an action is a purely internal one, and the continuity of this path is internal as well (cf. Bergson)” (Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 43). Again Bakhtin pushes Bergson’s thought a little further with the assistance of neo-Kantianism, emphasising the openness of the self and its continual striving towards ideal completion; as Bakhtin puts it, “in order to live and act, I need to be unconsummated, I need to be open for myself” (Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 13). Bergson refuses the idealism which allows Bakhtin to see the experiential self as “unconsummated”, yet provides the impetus to regard this experience as the primary focus for philosophy.

In a passage on biography in “Author and Hero”, Bakhtin runs together “contemporary biologically oriented ‘philosophy-of-life’” with Nietzsche. He expounds on biographies which represent an adventurous-heroic type of being, where the hero “is distinguished by his own specific standards of value, his own biographical virtues: bravery, honor, magnanimity, generosity, etc.” (Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 160). This concept of man leads to “the aestheticized philosophy of Nietzsche” and *Lebensphilosophie*, and the ground for Bakhtin’s criticism seems once more to be the absence of a transcendental; in this form of biography there is nothing greater than man, hence nothing ethical or capable of stimulating moral action.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, biologism acts as a bogey in Bakhtin’s work, a reduction of human life to the brute physical which philosophy and culture must perpetually guard against: “All the forces of responsible accomplishment pass into an autonomous sphere of culture, while the act which has been separated from them descends to the level of elementary biological and economic motivation, it loses all its ideal moments” (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 55).<sup>10</sup> A Kantian suspicion of sensualism becomes imbricated with a more general sense of cultural crisis, leading to a reassessment of the significance of the body in Bakhtin’s career. In Voloshinov’s work this

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<sup>9</sup> Anatolii Lunacharskii adopted the line in a 1929 article that Bergsonism’s apparent rejection of intellectual and sober analysis entailed an ignorance of social reality and art’s connections with thought and ideology, a more materialist variant of Bakhtin’s argument (Fink 1999, p. 98). As we have seen in the section on Nietzsche, common ground can be established between Lunacharskii and Bakhtin, often differing in their attitudes towards materialism and idealism and hence, given the historical situation, their political fortunes.

<sup>10</sup> The quotation continues, “this precisely is the condition of civilisation”, a Simmelian theme to which we will return in a moment.

theme is more significant, as biologism detracts from a political understanding of social existence:

The ideology of [times of social crisis] [...] shifts its centre of gravity onto the isolated biological organism; the three basic events in the life of all animals – birth, copulation, and death – begin to compete with historical events in terms of ideological significance and, as it were, become a surrogate of history.

(Vološinov 1976 [1927], p. 11)

The opposition of culture and life recognised in “Art and Answerability” buys into precisely this anxiety about the decline of society, itself a motif of later populist adaptations of *Lebensphilosophie* (most notably Oswald Spengler), and the connected belief in a renaissance of Russian culture led by small, elite circles (Brandist 2002a, pp. 30-1; cf. also the comments by Mikhail’s brother, Nikolai, on the concept of a “Third Renaissance”, Bakhtin 1963, pp. 34-44). The potential for biological reductionism had also been identified by Cassirer as a danger of Bergsonism, and avoiding physical essentialism is one of the difficulties Bakhtin encounters when reconciling the ahistoricism of *Lebensphilosophie* and phenomenology with Cassirer’s neo-Kantianism and other more historicist influences (Cassirer 1955 [1925], p. 108).<sup>11</sup> For instance:

History knows no isolated series: an isolated series as such is static, and a change in the elements within such a series can only be a systematic articulation or simply a mechanical disposition of series, but certainly not a historical process. It is only the establishment of interaction and indetermination of the given series with other series that creates the historical approach. One must never cease to be just oneself, in order to enter history.

(Bakhtin 1990 [1924], p. 272)

Here, Bakhtin has to bring together a Bergsonian concept of continuous experiential time, a Dilthean focus on interpretation, and a Cassirerean feeling for the whole, a sense of historical development. That he is not always successful is no comment on his ingenuity, but rather, on the diversity of sources he attempts to combine.

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<sup>11</sup> Although note his favourable comments about Bergson elsewhere (e.g. Cassirer 1957 [1929], pp. 36-7, 184).

The ideas of Bergson feature heavily in one curious text, a cuckoo even in the nest of foundlings that constitute the majority of the Bakhtin Circle's canon, namely the 1926 article "Contemporary Vitalism". This deals with the specific biological problem of the capacity for regeneration of fresh-water polyps, and more broadly with debates about vitalism and the existence of an inherent will-to-form on a cellular level within all creatures. The status of the text is unusually complicated, even by Bakhtin's standards. The article is signed by Ivan Kanaev, an established scientist of the fresh-water hydra, and member of the Bakhtin Circle. However, he later disclaimed authorship of the piece, and it was the first of the texts of the Circle to be ascribed to Bakhtin's concealed hand (Taylor 2004, p. 150). Whoever claimed responsibility for the article, they made it a "studied copy of several chunks" cut from an article by Nikolai Losskii, the Bergson scholar mentioned above, so that no matter who wrote the article, large parts of it they didn't (Perlina 1989, p. 18). The text begins with a history of vitalism from the ancient Greeks onwards, and separates a modern "critical vitalism" from its Classical and Enlightenment forebears, the main difference being its operation within a Kantian, science-oriented, structure (Bakhtin 1992 [1926], pp. 80-1). In particular, the targets of the argument are the biologist Hans Driesch and his concept of "entelechy", a purposiveness not contained materially within the organism but defining its movement, actions, and basic organization (Bakhtin 1992 [1926], p. 88). For the author of "Contemporary Vitalism", this is too mechanistic an explanation, and assumes a principle of life separate from social influence; what is required is "dialectical materialism" to provide "an adequate, scientific presentation of such complex phenomena as the organic regulations" (Bakhtin 1992 [1926], p. 96). As we have seen with the comments on vitalism in Bakhtin's 1920s writings, this line of criticism can be found in his work, although with the presumed alternative of idealism rather than materialism, and in the work of contemporaries, self-evidently Nikolai Losskii. Certainly there are broad similarities between the form of the article and Bakhtin's texts, most notably the history of the central concept before an attempt to redefine it, and the refusal of positivism (cast here as, "It is obviously impossible to suggest any neutral methodology") (Bakhtin 1992 [1926], p. 78). A fascinating recent article by Ben Taylor has also drawn out the similarities between the argument of "Contemporary Vitalism", and the later works about carnival and the grotesque body (Taylor 2004). Yet in terms of a philosophical engagement with *Lebensphilosophie*, the piece is even less rewarding than the passing comments in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* and "Author and

Hero”.<sup>12</sup> It is only in the last paragraph that Bakhtin presents “dialectical materialism” as an option, and it remains an unelaborated suggestion, possibly introduced to improve Kanaev’s institutional standing, possibly, as has been suggested with Voloshinov’s work, window-dressing for a much more complex philosophical position. In any case, “Contemporary Vitalism” marks no progression in the Bakhtin Circle’s engagement with *Lebensphilosophie*, and does little to develop its members’ own world-view.

The next substantial set of responses which Bakhtin’s work offers to *Lebensphilosophie* are the writings on carnival, spreading across the 25 years after Bakhtin’s 1940 thesis, “François Rabelais in the History of Realism”. In particular, it is the concept of laughter advanced in the 1965 version of the Rabelais book that is commonly seen as indebted to Bergson, although there are other points about the human body that can also be ascribed. In 1900 Bergson published a book on laughter, spurred by laughter’s dual significance as an intrinsically human action, and as the creation of social circumstances. This, for Bergson, made it a particularly telling intersection of the biological and social levels of human existence, and a good example of supposedly spontaneous activity that is revealed to be rule-governed. The primary maxims which Bergson adduces are: only what involves or is associated with human beings can be funny (when we laugh at animals, we laugh at how they mimic or subvert the human); emotion is an enemy of laughter, meaning disgust, shame, unease and so forth inhibit rather than aid humour; and that laughter is a social phenomenon, that we never laugh alone (Moore 1996, p. 74). Humour is “a sort of *social gesture*” which refuses to allow the individual to become a complete and isolated work of art, and is never entirely aesthetic but has a corrective function. “By the fear which it inspires”, argues Bergson, laughter

restrains eccentricity, keeps constantly awake and in mutual contact certain activities of a secondary order which might retire into their shell and go to sleep, and, in short, softens down whatever the surface of the social body may retain of mechanical inelasticity.

(Bergson 1921 [1900], p. 20)

The opposition of a living social body with a mechanical or formal shell is typical of Bergson’s vision of laughter, as is the darkness which sometimes drifts into a more politically-tinted

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<sup>12</sup> Ben Taylor elucidates some of the political contexts of the article which would have given it greater impact for contemporary readers (Taylor 2004, pp. 155-6).

argument: “society holds suspended over each individual member, if not the threat of correction, at all events the prospect of a snubbing, which, although it is slight, is none the less dreaded. Such must be the function of laughter” (Bergson 1921 [1900], p. 135).<sup>13</sup> Bakhtin’s debt to Bergson’s theory of laughter consists primarily of these notions that it is a social activity (for Bakhtin, the very model of social conflict), and that it is intimately connected with life, nature, and a primordial common being (Tihanov 2000, pp. 275-6).<sup>14</sup> Bakhtin rejects the more negative view of laughter as a social corrective, preferring instead a Nietzschean model of the community laughing together, where common humanity embraces all rather than relies upon exclusion (Bakhtin 1984 [1965], p. 71).<sup>15</sup> He underscores the subversive rather than authoritarian power of laughter – “Laughter liberates not only from external censorship but first of all from the great interior censor; it liberates from the fear [...] of the sacred, of prohibitions, of the past, of power” – and its role in developing communal self-awareness (which is not quite class consciousness) – “[During carnival] all men became conscious participants in that one world of laughter” (Bakhtin 1984 [1965], pp. 94, 188). Bergson notes as a fundamental comic motif that attention is called to the physical rather than the moral or spiritual aspects of human beings, and this is certainly where Bakhtin takes off, positing an entire alternative culture and world-view as discernable through carnival laughter (Bergson 1921 [1900], p. 51). This argument about laughter as *Weltanschauung* returns to Bakhtin’s earlier work in at least two ways. The first is that the corporeality of laughter in the Rabelais book is, in one sense, a literalisation of the metaphors of previous texts, for instance the assertion in “Epic and Novel” that “all comical creativity works in a zone of maximal proximity” (Bakhtin 1981 [1941], p. 23). The second is that by playing on laughter as a symbolic form and a manner of seeing the world, Bakhtin can write its history, much as he had written about histories of the developing novel in the 1930s. Thus the 1963 Dostoevsky book: “Laughter is a specific aesthetic relationship to reality [...] a specific means for artistically visualizing and comprehending reality and, consequently, a specific means for

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<sup>13</sup> Just as laughter can be seen as a mechanism of social control, so is religion initially conceived in *The Two Sources of Religion and Morality*, although the thrust of this work moves away from this repressive definition (Bergson 1977 [1932], p. 13).

<sup>14</sup> Both of these motifs come out in one of the more curious arguments of the Rabelais book, namely that the death of the individual is overcome in the life of the collective (e.g. Bakhtin 1984 [1965], p. 256). This is an idea advanced both by Bergsonist biology, and in Lunacharskii’s more mystical moments (Williams 1986, p. 99).

<sup>15</sup> Bakhtin’s work on laughter can also be read as part of an explicitly Russian Orthodox tradition, where emphasis falls on the sacred power of laughter, and the social necessity of the “holy fool” who contrasts the passing shows of corporeal earthly life with the lasting benefits of spiritual redemption (Coates 1998a, p. 136 *et passim*).

structuring an artistic image, plot, or genre” (Bakhtin 1984 [1963], p. 164). This investment of laughter with significance as a symbolic form points to the influence of Cassirer, whom Bakhtin uses to see laughter as a development of self-consciousness, “undermining the truth-claims and authoritative pretensions of a discourse and thus showing that the process of symbolisation is itself the object of knowledge” (Brandist 2002a, p. 127).<sup>16</sup> There is at least one more significant influence on Bakhtin’s theory of laughter, and that is other members of the Circle, most notably Lev Pumpianskii. He worked on a book on Gogol between 1922 and 1925 which provided “the first original philosophy of laughter in the history of the Nevel School”, and it is his reading of Bergson which Bakhtin primarily adopts (Nikolaev 1998, p. 32; for more on the relationship between Pumpianskii and Bakhtin, cf. the stimulating Nikolaev 2004).<sup>17</sup> The popularity of laughter as a topic among the Circle as a whole is suggested by Boris Zubakin’s presentation in 1920 of a paper on laughter, and its political application, so often championed as Bakhtin’s covert resistance to Stalinism, surely recalls this period’s quest for a return to an idealised, more authentic level of existence, as much as the later search for the strength of the collective (Shepherd 2004, p. 6, n. 13).

To return briefly to the 1920s and Bakhtin’s early works, it is striking how closely his model of culture fits with Simmel’s. The basic, tragic, division between life and form is glossed in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* as “two worlds [here, life and culture] that have absolutely no communication with each other and are mutually impervious” (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 2). Indeed, “Art and Answerability” is predicated on this radical split between art and life, joined by a neo-Kantian realm of validity, science. While the remedy suggested by both of these early works is reunification through the individual’s moral responsibility, Bakhtin argues that in earlier ages a coherent, harmonious way of life, which synthesised subjective and objective cultures, was the norm, and specifically locates it in ancient Greece (e.g. Bakhtin 1981 [1937-8], p. 109). Here again we can see a neo-Kantian idealism creeping into Bakhtin’s work, one to which Simmel would not necessarily subscribe, aware as he is that so long as there has been culture,

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<sup>16</sup> This symbolic conception of laughter can also be drawn from more apparently psychological sources: the neo-Kantian experimental psychologist Theodor Lipps argued that humour was based on frustrated expectation, and that expectation constituted a an intentional, positive form of experience (Tihanov 2000, p. 274).

<sup>17</sup> The phrase “Nevel school” was used by Ivan Sollertinskii, a pupil of Bakhtin and of Lev Pumpianskii, to describe the specificity of that intellectual moment, and has been taken up by Nikolaev as part of his larger re-evaluation of the Bakhtin Circle (Nikolaev 1998, p. 29). It is not, however, uncontested, with the appellation of “school” in particular drawing criticism: can there be a school that produced no philosophical works?



there has been a division between the individual and the subjective forms that she creates. This leads to a fragmentation of the subject: “By virtue of the fact that we *have* boundaries everywhere and always, so accordingly we *are* boundaries”, argues Simmel (quoted Weinstein and Weinstein 1993, p. 103). This is recalled in very similar terms by Bakhtin:

A cultural domain has no inner territory. It is located entirely upon boundaries, boundaries intersect it everywhere, 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. Separated by abstraction from these boundaries, it loses the ground of its being and become vacuous, arrogant; it degenerates and dies.

(Bakhtin 1990 [1924], p. 274; cf. Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 28)

The life of culture itself is constituted through interaction and flow between subjective and objective forms, and the fundamental connection with experiential human existence is maintained through this movement.<sup>18</sup> On a more local level, Simmel’s divide between the living spirit and the spirit frozen in value connects with Bakhtin’s separation of animated form and content in aesthetic creation from their ossified versions in some artworks (Bonetaskaia 1998, p. 85). While Bakhtin turns to aesthetics and the artistic process as Simmelian forms of subjective spirit, Voloshinov regards ordinary language as capable of both reproducing and commenting on ideology, in particular the everyday world of life-ideology (cf. Tihanov 1998, p. 611). Voloshinov sophisticates Simmel’s model of life and form by suggesting that life-ideology (translated as “behavioural ideology” in the English *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*) is itself a sort of form, and “ideology proper” an extension of it (Tihanov 2000, p. 94; the note on the translation comes from Brandist 2002a, p. 61).<sup>19</sup> Even if Voloshinov revises Simmel’s critique, he still fundamentally relies upon its preconceptions, namely that the individual reproduces and suffers from the constraints of cultural form. This understanding of ideology impacts on Bakhtin’s work of the 1930s through Voloshinov, and through Cassirer, one of Simmel’s students. Analysing the influence of cultural forms on all levels of understanding

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<sup>18</sup> A similar point is made in Tihanov 2000, pp. 35-6, a work which pursues the general influence of *Lebensphilosophie* on Bakhtin; Tihanov 2001 also deals with this movement in relation to Bakhtin’s changing conceptions of the body.

<sup>19</sup> It could be remarked that just as Losskii unbinds the distinction between Bergson’s intuition and reason, a move which Bakhtin follows, so Voloshinov refuses the binary opposition of Simmel’s life and form.

helps bring together Bakhtin's interests in the flux of experience with the mediating role of language and a framework of historical development, loosely Hegelian, but more pertinently Cassirerian. When he claims that "Artistic form, correctly understood, does not shape already prepared and found content, but rather permits content to be found and seen for the first time", Bakhtin follows Simmel's example of regarding form as fundamental to human perception (although the influence of *Gestalt* theory, one topic of the next chapter, should not be ignored) (Bakhtin 1984 [1963], p. 43). Specifically, Bakhtin hearkens to Simmel's understanding of the emotional, subjective significance of form, here in "The Problem of Content, Material, and Form" criticising the Formalists:

What fails to be understood is the *emotional-volitional tension of form* – the fact that it has the character of expressing some axiological relationship of the author and the contemplator to something apart from the material. For this emotional-volitional relationship that is expressed by form (by rhythm, harmony, symmetry, and other formal moments) is too intense, too *active* in character to be understood simply as a relationship to the material.

(Bakhtin 1990 [1924], p. 264)

It is one of the curiosities of this essay to see Bakhtin's concept of form developing away from the individual experiences outlined early on, towards the neo-Kantian "architectonic form" and the social histories of the novel expounded in the 1930s (Bakhtin 1990 [1924], p. 269). For his early work, Simmel's model of culture is a guiding-light; for these later writings, it is the more neo-Kantian Cassirer whom Bakhtin follows.<sup>20</sup>

We turn finally to the influence of Dilthey, especially on Bakhtin's late methodological works. Dilthey's aims in his mammoth *Introduction to the Human Sciences* were to write a history of modes of perception and metaphysical frameworks, trace the changing interactions between man and world, and continually call attention to methodological developments (Makkreel 1998, p. 77). These three ambitions remain with Bakhtin throughout his career, but are most clear in the notes and writings from the end of his life.<sup>21</sup> When he claims in 1970 that that "Literary scholarship is still essentially a young science" which, unlike the natural sciences,

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<sup>20</sup> These thematic points aside, Bakhtin's familiarity with Simmel is suggested by the recommendation of his book on Goethe in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (Bakhtin 1984 [1963], p. 45, n. 38).

<sup>21</sup> This is not to deny influence on the earlier works, only that it is harder to trace; there was an authorial footnote to Dilthey in "Discourse in the Novel", deleted by Bakhtin's editors (B. Poole 1998, p. 573, n. 39).

has not been “developed and tested through experience”, he offers a philosophical distinction of the early twentieth century, rather than an insight into the “current state of literary scholarship”, the brief of the article (Bakhtin 1986 [1970], p. 1). His basic position in these late notes is that of Dilthean hermeneutics, and therefore an emphasis on language, although combined with an awareness of Hegelian concepts of *Geschichte* and neo-Kantian idealism. Thus in arguing, “A human act is a potential text and can be understood (as a human act and not as a physical action) only in the dialogic context of its time”, Bakhtin picks up on the humanism of Dilthey’s work but strengthens it with a neo-Kantian confidence in absolute verifiability: “To see and comprehend the author of a work means to see and comprehend another, alien consciousness and its world, that is, another subject” (Bakhtin 1986 [1959-61], pp. 107, 111). A similar tension is felt in later notes, where “The interpretation of symbolic structures is forced into an infinity of symbolic contextual meanings and therefore [...] cannot be scientific in the way precise sciences are scientific”, yet within an overarching framework of universally reclaimed meaning (Bakhtin 1986 [1975], pp. 160, 167). The general project into which Dilthey saw his work fitting was a “Critique of Historical Reason”, intended to return Kant to an analysis of everyday experience and social interaction which had fallen out, unintentionally, from his metaphysics (Rickman 1976, p. 16). This is also the drift of Bakhtin’s writing, and *Lebensphilosophie* provided one method for reintroducing experience into transcendental critical philosophy.

#### 6.4. Derrida and Bergson

Links between Derrida and Bergson are not commonly drawn, a lacuna perhaps best explained by the latter’s perceived role in French philosophy as having laid a path for several twentieth-century movements without necessarily contributing anything himself. Emmanuel Levinas, for instance, “saw Bergson as a major early influence on his own thought, and describes Bergson’s emphasis on temporality as having ‘prepared the soil for the subsequent implantation of Heideggerian phenomenology into France’” (Matthews 1996, p. 158). It has already been noted how *Lebensphilosophie* primed French philosophy for Hegelianism, and it will soon become clear the impact it had on phenomenology; however, Bergson’s work *per se* has not had the significance of either movement it fostered, and is little studied today. Yet Levinas has also noted how

Derrida's critique – which frees time from its subordination to the present, which no longer takes the past and the future as modes, modifications, or modulations of presence, which arrests a thinking that reasons upon signs as if upon signifieds – thinks through to the end Bergson's critique of being and Kant's critique of metaphysics.

(Levinas 2000, p. 428)

This emphasis on temporality is well-judged, although where Derrida exceeds Bergson is by the (Heideggerian) connection of this to the question of Being, and the (Kantian) affiliation to philosophy as a methodological enterprise. Bergson's model of time as a series of experiential presents relies on a certain repetition which Derrida's work also engages: just as for Derrida the sign is *iterable*, repeatable yet constantly changing, so for Bergson the experience of the present is always the same while always different. This point can be made a little sharper, although more speculatively, with the recollection that Bergson offers repetition as one of the basic mechanisms of humour which projects a mechanical frame onto something living and unpredictable (Bergson 1921 [1900], p. 34). Derrida, not averse to a good joke himself, therefore sees something humorous in philosophical attempts to preserve repetition from difference, most notably with Husserl's idealism about the origin of geometry, and Searle's belief in a detachable performative component to speech acts (Derrida 1978 [1962]; 1982b [1972], pp. 307-30). Derrida and Bergson also share a suspicion of perception, preferring to concentrate on the distortions of temporality, memory, and anticipation, rather than on the purity of instantaneous apprehension. Bergson encapsulates this when he says, "Perception is never a mere contact of the mind with the object present; it is impregnated with memory-images which complete it as they interpret it", and in general he regards it as an ideal limit-state rather than an everyday activity (Matthews 1996, p. 29). Derrida has similarly argued, "I don't know what perception is and I don't believe that anything like perception exists", and with the same emphasis on temporality as a conditioning factor; this suspicion has led both men to question the value of the linear understanding of time at the root of the Western philosophical tradition (quoted in Flynn 1984, p. 164). Yet despite these similarities, and unlike Bakhtin, Derrida has explicitly refused one of the key terms of Bergsonian philosophy, namely "experience": "it belongs to the history of metaphysics and we can only use it under erasure [*sous rature*]. 'Experience' has always designated the relationship with a presence, whether that relationship had the form of consciousness or not" (Derrida 1974 [1967], p. 60). This relation with presence

is, of course, what Derrida rejects, although as with the argument about Hegel, it is still feasible to note that what Derrida reacts against is just as significant as what he adopts. Through phenomenology, and in particular the work of Husserl, Derrida lays an emphasis on alterity (radical, unpredictable difference) in experience, rather than the synthetic, undifferentiated, and relatively unsophisticated category of life which he sees in Bergson (Lawlor 2002, p. 186). In this manner, and probably unconsciously, Derrida returns to the roots of *Lebensphilosophie* and Dilthey, whose concept of life is differentiated from Hegelian *Geist* precisely through its basic heterogeneity (Gasché 1986, p. 82). In his 1953-4 thesis *Le Problème de la genèse dans la philosophie de Husserl*, Derrida offers the title “the phenomenological *durée*” to Husserl’s concept of time as a subjective sequence of protention and retention, suggesting that he saw Husserl as guilty of the same subjectivism and mysticism that characterises Bergson (Lawlor 2002, p. 70). Like Heidegger, Derrida is interested in something more fundamental than unreflective experience can allow, and which can only be accessed through a rigorously critical engagement with that experience. And this fundamental project, a project that questions the possibility of fundamentals, continually runs up against a problem: how to reconcile a model of time as perpetual flux with the creation of something called history.

Bergson and Derrida reach typologically similar resolutions to this issue by concentrating on the construction of transcendent institutions from a series of varying subjective experiences. For instance, Bergson opens *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* with a history of moral obligation based on both Kantian and Hegelian precepts, emphasising both the social development of and the innate human tendency towards virtue: “The modern idea of justice has progressed in this way by a series of individual creations which have succeeded through multifarious efforts animated by one and the same impulse” (Bergson 1977 [1932], p. 78). This is similar to Derrida’s narrative about the accretion of individual acts of interpretation into a canonical reading:

every text, every element of a corpus reproduces or bequeaths, in a prescriptive or normative mode, one of several injunctions: come together according to this or that rule, this or that scenography, this or that topography of minds and bodies, and form this or that type of institution so as to read me and write about me, organize this or that type of exchange or hierarchy to interpret me, make me live on (*überleben* or *fortleben* in the sense that Benjamin gives to those words in *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers*).

(Derrida 1992 [1980], p. 21)

While this indisputably raises questions about the specific processes active in this creation of institutions, it is fair to say that Derrida uses Bergson's concentration on time to present phenomenology with alternative models of temporality and experience which he then develops after his own interests. Most obviously, this involves writing about language, where again institutions remove from the individual any certainty about the linearity of understanding:

All translations into languages that are the heirs and depositaries of Western metaphysics thus produce on the *pharmakon* an *effect of analysis* that violently destroys it, reduces it to one of its simple elements by interpreting it, paradoxically enough, in the light of the ulterior developments it itself has made possible.

(Derrida 1982a [1972], p. 99)

All interpretation, as Derrida is constantly at pains to observe, excludes alternatives, and it should be the project of philosophy to outline with the greatest possible clarity the changing formations of these exclusionary rules, indeed, the synthesis of Kant and Bergson that Levinas indicates. This necessarily involves grappling with problems of memory, as Derrida's basic understanding of language is as a continual pursuit and recollection of presence rather than an achievement of that plenitude. He casts this as: "You cannot read without speaking, speak without promising, promise without writing, write without reading that you have already promised even before you begin to speak, etc. [...] You can only say and sign: yes, yes in memory of yes" (Derrida 1989 [1986], p. 100. The theme of the originary promise will be returned to when dealing with the significance of Heidegger in Derrida's work). Similarly, a lynchpin of Bergson's thought is the inevitable delay between external stimulus and mental response, an interval (*écart*) that allows for memory and other confusing factors to enter (Deleuze 1991 [1966], p. 24). This delay is something with which Derrida plays, especially in *The Post Card*, as it treats the psychoanalytical implications of interventions between event and memorialisation by exploiting the various meanings, including "interval", of *carte* (Derrida 1987 [1980], p. xi *et passim*). Bergson's concept of memory is fundamentally reliant upon forgetting, as the mind only provides us with memories that are connected to the situation at hand, allowing us to navigate a situation without danger (Bergson 1921 [1900], p. 183). Derrida would subscribe to some of this, but want to emphasise (after Freud) that some memories may stand in

the way of pragmatic action, and that what is *not* recalled may be as significant as what is. Ultimately, Derrida would choose to follow through this radical Freudianism to the point where any concept of time becomes suspect, just as all concepts of experience have been rejected, and for similar concerns about its weighting with metaphysical tradition (cf. Derrida 1982b [1972], pp. 63-4). One more recent manifestation of this attempted move beyond temporality is the concept of the messianic, which ruptures the conventional boundaries between presence and absence, and acts, as an astute commentator has noted, as a personalisation of the earlier concept of the trace (Lawlor 2002, p. 194). “The messianic,” argues Derrida, “including its revolutionary forms (and the messianic is always revolutionary, it has to be), would be urgency, imminence but, irreducible paradox, a waiting without horizon of expectation” (Derrida 1994 [1993], p. 168). This step beyond anticipation is one that Bergson does not take, although his work allows it to be conceivable.

There are some other brief points of similarity between Derrida, Bergson, and the larger movement of *Lebensphilosophie* which will help smooth the path to the next section on Derrida and national languages. When Bergson talks about the “essentially active, I might almost say violent, character of metaphysical intuition”, he directly anticipates Heidegger and the violence required to uncover Being, and hence Derrida (Bergson 1913 [1903], p. 48). Bergson’s work on “creative evolution” suggests a positive differentiation of animals from humans rather than a simple negative, again something that Heidegger develops into varying attitudes towards Being among humans and other animals, and Derrida takes forward as a reconsideration of the categories of human and animal (Deleuze 1991 [1966], p. 101). More broadly, one of the fundamental gestures of Bergson’s work is revealing how two contradictory bodies can be grounded in the same forces or tensions, a technique very close to Derrida (Lacey 1998, p. 735). Derrida’s discovery of irrationalism in supposed bastions of reason (paradigmatically, the argument in *Of Grammatology* about Rousseau and the supplement), together with his interest in seemingly irrational elements of modern life (nationalism, political belief, religious faith), demonstrates an attention to aspects of subjective experience that cannot be explained away by reason. His work engages with a gamut of intellectual approaches to the world, deliberately expanding the phenomenological category of “intentionality” to recover some of its founding, philosophy-of-life-influenced, interest in the range of human experience. This could be read as the classically Dilthean project of investigating both experience and the social factors which

shape that experience, although the humanist categories which Dilthey employs are obviously anathematic for Derrida.<sup>22</sup> However, the broad similarity in method does point to similar approaches to the problem of origins, which again Derrida receives more strongly through its phenomenological formulation than earlier versions. The basic problem in the phenomenology of Derrida's work is the question of the beginning of phenomena and the human understanding or expression of them, and it could be argued that this is a historicisation of problems within *Lebensphilosophie* as received by Husserl, Heidegger, Scheler, and others (Lawlor 2002). Human history is a prolonged series of individual acts of perception that create, condition, and advance habits of thought (in both a subjective sense and a social, in terms of institutions, especially language). Philosophical investigation must employ a double focus on the individual distinction of these acts, and their coherence within a whole, and if *Lebensphilosophie* provides one of the guiding-lights for the first project, then phenomenology, attempting to account for social life and common perceptions in a much more rigorous way, serves to pilot the second. Yet both continually encounter the problem of language, in terms of both an expression of experience, and some sort of Procrustean bed into which our experiences are manipulated, thus limiting and framing our supposedly direct engagement with the world. Derrida acknowledges the importance of Bergson's awareness that language prevents intuition and the expression of the results of intuition, but regards his decision to carry on using language in this knowledge as only a classical solution to a classical formulation of the problem, not one which goes to the heart of the matter (Lawlor 2002, p. 153). Bergson also notes that the language of transcendent statements about the human condition and experience are more often literary and expressive than scientific and unemotional, thus prompting questions about their acquisition of general validity (Lyotard 1991 [1954], p. 78). While Bakhtin resolves this issue by underscoring the social significance to literature, Derrida chooses the more radical route of questioning the distinctions between philosophy and fiction. Philosophy as a discourse, argues Derrida, has always attempted to define its own limits, not least so it can go beyond them in specifically determined ways, and suggest places from where "philosophy" can be treated neutrally, making the exclusion of literature essential (Derrida 1982b [1972], pp. x, xii). The philosophical

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<sup>22</sup> Some of the difficulties of aligning Derrida with philosophers of life are made clear in Weinstein and Weinstein 1993. Here, biographical similarities, an interest in language, and general talk about the significance of play and indeterminacy are not enough to prove the authors' case that Simmel anticipated Derrida, and Derrida recapitulates some of Simmel's ideas. The divide in basic philosophical perspectives is too strong, particularly in relation to assumptions about epistemology, to produce more than a diverting cross-reading.



investigation of language, therefore, must always be alert to its own linguistic presuppositions and frames, and be capable of risking its own authority to more accurately reflect the uncertainties of meaning. And this scepticism must, as *Lebensphilosophie* indicates, go all the way down to ordinary experience:

“everyday language” is not innocent or neutral. It is the language of Western metaphysics, and it carries with it not only a considerable number of presuppositions of all types, but also presuppositions inseparable from metaphysics, which, although little attended to, are knotted into a system.

(Derrida 1981 [1972], p. 19)

#### 6.4.1. *Language and national identity (II) – Derrida and Lebensphilosophie*

We turn, as we did in the Romanticism chapter, to the question of national identity as a way of examining more closely Derrida’s ideas about language and their connection to previous philosophical and political thought. In Chapter Four, it was argued that Bakhtin critically employs ideas of national identity and language in order to advance his own more complex philosophical position, without making explicit the political positions it would seem to entail. Here, I would like to suggest that Derrida’s philosophical work is also profoundly political, and that he similarly uses his ideas about language to open larger questions of nationalism.<sup>23</sup>

Derrida’s work attempts to open questions about affiliation, bonds that bring together concepts, individuals, and institutions, and once this fundamental preoccupation is realised there is no limit to the topics which can be addressed.<sup>24</sup> That affiliation is a political issue is made clear in the development of Derrida’s work, from passing comments about political issues in the early texts, to an involvement with certain forms of political campaign, and the much-noted late turn to more political and sociological modes of investigation (cf. Derrida 1982b [1972], pp. 113-4; Derrida and Mortley 1991; Derrida 1994 [1993]; Borradori 2003). The movement can even be recognised within individual works, for instance the movement from the second to the first titular element in the *Politics of Friendship*, where the argument is proposed that democracy necessarily

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<sup>23</sup> Completists may like to note that *Of Grammatology* summarises some of the debates over the presentation of earlier languages within current speech, including an outline of Marrism (Derrida 1974 [1967], pp. 323-4, n. 1).

<sup>24</sup> Derrida’s interest in this term comes particularly from its derivation from *filius*, son, and the points about the male-centred economy of intellectual life that can be drawn from this (Derrida 1997 [1994], p. 6).

contains within it the seeds of racism, xenophobia, and inter- and intra-national conflict (Derrida 1997 [1994], p. 172 *et passim*; cf. 2002). Derrida perpetually builds on the refusal of binary distinctions first and most fundamentally articulated through the philosophy of language, and repeatedly returns to the potential language possesses to disturb our strongest preconceptions.

It is therefore from language that we will begin, and by picking up some of the philosophy-of-life motifs outlined above. Simmel proposes language as an example of objective culture, that which has become distanced from the individual, and equally capable of leading him and his intentions astray as delivering her home safely (Simmel 1997, p. 67). Husserl echoes this, taking as a given the capacity for language to distort experience, but suggesting that through a concentration on the actions of perception (the phenomenological reduction), and an historical awareness of the development of phenomena (the late Husserl's project of the *Rückfrage*), sense-certainty can still be attained. Derrida attempts to go one further than each of these predecessors, so that while Simmel establishes his poles as subject and object, and Husserl as transcendental and empirical subjects, Derrida attempts to move away from such binaries and recognise language as both that which conceives subjectivity, and which the subject puts to use. He takes more seriously, if more counter-logically, the necessary interweaving of objective and subjective forms, and investigates these in a manner that attempts to construct general rules without neglecting experience. With national languages, this means a double bind of reflecting a national idiom *and* going beyond it, so that your speech has individuality and meaning. A language must represent its nation to non-native auditors, yet be comprehensible in its incomprehensibility, recognisable as something other.<sup>25</sup> This is particularly pressing in an age of *globalatinization*, where the spread of (American) English as a language and form of culture places the very cultural identities of certain national and ethnic groups under threat (Derrida 1998a [1996], p. 11; cf. 2002). It is also urgent when subjects have the capacity to experience forms of culture very different to their own, under circumstances not of their own choosing:

[The foreigner] is first of all foreign to the legal language in which the duty of hospitality is formulated, the right to asylum, its limits, norms, policing etc. He has to ask for hospitality in a language which by definition is not his own, the one imposed on him by the master of the house, the host, the king, the lord, the authorities, the nation, the State, the father, etc. This personage imposes on him translation into their own language, and that's the first act of violence. That is where the question of hospitality begins: must we

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<sup>25</sup> A little like, some might say, literary theory

ask the foreigner to understand us, to speak our language, in all the senses of this term, in all its possible extensions, before being able and so as to be able to welcome him into our country? If he was already speaking our language, with all that that implies, if we already shared everything that is shared with a language, would the foreigner still be a foreigner and could we speak of asylum or hospitality in regard to him?

(Derrida 2000b, pp. 15, 17)

Derrida therefore opens up the question of language into that of asylum and hospitality, and in a manner which disturbs our fundamental ethical precepts on the matter: if even the welcoming of the stranger is “the first act of violence”, how can moral action be preserved? One aspect of Derrida’s argument about language pertinent here is the problem of memory in language, that if the Romantic thesis is accepted and languages represent a storeroom for national identity, then, following Freud, there will be some artefacts that can never be displayed or recalled. This is given an edge in Derrida’s exploration of the term “hospitality”, where its etymological connections with “hostage” are recalled as a means to exploring the balance of power in the situation (Derrida 2000 [1999], p. 9). Derrida is happy to continue the Romantic or philosophy-of-life project of examining how language influences social consciousness, so long as 1) language is taken in its most fundamental sense of a division of the world into sensible units, and 2) what is excluded in this division is recognised as equally important as what is included. To return this question of what is brought along with a concept of identity, Derrida notes that the desire for presence in language which he sees at the root of the Western philosophical enterprise can be seen as an extreme desire for apocalypse, absolute and final presence, identity, and closure (Royle 1995, p. 29; cf. Derrida 1984b). This quite rightly draws out the Romantic position (or, if we accept Derrida’s general argument, the metaphysical viewpoint) as the extreme, while Derrida offers more rational, if much harder, alternatives of tolerance, openness, and patience. As with Bakhtin, this is less a question of large political positions considered in every nuance than small-scale orientations with regard to specific problems, or, less charitably, reactions to given circumstances. For this reason, Derrida feels he can address the question of immigration in modern Europe as a problem of deconstruction, using his own critical framework to intervene in a contemporary debate and thus rebind the philosophical oscillation between life and form more closely to the prior term (Derrida 2000a, p. 540; cf. 2001 [1997], pp. 3-24). This

is a project explicitly developed through several of Derrida's texts, two of which we will examine here.

The first is *Monolingualism of the Other*, a lecture delivered in the early 1990s and published in French in 1996, and the form of the piece is immediately worthy of comment. The text is a dialogue between at least two speakers, one interrogatory and the other explanatory, although as with similar works, no effort is made to label or count the voices (e.g. Derrida 1991 [1987]). The model here seems to be the Socratic dialogue, although with a deliberate confusion of oral and written forms, and the intention is to clarify from the outset that language use is a social act, and one which engages within each speaker's voice a number of different discourses. Derrida's opening gambit is to advance two propositions which "take the form of a law": "*We only ever speak one language*", and "*We never speak only one language*" (Derrida 1998b [1996], p. 7). This is justified by the typically Derridean point that "our" language belongs to others, thus preventing it from being absolutely our own – "My language, the only one I hear myself speak and agree to speak, is the language of the other" (Derrida 1998b [1996], p. 25). This alienation from our individuality leads us to pursue our distinctiveness precisely through the language which involves us with others and which, in a rather Heideggerian mood, forms one aspect of our fundamental obligation to one another.<sup>26</sup> To digress slightly, it is worth noting how this alienation from language differs from Bakhtin's similar concept during the 1950s "Discursive Genres" phase. Here, a response if not understanding is always guaranteed (Bakhtin 1986 [1952-3], p. 68), while for Derrida, the danger lies precisely in the capacity for responses to be hostile or understandings to be inaccurate. Derrida works with a stronger model of alterity than Bakhtin, so that in a key sense he exchanges the possibility of anticipating a response for allowing that response to be genuinely open. This impinges on the models of speech communities suggested by each author, as Bakhtin's orientation at this time is towards inclusive groups bounded only by the limits of their willingness to engage in discourse, while Derrida is more conscious of the specific social and political factors that will limit the exchange of ideas.

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<sup>26</sup> This notion of the originary promise in language is explored by Derrida elsewhere, for instance his relatively early piece, "Living On: Border Lines". Here, he asserts that promises are only possible in the language of the other, in the moment of a speech act which is impossible in your own tongue (Derrida 1979, p. 149). This notion, indebted to a Levinasian appeal to the other, suggests how politics is hard-wired into his philosophy of language. The "same" text (from the "Border Lines" section rather than "Living On") also anticipates the form and argument of *Monolingualism*, with a division of voices and confusion over where language can be said to originate: "One never writes either in one's own language or in a foreign language" (Derrida 1979, p. 101).

In *Monolingualism*, Derrida deploys this Simmelian pessimism towards the construction of national language and identity implicitly against a more positive, Romantic model: “All culture is originally colonial. [...] Every culture institutes itself through the unilateral imposition of some ‘politics’ of language” (Derrida 1998b [1996], p. 39).<sup>27</sup> Despite the Althusserian overtones of this passage, Derrida’s basic point is that such colonial actions will always be incomplete and partial, and never completely dominate the individual.<sup>28</sup> It is also an explicitly political-philosophical point rather than a linguistic one, although Derrida would argue that because philosophy “sometimes intervenes in the most critical, and occasionally in the most dogmatic, least scientific, operations of the linguist”, it is “*before* linguistics, preceding linguistics by virtue of all the concepts philosophy still provides it, for better or for worse” (Derrida 1982b [1972], p. 188). It is the concept of language and the experience of its users, which interests Derrida, rather than its forms or technical variations. *Monolingualism* moves on to apparently more autobiographical ground with some comments on the experience of Algeria under French rule, yet it is also an autobiography that questions the possibility of such linguistic self-representation. Selfhood is something which is continually constructed – “an identity is never given, received, or attained; only the interminable and indefinitely phantasmatic process of identification endures” – so that the seemingly personal comments, “Rather than [being] an exposition of myself, [are] an account of what will have placed an obstacle in the way of this auto-exposition for me” (Derrida 1998b [1996], pp. 28, 70; on the endless process of identification, see 1994 [1993], p. 54, on inheritance). This leads us to read the autobiographical experiences explored in the text, and even the foregrounding of the author and his nationality, as open movements rather than closed connections, political tactics rather than personal confessions. Certainly there is an *ad hominem* argument about Derrida’s personal feelings of exclusion, for instance, when he claims that “I am an immigrant, as a philosopher”; but this should be balanced with his other assertions that he is “very French”, “neurotically French”, indeed “the most French philosopher” because he needs the French language, the French idiom, so much (Derrida 2002). Yet as suggested in the previous chapter, he is always aware of this process of identity-construction, and more than

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<sup>27</sup> Compare the meditations on Heidegger’s understanding of *Geschlecht*, race, in the series of that name, and its simultaneous inclusionary and exclusionary power (esp. Derrida 1987, pp. 162-3).

<sup>28</sup> It could also be noted here that this politics of resistance, implicit in Derrida from the earliest works about the difficulties of Husserl’s transcendentalism, is one of the things which left-leaning scholars found attractive in the works of Bakhtin and Voloshinov during the early 1980s, often in reaction to a certain understanding of Derrida (e.g. Bennett 1989).

capable of tailoring it to his own ends (the best example of this being Derrida 1993 [1991]). Derrida's personal experiences and emotions towards questions of national identity and language must, given the basic philosophical positions he adopts, feature in his broader arguments; yet they do not dominate them, and are only one thread among others. He is certain in his observation that his subjectivity, constructed by himself and by his role as a public intellectual, not only involves discourses alien to his own speech, but also requires them; in other words, it is the more social, phenomenological revision of *Lebensphilosophie* that, like Bakhtin, he finds most useful.

The second article on which I wish to concentrate comes from a series of lectures from the early 1980s on the topic of "Languages and Institutions of Philosophy". This text explores the difference between a "natural language", one in which it is established that philosophy can be written, even if because of specific cultural and historical determinations; and "natural reason" which is universal, ahistorical, and pre- or meta-linguistic, and thus attempts to transcend the languages in which it is expressed. Between these two versions of nature lies a whole history of philosophical discourse (Derrida 1984a, p. 92). Derrida initially adopts a rather Foucauldian framework to discuss the political effects of language, where it is seen as a power of spacing and division, a series of direct interventions into everyday life, yet normal Heideggerian business is soon resumed with a discussion of the technological influences on the dispersal of languages (Derrida 1984a, pp. 94-103). The main example of a text that hovers between the two concepts of nature is Descartes' *Discourse in Method*, one of the first significant works to be written in a native language rather than Latin, and one that draws attention to this fact. Descartes suggests that writing in French, while facilitating the spread of his thought and making it more widely comprehensible, makes it appear more facile in its content; this is connected to his concern that his work should be opened up to women, with all the risks of trivialisation which that entails (Derrida 1984a, pp. 110-12). As in *Monolingualism*, Derrida exploits this acknowledged tension between greater and lesser comprehensibility to make socio-political points about the restrictions placed on access to knowledge, and the creation of institutions from these limits. Derrida is thinking specifically of the university (an "Institution of Philosophy"), and the different models sketched by Kant and Schelling. The former proposes that the university be in the service of the state, avoiding matters of controversy while providing useful service to the government; the faculty of philosophy would be in control overall, and determine what was within the bourn of

the university and what without (Derrida 1984a, pp. 136-9). Schelling countered this with a much more liberal college of arts model, divorced from the state, and fostering independent creativity and expression (Derrida 1984a, pp. 139-46). Derrida suggests that these two structures rely on different views of the state, as liberal-permissive (Kant) and authoritarian-restrictive (Schelling), and hence two different models of translation. For Kant, translation can demolish all boundaries between nations and people, while for Schelling, the specificity and uniqueness of each language and every language-user is what makes it valuable (Derrida 1984a, p. 148). And this is a dilemma with which we are still faced today, and with the same very real consequences for university study and the pursuit of knowledge: “The so called fundamental sciences can no longer be distinguished from the so called directed sciences. And what has rightly been called the military-industrial complex of the modern state presupposes this unity of the fundamental and the oriented” (Derrida 1984a, p. 150). The transparency of reason and the natural languages of philosophy has been seconded to another form of universality, that of global capital, and the processes of economic domination which that entails. By unpacking the historicisation and politicisation of philosophy (supposedly pure thought), and concentrating on the experience of linguistic subjects under (however loosely) defined social conditions, Derrida reawakens some of the power of *Lebensphilosophie*. Yet his final conclusion is that philosophy needs to pass through the everyday experience of subjects, not to the transcendental but to something much harder to discuss. It is phenomenology that provides the best means for this, and this necessitates a certain silence:

As Levinas says from another point of view, language *is* hospitality. Nevertheless, we have come to wonder whether absolute, hyperbolic, unconditional hospitality doesn't consist in suspending language, a particular determinate language, and even the address of the other. Shouldn't we also submit to a sort of holding back of the temptation to ask the other who he is, what her name is, where he comes from, etc.? Shouldn't we abstain from asking another these questions, which herald so many required conditions, and thus limits, to a hospitality thereby constrained and thereby confined into a law and a duty? And so into the economy of a circle? We will always be threatened by this dilemma between, on the one hand, unconditional hospitality that dispenses with law, duty, or even politics, and, on the other, hospitality circumscribed by law and duty. One of them can always corrupt the other, and this capacity for perversion remains irreducible. It *must* remain so.

(Derrida 2000b, p. 135)<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The obvious recollection should be made of the passage from *The Gift of Death* in the previous chapter where, again with reference to Levinas, Derrida suggests ethical obligation must necessarily lie beyond language.

## 6.5. Conclusion

We have seen how for Derrida and Bakhtin *Lebensphilosophie* both points the way towards phenomenology, and provides a set of tools with which it can be criticised. As a broad cultural movement, more than a set of philosophical arguments, it provides a manner of studying the poles of subjectivity and objectivity which fundamentally undermines their distinction: the regrounding of philosophy on the individual's experience of temporality necessitates revision of these and other binary distinctions. Unsurprisingly, Derrida attempts to loosen these oppositions further, although without necessarily accepting the terms of the philosophy-of-life's critique, while Bakhtin in both his early work and late attempts to reunite them on a higher theoretical level, another manifestation of their analytic and synthetic tendencies. *Lebensphilosophie* potentially encourages a self-awareness of the role of the philosopher that is valuable, whether in methodological or stylistic terms, as is its interrogation of the boundary between natural and cultural. Laughter for Bakhtin becomes the most important aspect of this confusion, although he combines Bergson's treatment with a range of other positions, while Derrida more primarily grounds it in language. Bakhtin and Derrida both appreciate Bergson's privileging of experience, but sophisticate it with an awareness of the problems of developing transcendent structures from non-repetitive flux; they are also interested in the representation of that experience, or, more precisely, the interference of forms of communication with the possibility of authentic experience. Most notably, this is the next step in the progression of responses to Kant, which moves from attempting to determine the conditions of our knowledge to trying to ascertain the ways in which language may fundamentally control the shaping of this question. *Lebensphilosophie* primed the pump for phenomenology's development of this matter, synthesising along the way the Romantic and Nietzschean assays; but equally importantly, it prepared the social and cultural soil for a popular form of philosophy which engaged with ordinary problems of perception and attempted to deepen rather than avoid the experience of everyday life.



## 7. Phenomenology

### 7.1. Introduction

One of the many reasons why irrationalist philosophies of life gained popularity in the early twentieth century was that the dominant form of academic philosophy, neo-Kantianism, was seen as abstract, politically outdated, and disengaged from social concerns. As shown in Chapter Two, neo-Kantianism developed into such an eclectic movement that challenges from within and without were inevitable. In the Marburg school, the firm identification of thought with logical form invited criticism from more irrational positions, while the Freiburg school separated fact and value with such determination that experiential arguments for reuniting them became pressing (Crowell 2001, p. 27). Both this irrationalism and emphasis on experience could be redeemed and tidied up from *Lebensphilosophie* by phenomenology, the movement associated with Franz Brentano (1838-1917), Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), Max Scheler (1874-1928), and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). For Bakhtin, a *synthesis* of neo-Kantianism and phenomenology was not only possible but necessary for advancing human understanding: the former doctrine looked for the conditions of possibility of interaction between mind and world, while the latter examined the specific acts of communication to which these gave rise (Bernard-Donals 1994, p. 40). The tension between these two positions is one motif developed below. For Derrida, neo-Kantianism is never a valid philosophical option, too heavily grounded in idealism and classical transcendental philosophy to respond to the intricacies of being-in-the-world. His guiding light is phenomenology, in particular the development of Husserl's work represented by Heidegger, a viewpoint which provides the basic perspective from which he surveys philosophy. Phenomenology has, in the broadest sense, a tense relationship with history, as its concentration on the moment and individuality of perception can easily shade into a quest for the eternal in human experience without necessitating an investigation of specific contexts. This difficulty is countered by Bakhtin with his interest in Hegelian histories, Derrida by his Heideggerian centralisation of the human experience of time, and both by an incorporation of language into the problematic of experience: by running the investigation of subjectivity through language, an historical (and therefore social) dimension is inevitably opened. This necessarily leads to their interests shifting from the mechanisms of consciousness (one concern of mainstream

phenomenology) and towards phenomenologies of language. Hirschkop acutely notes that both Bakhtin's and Derrida's phenomenologies attempt to defend philosophy as a consideration of human experience against an overwhelming scientific impulse, suggesting it forms a tactical outpost in a larger conflict as much as a valued position in itself (Hirschkop 2001, p. 31). Phenomenology was a contemporary method of returning to some of the questions that Kant posed, and it produced not just a multiplicity of responses to them but a variety of forms of phrasing from which others may draw inspiration.

## 7.2 Phenomenology

A traditional point to begin the consideration of phenomenology is that it is a movement rather than a school, the work of a diverse group of thinkers who draw different things from overlapping rather than identical sources, and who are united not by a common method but rather a belief that the original, basic problems of perception must be dealt with before higher-level enquiries about truth, reality, and certainty can be made (Schuhmann and Smith 1991, p. 304; Spiegelberg 1982 [1959], p. 5). Metaphysics, by this reasoning, is so far down the line that it becomes a distraction from the immediate task of understanding the conditions, assumptions, and actions of perception, a reorientation of philosophy whose debt to *Lebensphilosophie* and Bergson is evident (Crowell 1990, p. 509). The previous chapter has demonstrated how both Bakhtin and Derrida respond to this criticism of metaphysics, and the ambition of this part is to argue they deploy phenomenology and its intellectual resources in order to develop the Kantian investigation of the conditions of experience. They find in phenomenology familiar arguments about language, intersubjectivity, epistemology, and aesthetic and ordinary perception partly because they have read the history of post-Kantian philosophy in a similar way to the phenomenologists. By the same token, they discover in earlier philosophers phenomenological motifs, or at least a capacity to be turned to phenomenological purposes. For instance, as with Schopenhauer, in phenomenology the individual perceiver is regarded as the primary determinant of reality, but the activity of the world is given in a different way: matter forms a *provocation* for the subject, a challenge to which she is obliged to respond, rather than a blank refusal (cf. Bachelard 1983 [1942], p. 159). This necessity of response in turn recalls Hegel's emphasis on the socio-historic bonds placed on individuals, or Bergson's understanding of the

creativity of human experience. Alongside philosophical movements, phenomenology fits well with the artistic interests of Derrida and Bakhtin that have been attested elsewhere in this work. Phenomenology is a technique of estrangement from the world, as with avant-garde attempts to rediscover the wonder of being: because we interact with the world in such narrow and specific ways, it takes a dramatic wrench away from necessity to perceive objects as, in Bakhtin's words, "something foreign and independent" (Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 5). Philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger, and Scheler appeal to Bakhtin and Derrida because they provide near-contemporary syntheses of already-existing interests, and a helpful framework for returning to Kantian problems beyond the confines of neo-Kantianism.

Let us briefly run through some of the key ideas of phenomenology, broadly common to its varying exponents and developments, and their influence on Bakhtin and Derrida. *Intentionality* is probably one of the most significant, not least because of its simplicity and depth: the world is not presented to us, argued Brentano, but we actively take a part in its making, extending our intentions towards even the most mundane of objects in order to bring them into our sphere of understanding. This is clear, for instance, in Bakhtin's early *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, where the entirety of one's existence is seen as a conscious, reasoned, and responsible series of acts, although admittedly this rationality is also reliant on the neo-Kantian juridical conception of the individual (Brandist 2002a, p. 16).<sup>1</sup> It is also visible in Derrida's attempt to foreground the activity required in (linguistic) understanding, the deliberate exclusion of less likely meanings, constructions, and ideas, which can never be entirely successful. Intention places all objects of thought on an equal footing, irrespective of their epistemological or ontological status – a hallucination is as subjectively convincing as a genuine experience as they share the same mechanism of perception. Bakhtin uses this to facilitate the collapse of distinctions between literature and the real world, and the author's perception of the hero and the reader's perception of other people, so that "It could be said that Dostoevsky offers, in artistic form, something like a sociology of consciousness", although, Bakhtin qualifies, "only on the level of coexistence", not anything deeper (Bakhtin 1984 [1963], p. 32). Derrida develops his initial critique of assumed generic or semantic differences between literature and philosophy into

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<sup>1</sup> Bakhtin uses "intentionality" in a similarly phenomenological manner in the first edition of the Dostoevsky book, less than a decade after *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, and while there were clear political reasons in the 1960s for such idealist terms being inadvisable, it is also a marker of the development of his work that he revises this out in the second edition (Poole 2001a, p. 116).

into an analysis of the established structures of understanding that encourage such binary distinctions (cf. Derrida 1982b [1972], p. x). Brentano extends the concept of psychological intention by distinguishing between primary and secondary intentionality, consciousness of the object and self-consciousness of perception (Bell 1990, p. 11). This consciousness of one's own actions, then of the conditioning role of others in this process, leads Bakhtin away from phenomenology and towards more socially-engaged, Hegel-influenced, forms of thought. For Derrida, it becomes less an issue of the intentions of the individual, and much more one of the way in which the linguistic division of the world conditions perception. In a concept such as *différance*, there is an inherent movement of language beyond the individual's control: meaning is still determined by intention, but intention is not governed by the subject. Derrida, it should always be recalled, shares the fundamental phenomenological concern that we are involved in a world only partly of our own making. "To be", he argues, "means [...] to inherit"; and "Inheritance is never a *given*, it is always a task" (Derrida 1994 [1993], p. 54).

A second key idea of phenomenology folds out of this, namely the advancement of language as a point of access to consciousness, in a manner previously more developed in literature than philosophy. While this reaches a clear limit-point in Heidegger – "we do not say what we see, but rather the reverse, we see what *one says* about the matter" – it is a recurrent feature of earlier phenomenologies, for instance Brentano's analysis of culturally variant linguistic structures and their relations to forms of perception (Heidegger in 1925, quoted Moran 2000, p. 234; e.g. Brentano 1969 [1889], pp. 98-108). Language is foregrounded as a *philosophical* object of investigation (or, to utilise the Dilthean distinction, an object of the *human sciences*), thus allowing the step away from linguistics and the scientific study of language that has been excoriated by Derrida's critics, and more gently chided in Bakhtin. This ties in with a broad sweep of German philosophy of the early twentieth century that investigates the means of accessing culture as closely as the culture itself, and which is also evident in the Hegelian emphasis on history becoming a hermeneutic emphasis on interpretation. An awareness of the significance of language does not immediately equate with an understanding of its effects on perception, a point for which there is no better witness than the early Bakhtin's "Language *per se* is axiologically indifferent: it is always a servant, it is never a goal; it *serves* cognition, art, practical communication, etc." (Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 193). This argument does not sit comfortably with the typological and experiential analysis the rest of

rest of “Author and Hero” has outlined, and clearly points to “the linguistic turn” of the late 1920s, but it is a helpful reminder of Bakhtin’s influence from the early Husserl and a consequent naivety about the structures of consciousness. Husserl’s *Logical Investigations* presented language as a bridge between subjective and objective ideas, a convenient packhorse for meaning which does not strongly influence the construction of the original perceptions, while his later works that introduce the *Lebenswelt* as a broader realm of intersubjective experience highlight in particular the significance of language (Simons 1995, p. 132). This is one example of how Heidegger, and hence Derrida, develops more from the late Husserl than the early, while Bakhtin, partly through obvious difficulties in accessing German philosophy after the 1930s, remains with the earlier. Specifically, Bakhtin attempts to synthesise Husserl’s early work with neo-Kantianism, for instance emphasising how specific perceptual experiences lead to recognition of transcendental elements, and that the individual act “is an actual living participant in the ongoing event of Being: it is in communion with the unique unity in ongoing Being” (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 2). This attempts to establish common ground between phenomenology and certain strands of neo-Kantianism, therefore not only mimicking the Kantian drift of Husserl’s work after *Logical Investigations* with which Bakhtin was apparently unfamiliar, but also chiming with the predominant Russian reception of Husserl.

The most respected interpreter for Husserl’s work in Russia was Gustav Shpet, whose 1914 *Appearance and Sense* explained Husserl’s *Ideas* to a Russian audience and followed the organisation of that text, although significantly altering Husserl’s philosophy in the process (Cassedy 1997, p. 84).<sup>2</sup> Shpet synthesised phenomenology with idealist philosophies (notably Romanticism) and native philosophies influenced by Orthodoxy, transforming Husserl’s work so that two worlds, nature and consciousness, created human experience; contact between the two could be made through material forms which incarnated the higher realms of consciousness, in a religious sense (the incarnation of Christ, and Orthodox forms of worship which reflect this), or an artistic one (texts representing, in a Romantic fashion, an entire nation) (Cassedy 1997, pp. 86, 95).<sup>3</sup> This idealist reading (or writing) of Husserl features in the most significant Shpet text for Bakhtin, his 1927 effort, *The Inner Form of the Word*. This shares the religious concerns of Bakhtin’s early works, where the division of object and meaning (both thing and word, and word

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<sup>2</sup> The appetite for Husserl’s work in Russia is significant, as the first language into which the *Logical Investigations* were translated was Russian, and less than a decade after their German publication.

<sup>3</sup> The influence of Humboldt on Shpet is analysed in Haardt 1998.

and sense) taken by both men as fundamental to contemporary experience can be resolved by the spiritual transcendentalism outlined in *Appearance and Sense*. Shpet also criticised Wundt's theories of ethnic psychology for assuming a simple correlation between linguistic forms and national consciousness in a text known to Voloshinov, who continues Shpet's sophistication of the model with reference to other phenomenologists of language, notably Anton Marty (Vološinov 1986 [1929], p. 50, n. 10, and p. 105). By foregrounding concerns of language, spirituality, and transcendentalism, Shpet presented phenomenology in a form assimilable to neo-Kantianism and the more sociological or socially-focused ideas significant for Bakhtin. While the influence of contemporary Russian readings of Husserl on Bakhtin have only recently been recognised, the significance of Heidegger for Derrida's understanding of philosophy is a critical trope familiar to the point of banality.<sup>4</sup> The interrogation of the possibility of ontology, the significance of language in determining perception, the necessity of doing violence to do philosophy, a privileging of temporal unfolding rather than suspension: all of these are well-known points of influence, touched on in the Introduction, and to be explored again in a brief while. Indeed, the shadow which Heidegger casts on Derrida is so long that it often seems to mark Derrida's readings of other philosophers; hence a history of the intellectual problem of separating man and animal which simultaneously operates as a narrative of the philosophy of being (Derrida 2002 [1999]). The Heideggerian revision of phenomenology leads it away from analysing subjective perception and towards investigating the fundamental Being that creates the illusion of the subject. This journey makes Derrida's analysis of language appear as a logical conclusion, asking what kind of thought-structures needs to be in place before modern individuality is possible? This necessarily involves re-visiting phenomenological problems:

the question of the meaning of being, the being of the entity and of the transcendental origin of the world – of the world-ness of the world – must be patiently and rigorously worked through, the critical movement of the Husserlian and Heideggerian questions must be effectively followed to the very end, and their effectiveness and legibility must be conserved.

(Derrida 1974 [1967], p. 50)

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<sup>4</sup> To recycle the waggish summary of two key figures of the post-structuralist generation: Lacan equals Heidegger plus Freud, while Derrida equals Heidegger plus Derrida's style.

Yet phenomenological questions of being are not exclusively the province of Heidegger, despite the power of his critique, and he was not the first to raise them. It is worth reiterating that phenomenology was a movement rather than a school, and one of the other pioneers of an ontological phenomenology and a key influence on Heidegger also happens to weigh heavily on Bakhtin; namely, Max Scheler.

### 7.3. Bakhtin, Scheler, and phenomenological traditions

Although relatively neglected until recently, Max Scheler enjoyed such standing in contemporary philosophy that he was named in the dedication of the 1929 edition of *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* by Heidegger, the same philosopher sent him the first copy of *Being and Time*, and Voloshinov called him “the most influential German philosopher of our time, the major representative of the direction of phenomenology” (Heidegger 1990 [1973], p. xvii; Frings 2001, p. 293; Poole 2001a, p. 112). He provided significant guidance for Heidegger about investigating the concept of being rather than the perceptions which result, as well as a general attitude towards phenomenology which developed it from Husserl’s concept of a rigorous science to the more contemporary guide to existential disquiet (Spiegelberg 1982 [1959], p. 270).<sup>5</sup> He has also been recognised as a significant player in the development of the Bakhtin Circle, and serves an important symbolic role in the history of the reclamation of Bakhtin’s intellectual contexts and hence the development of Bakhtin studies.<sup>6</sup> What Scheler’s work majors on – for instance, the importance of intersubjectivity, and the “genetic” method of phenomenology that examines the personal and cultural construction of subjective perceptions – already fits with Bakhtin’s other interests (notably *Lebensphilosophie*) and so offers a phenomenology amenable to Bakhtin’s work, and complementary to the idealist Husserl read through Shpet. In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin begins from being and works up to knowledge, the opposite of the neo-Kantian perspective that begins with knowledge and, not inexorably, comes down to being. This is not purely phenomenological in argument, as should be ascertained from the chapters on *Lebensphilosophie* and its nineteenth-century antecedents,

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<sup>5</sup> Another way to cast this is by noting that Scheler and Heidegger both refuse Husserl’s idea of a pure or absolute consciousness, in favour of specific examples of consciousness, human or fallible in other ways (Frings 2001, p. 22).

<sup>6</sup> The article which prompted this rediscovery of Scheler is Brian Poole’s 2001 contribution, although the promised book to expand his argument is, sadly, yet to surface (Poole 2001a; cf. B. Poole 1998, p. 571, n. 14).

but phenomenology, and in particular Scheler's understanding of intersubjectivity, does offer the most modern way of gathering these ideas together. There is necessary and healthy debate over what Bakhtin actually understood by phenomenology, for it has been suggested that he is largely ignorant of Husserl's work and far more reliant on Theodor Lipps and Moritz Geiger (Laine 2003). The instances where the word is used by Bakhtin do little to clear up this ambiguity, marking, in the manner of his other load-bearing terms, a general position rather than specific authors or problems (e.g. Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 32). As suggested above, there is a problem of Bakhtin deliberately overlapping concepts from different philosophical lexicons for his own purposes, so that, for instance, his early reliance on an eternal and immutable sense being reached through individual intentional acts could be derived from Husserl's phenomenology, neo-Kantianism, or a combination of the two.<sup>7</sup> Similarly, the early Bakhtin also allows the aesthetic object the same openness and flexibility which Husserl permitted all objects of consciousness, although remnants of a Kantian faith in "purposiveness without purpose" are still prominent (cf. Palmieri 1998, p. 50). In fine, phenomenology operates as a focussing lens for Bakhtin, drawing together his interests into a semi-coherent whole, and recapitulating a certain narrative of philosophy with which he was already familiar.

The specific influence of Scheler, however, is marked and clear within Bakhtin's canon. Prime among points of consanguinity is the emphasis on separation being necessary for sympathy: the subject does not experience the sorrow of the grieving other but reads, through an intentional act of projection, her representation of it. For the early Bakhtin, this ties in with his vision of the aesthetic creation of everyday experience:

An essential moment (though not the only one) in aesthetic contemplation is empathizing into an individual object of seeing – seeing it from inside in its own essence. This moment of empathizing is always followed by the moment of objectification, that is, a placing *outside* oneself of the individuality understood through empathizing, a separating of it from oneself, a *return* to oneself. And only this returned-into-itself consciousness gives form, from its own place, to the individuality grasped from inside, that is, shapes it aesthetically as a unitary, whole, and qualitatively distinctive individuality.

(Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 14; cf. Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], pp. 25-6, 81-7)

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<sup>7</sup> For more on similarities between the early Bakhtin and the early Husserl, cf. Brandist 2001.



This shuttle between self and other, inside and outside, is offered in its more classical phenomenological form by Scheler's 1913 work on sympathy:

*All fellow-feeling involves intentional reference of the feeling of joy or sorrow to the other person's experience. [...] A's suffering is first presented as A's in an act of understanding or "vicarious" feeling experienced as such, and it is to this material that B's primary commiseration is directed. That is, my commiseration and his suffering are phenomenologically two different facts.*

(Scheler 1954 [1913], p. 13)

The radical divide of self and other posited here is one of the hallmarks of Bakhtin's early work, combined with the equally far-reaching assertion that we are all others for each other, a phenomenological motif that evolves quite easily into the more Hegelian and sociological work of the 1930s (Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], pp. 35-6). Bakhtin draws on other elements of Scheler's work, including the distinction between *Leib* and *Korper*, my body as experienced from within, and as seen by others from without, which was initially offered by Husserl in lectures of 1907 (published much later as *Ding und Raum*), but more fully developed by Scheler. Bakhtin adopts this as I-for-myself and I-for-other, and again builds it into a fundamental determinant of human existence, neatly enabling him to juggle a philosophy-of-life interest in corporeal experience with a neo-Kantian awareness of transcendent limits on individual variation (Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s]).<sup>8</sup> A similar binary relationship in "Author and Hero" is established between the soul and the spirit:

I experience the inner life of another as his *soul*; within myself, I live in the *spirit*. The soul is an image of the totality of everything that has been actually experienced – of everything that is present-on-hand in the soul in the dimension of time; the spirit is the totality of everything that has the validity of meaning – a totality of all the forms of my life's directedness from within itself, of all my acts of proceeding from within myself (without detachment from the *I*).

(Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 110)

This is an extraordinarily dense passage, which would welcome elucidation from a variety of perspectives. Two things, however, can be noted within the narrow confines of this section. The

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<sup>8</sup> He also connects it with different artistic forms, so that seeing the lives of others from without is best represented by the epic mode, while experiencing your own from within is expressed through the lyric (Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 29, and p. 237, n. 49).

first is how it elaborates the *Leib/Korper* distinction, so that the spirit is aligned with the subjective former term, and the soul with the externalising latter term. The second is that it not only draws on Scheler's usage of this distinction, but overrides his related work on the personality: this is "a non-spatio-temporal collection of acts, a concrete whole conditioning each individual act, and a whole whose variations are reflected in those acts; or, as I am wont to put it, personality is the substance of which acts are attributes" (Scheler 1954 [1913], p. 224). Bakhtin displaces the chronological flexibility of Scheler's concept into his notions of fate and self-accounting, where the personality forms a whole represented by sequential acts, and insists on the logic of Scheler's phenomenology as determining two kinds of selfhood, experienced from within and without. Bakhtin similarly expands on Scheler's concept of *milieu*, which he renders as *purview*. Scheler's term describes the specific and non-coinciding set of relations which condition the understanding of an object, a strong version of intentionality which means the moon viewed through an astronomer's telescope is essentially a different thing to the moon gazed at by young lovers. The inherent difficulties of this position are resolved by Bakhtin with a neo-Kantian confidence in the variety of individual perceptions adding up to a universal, transcendently valid, whole (Brandist 2002a, p. 50; cf. Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 46). The concept of the milieu recalls another helpful idea from the philosophical associates of Scheler's youth, a group of phenomenologists based in Munich who refused to follow Husserl's turn to transcendentalism. One of these Munich phenomenologists was Adolf Reinach, who developed the notion of *Sachverhalten*, states of affairs, conditions which give acts meaning: in order for there to be a promise, there must be one who promises, one who is promised, one who can override the promise in case of necessity, and so forth (cf. Brandist 2004b).<sup>9</sup> These states of affairs actually, concretely exist, and individual acts (in this case, of promising) buy into them – an example of the "participative thinking" lauded by Bakhtin in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* – and he is likely to have received this idea through Scheler (Brandist 2004b, p. 24). Reinach's argument here fits snugly with anti-Kantian tendencies found in Scheler and many other phenomenologists of this generation, where the categories of perception are built up through experience, rather than formally existing on a transcendent or transcendental plane. Scheler indeed goes further than Kant by following Brentano's ethical theory: values are not just

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<sup>9</sup> Brandist, an excellent guide to the influence of German jurisprudential philosophy on the Bakhtin Circle, ultimately sources the concept of *Sachverhalten* with Karl Stumpf (Brandist 2004b, p. 24).

valuations, but value-facts, and the object has an inherent quality which, although perhaps not perceivable, places it in a set hierarchy of values (Stark 1954, p. xv). It is beholden to the individual's powers of intuition to recognise these inherent values and respond to their demands, and this becomes connected with a religious-ethical imperative to love: "*love is that movement wherein every concrete individual object that possesses value achieves the highest value compatible with its nature and ideal vocation*", which necessitates a shift from reactive sympathy to proactive involvement with the world (Frings 2001, p. 58; Scheler 1954 [1913], p. 161). The intuition of fixed values, with the same religious overtones, is precisely the line on ethics which Bakhtin develops in his early works, and which is undermined but never toppled by his post-1920s interest in the possibility that language might influence the validity of perceptions (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 30; compare Brentano 1969 [1889], p. 13). The establishment of a hierarchy of values produces an ethical perspectivism rather than a relativism, as humans act within an ordained moral framework, comprehending to different degrees the immutable truths therein. From one divine place in the system, all values are visible, a point which adds another dimension to the description of Scheler as "the Catholic Nietzsche".<sup>10</sup> The notion of a higher power lurking behind everyday life is central to Scheler's work – "Behind the stirrings of the conscience [...] the spiritual eye of Faith is ever aware of the outline of an invisible, everlasting Judge" – and to the early Bakhtin's – "What I must be for the other, God is for me" (Scheler 1960 [1921], p. 35; Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 56). This confidence in a hierarchy of values which individuals access with more or less clarity has the curious effect of removing ethical judgement from the individual's gift and placing it within a transcendental frame: "My left hand may not know what my right hand is doing, and my right hand is accomplishing the truth" (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 52).<sup>11</sup> The idea of divinity in turn feeds into the temporal distortions which characterise Bakhtin's and Scheler's readings of phenomenology: repentance can change acts after they have occurred, suggesting a deferral of final judgement which both are happy to place within an eschatological frame (Scheler 1960 [1921], pp. 40-1; Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 28; 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 118). Bakhtin indeed lectured on the topic of confession, and in "Author and Hero" describes it as "an accounting rendered to oneself for

<sup>10</sup> The term was primarily applied to Scheler because of his interest in *ressentiment*, the grounding of certain forms of ethics in social hierarchies and inequalities.

<sup>11</sup> The Biblical echoes are quite clear here; see in particular, Matthew 6:2, "when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing". For an exploration of this motif of giving without knowing in the philosophy of Levinas, cf. Plant 2004.

one's own life", a fundamental mechanism in the construction of the self (Poole 2001a, p. 110; Bakhtin 1990 [mid to late 1920s], p. 141).<sup>12</sup>

The religious element to Scheler's refusal of reason is different to Kierkegaard's primarily in its privileging of communal values, but secondarily in its sentiment and pathos (e.g. Scheler 1960 [1921], p. 120). Both of these tensions are worked into Bakhtin's own complex thoughts about religion, for instance the dialogue between the individual ethical actor and the community in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, and the attempt to found Christianity in non-gospel sources in "Author and Hero" (e.g. Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 52, where the individual's communal ethical practice does not excuse personal moral failings; 1990 [mid to late 1920s], pp. 55-6). Scheler, like Kierkegaard, emphasises feelings and states of mind over logical deduction, arguing they possess an actual cognitive value and form an integral part of knowledge, a move that takes him as far from Husserl as it does the bloodless neo-Kantianism he saw in Cohen (Coser 1972, p. 10). Yet Scheler advances half a step on Kierkegaard by recognising a wider typology of emotions, and indeed varieties of religious experience, without losing sight of the similarity of the emotional mechanism in each case. The integration of human existence and ethical responsibility that Heidegger draws from Kierkegaard (in particular, the determination of responsibility by a relationship with death) could as easily have come from Scheler, and represents another direction in which phenomenology could be developed.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, it is one way in which Bakhtin attempted to travel; in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, he explicitly refers to Husserl's argument that the compulsion to strive after truth cannot be derived from epistemology, only from outside (for Bakhtin, from life), and swiftly translates this into ethical terms, arguing that the obligation to be ethical must be derived from life rather than ethics (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 5, and cf. p. 83, n.16). The insistence on a strong definition of life is one final point where Bakhtin's philosophy intersects with Scheler's. Scheler argues against Freud's model of sexuality because of its failure to recognise love as an entity independent from sexual desire, a line of argument followed by other phenomenologists, such as Merleau-Ponty,

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<sup>12</sup> Traces of this eschatological idealism can be found as late as the notes of the 1970s, where all meanings are seen as ultimately recoverable, and nothing determined until the very final judgement (e.g. Bakhtin 1986 [1975], p. 170).

<sup>13</sup> This is not, however, to neglect the differences between Scheler and Heidegger in relation to the development of this sense of responsibility. For Scheler, each act of sympathy educates the individual and makes them more aware of their communal existence within a social whole (Scheler 1954 [1913], pp. 49, 256). For Heidegger, there is not the linear progression that this narrative implies, rather a succession of discrete incidents to which the individual responds in different (more-or-less authentic) ways. In this instance, Bakhtin is firmly within Scheler's tradition of philosophy rather than Heidegger's.

and much closer to Bakhtin, Voloshinov (Scheler 1954 [1913], p. 177; Merleau-Ponty 1962 [1945], p. 166; Vološinov 1976 [1927]). The motivation shared by all three interpretations of Freud is a desire to turn away from a reductive materialism towards a more sophisticated understanding of human experience involving more sociable forms of emotional contact than selfish desire, and with that a phenomenological move away from subjective experience towards intersubjectivity and the development of social relations. The mechanisms of understanding, insists Bakhtin, Scheler, and their common strand of phenomenology, may remain comparable, but the emotional and experiential matter constantly changes.

Max Scheler's phenomenology sits very well with another key influence on the early Bakhtin, namely *Gestalt* theory.<sup>14</sup> There are clear traces of the various schools in Scheler's work, for instance his assertion that:

The primary awareness, in ourselves, in animals and in primitives, invariably consists of *patterns of wholeness*; sensory appearances are only given in so far as they function as the basis of these patterns, or can take on the further office of signifying or representing such wholes.

(Scheler 1954 [1913], p. 264)

The intuition of value-essences and hierarchies clearly comes into this recognition of wholes, as does the reliance of milieu on a variety of contextual prompts. *Gestalt* theory can be simply summarised as this emphasis on the basic perception of patterns and their integral function in making the world comprehensible. This breaks down into smaller arguments, for instance: a reliance on the individual perceiver's activity in recognising these patterns; a debate over whether the patterns are inherent to the natural world or something imposed by man, again familiar in the history of phenomenology; and an emphasis on the space between perceptions and cognised thoughts. One of the basic phenomena studied by *Gestalt* was known as the phi effect, where an observer of two separate lights turning on and off at certain intervals perceives motion between the two, even though there is no object actually moving (Ash 1995, p. 128). Our perceptions build on empirical evidence in quite specific and predictable ways, and enable sense to be made of unfamiliar sensorial impressions, a key problem of phenomenology. *Gestalt* also fits with phenomenology in its insistence that complex structures are akin to one another, and

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<sup>14</sup> I use *theory* rather than the more conventional *psychology* to highlight how the movement had deeper philosophical roots and grander intellectual ambitions than one scientific discipline.

different individual reactions to them will share something in common. This analytical viewpoint means that the highest levels of cultural production (for instance, the experience of driving down a street) are structurally similar to the lowest (listening to a melody), a point echoed in phenomenology's belief in the complexity of everyday life (Smith 1988, pp. 14, 16).<sup>15</sup> Indeed, *Gestalt* drew in its earliest phases on the phenomenologies of Brentano and Husserl, who defined the self as a bundle of actions and intentions rather than a stable Cartesian essence. This overlap is explored by Bakhtin in his early attempts to explain the mediation of individual and world and the movement from fleeting quotidian perceptions to value-sensitive transcendent judgements. The perceptive individual

sees clearly *these* individual, unique persons whom he loves, *this* sky and *this earth* and *these* trees [9 illegible words], and the time; and what is also given to him simultaneously is the value, the actually and concretely affirmed value of these persons and these objects.

(Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 30)

*Gestalt* theory unfolds in Bakhtin's later works as thought on genre, where the genre as a whole determines the constituent artistic elements and the reader's understanding (paradigmatically, Bakhtin 1986 [1952-3], but cf. the chapter on carnival in 1984 [1963]). The ambiguity of language, which Voloshinov explores in "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry", is a fundamental *Gestalt* motif, again questioning the relation of individual utterances to complex wholes of meaning (Voloshinov 1983 [1926], e.g. pp. 10-11). Both Bakhtin and Voloshinov recognise the theoretical importance of understanding the individual's acts of perception, even if this is not rigorously followed through, and *Gestalt* can also open a line of criticism on both Bakhtin and Derrida: do either of them move too quickly from acts of perception to acts of thought? Certainly in the latter's case arguments from a psycho-linguistic perspective about understanding have to be excluded, probably as irredeemably humanist, although the focus on language as a philosophical problem suggests this is simply not Derrida's quarry. For Bakhtin, the slippage between cultural and individual perspectives discernable in different linguistic

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<sup>15</sup> There is, of course, a connection with Romanticism and the holistic perspectives offered therein. One of the explicit sources for the early *Gestalt* theorists was Goethe's morphology, where component parts of an individual organism in some sense reflect the whole, which nevertheless manages to transcend them all; this also folds quite naturally into the vision of the individual as the sum of constituent experiences (Ash 1995, pp. 85-6). Of course, it differs in key respects, for instance in the less idealist ascription of the *Gestalten* either to the individual consciousness or to the object itself, or in its allowance of error and assumption between the perceiver and her perceptions.

forms, and varying patterns of thought that they represent, marks a residually neo-Kantian idealism. A neat comparison can be drawn here with Medvedev and Voloshinov, who remain closer to their *Gestalt* sources which keep “seeing” and “thinking” as separate stages, and hence talk about reality as “refracted” through and by thought rather than “reflected” in it (Brandist 2002b).

*Gestalt* theory, with its fringe talk of the “Being of the world itself”, fitted very well with the Weimar quest for holism, and showed, following the lessons of *Lebensphilosophie*, that science did not have to be atomistic or reductive but could privilege the role of a social situation in determining the individual (Ash 1995, p. 296). It is this same historical quest for totality which Bakhtin draws from *Gestalt* and related phenomenological theories, and quite possibly for similar feelings of overwhelming cultural crisis – for Bakhtin, primarily the separation of art and life and an anxiety over the failure of social responsibility (cf. Bakhtin 1990 [1919]; Brandist 2002a, pp. 28-30). *Gestalt* fits with contemporary philosophical debates slightly broader than phenomenology. To choose two pertinent examples: Cassirer, by virtue of his interests in perception, is concerned with this problem of part and whole, where the perceiver sometimes sees the whole first and breaks it down into parts, and other times sees the parts and builds them up into a whole (Hendel 1953, p. 21; for an example see Cassirer 1953 [1923], p. 102). His concept of symbolic pregnance also follows the logic of Wertheimer’s *Gestalt* work (pregnance is defined in Cassirer 1957 [1929], p. 202, and the same volume [pp. 64-7] offers examples of Cassirer’s familiarity with Gestalt theorists). Maurice Merleau-Ponty too deals with *Gestalt* theory, largely as an attempt to question the traditional distinction between body and mind: for him, the organs of perception are intimately bound up with the results of that perception, and *Gestalt* can provide a sophisticated neurological model for this interweaving (Baldwin 1998, p. 321). He is also interested in the fundamental perception of wholes and meaning rather than discrete, random segments (Merleau-Ponty 1962 [1945], p. 13).<sup>16</sup> To return to the topic in hand, Husserl’s theory of moments draws on *Gestalt*, and his *Ideas* references key works of the different schools several times, his attacks on “psychologism” and psychological theories of understanding aside (Smith 1994, p. 253). Both *Gestalt* theory and phenomenology claimed

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<sup>16</sup> There is unfortunately not space here to unpack the many similarities between Bakhtin and Merleau-Ponty. The interested reader is referred to Gardiner 1998; 2000; and Herrick 2004.

Franz Brentano as a predecessor.<sup>17</sup> Brentano's work on human perception leads to three tenets that suggest the commonality between phenomenology and *Gestalt*: the utterance is distinct from the sum of its parts; it is inseparable from its context in quite a specific way; and it is constructed from different elements. Brentano and psychology also share, to a certain extent, a privileging of the description of perception over its analysis which clearly emerges in phenomenology, and which is a marker of Bakhtin's intellectual development: the historical narratives of the 1930s are different to the typological structures of the 1920s not least in their attempted sociological analyses (Moran 2000, p. 33). Brentano carries forward an interest in subjectless propositions (for example, "It is raining") that features heavily in other strands of pre-pragmatist linguistic thought, and which Voloshinov will develop (Brentano 1969 [1889], pp. 98-108; cf. Nerlich and Clarke 1996). Language hence becomes a contested terrain for epistemology: is language, and its capacity to express truth, entirely socially-created and determined – the *Gestalt* and phenomenological position – or can it still refer to something transcendent which humans access rather than control – the neo-Kantian argument? This debate is consistently played out, without resolution, in Bakhtin's writings.

Brentano's philosophy of language is particularly significant for Bakhtin because of its influence on other linguistic phenomenologists, to whom we will finally turn. Brentano conceived of three kinds of linguistic function – presentations, judgements, and expressions of liking or disliking – that correlated with three levels of mental act. The triumvirate were not to be considered as distinct entities but bound up with one another, so that no judgement was without its emotional or subjective shading, and indeed no expression of preference without the implication of a statement about the object. Brentano's work was developed by his student Anton Marty, who also divided genetic and descriptive approaches to language, examined subjectless propositions, and cast the entire development of speech as the story of man's capacity for social evolution through self-interest (Nerlich and Clarke 1996, pp. 188-9). Marty heavily underscored the rhetorical function of language, those elements designed to move others to action, no matter how the phrasing attempts to disguise the intention:

Now, if I ask a pupil in the Socratic fashion: "Isn't 2x2 four?" Should this be called a question or is rather a statement in the linguistic guise of a question? And on the other hand, if I order somebody politely: "I would like to ask the gentlemen x and y to come to

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<sup>17</sup> For a detailed and probing analysis of Brentano's legacy to twentieth-century thought, see Smith 1994.



my office tomorrow”, using the stress and the punctuation of the full stop and not of the exclamation: is this therefore a statement? Only the colour has changed, otherwise the meaning remains the same!

(from a 1925 article, quoted Nerlich and Clarke 1996, p. 198)

This appeal to others is characterised by another phenomenologist of language, Karl Bühler, as the “triggering” function of language, which he places alongside other two categories, representation (Marty’s presentation) and expression (judgement). Bühler considered Marty too reliant on the triggering aspect, and broadened the way in which language is to be understood as social. He proposed two fields in which language is simultaneously comprehended, namely the index field (*Ziegefeld*) and the symbol field (*Symbolfeld*). The *Ziegefeld* is the immediate context which surrounds the linguistic act, the immediate reference of the speaker and the common background that the conversational participants share. The *Symbolfeld* is the more abstract, linguistic side of context, how the words fit together and are intended to be understood. This sophistication of *Gestalt* relations of part and whole also marks a development of phenomenological concepts of social influence and immediacy, as the basis for study should always be the “concrete speech event”, but with constant reference to its transcendent conditions (Bühler 1982 [1933], p. 103). In this way Bühler is shown as a synthesiser of influences, as his work attempts to see language both as an Husserlian abstract entity dedicated to ideal meaning, and a Saussurian social fact, inexplicable without the human sciences (Nerlich and Clarke 1996, p. 227). This is precisely the same tension latent within Bakhtin’s 1930s works, and which becomes overlaid with further complications as he continues to struggle. The significance of Bühler’s work for the Bakhtin Circle is enormous, and it appears relatively late in the works of Bakhtin himself. Voloshinov translated Bühler’s 1922 article on syntax into Russian, and “Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry” mimics, even in its title, the division of *Ziegefeld* (life) and *Symbolfeld* (poetry). Bühler’s “communicative psychology” of patient-doctor relations is employed extensively in Voloshinov’s *Freudianism*, and both Bühler and Marty would have been familiar to Kagan through the reports to the State Academy for Research in the Arts where he worked (Brandist 2002a, pp. 59, 63-4; 2004c, p. 101). Bakhtin follows the “linguistic turn” prompted by Voloshinov’s studies of the later 1920s, but a serious assimilation of Bühler’s work does not appear until the 1950s. In the essay translated as “The Problem of Speech Genres”, Bakhtin explores the personal aspects of utterances, their orientation towards a “particular

referentially semantic content”, the literal meaning of the words or Bühler’s representation; and the *expressive* aspect, “that is, the speaker’s subjective emotional evaluation of the referentially semantic content”, a term and concept taken wholesale from Bühler (Bakhtin 1986 [1952-3], p. 84). The very concept of discursive genres fundamentally relies on the activity of the listener, the conscious intentionality of the speaker, and a shared context between them to guarantee sense, all phenomenological elements most energetically advanced by Bühler. The crystallisation of experience in language is one of the aspects of Bakhtin’s work that most attracted Western attention from the 1980s onwards, and to underline the importance of Bühler in this process is not to diminish Bakhtin’s significance, but to reinforce his active engagement within certain intellectual contexts.

#### 7.4. Derrida, Husserl, and materialist phenomenologies

Derrida’s affiliation to Husserl, and more generally phenomenology, differs from Bakhtin’s to Bühler in at least one crucial sense: while Bakhtin’s early works act as an *implicit* commentary on the philosophical currents of his time, Derrida’s work in the 1960s and after forms an *explicit* interpretation. His earliest academic works dealt with Husserl and “the ideality of the literary object”; his first published work was a preface to Husserl’s “The Origin of Geometry”; his earliest collections of essays (*Speech and Phenomena*, *Writing and Difference*, and, in a rather different sense, *Of Grammatology*)<sup>18</sup> are universally preoccupied with Husserl and Heidegger; and he persistently returns to phenomenology as a paradigmatic way of doing philosophy (Derrida 1983b, p. 36). Phenomenology played a significant role in French thought from the 1930s onwards, and meshed with the native Bergsonism and the previously-sketched interest in Hegel. The waning of Hegelian philosophy in France during the 1950s meant the waxing of Nietzschean and Heideggerian thought, and a renewed interest in phenomenology of a rather different sort which turned to the intersection between Husserl and Heidegger as the most fertile ground. Because of the vagaries of translation and publication, Husserl’s later work was more rapidly accepted and employed in France than his earlier, and the differences between his perspective and Scheler’s and Heidegger’s were elided (Spiegelberg 1982 [1959], p. 435). This

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<sup>18</sup> Spivak’s introduction to her translation of this text explicates how the work is stitched together from several book reviews, critical pieces, essays and observations (Spivak 1974).

productive confusion, aided in no small measure by the Davos debate and its consequences explored below, enabled French schools of phenomenology to flourish with as much vigour as German, and by the time of Derrida's arrival on the intellectual scene in the 1960s, to provide the dominant context for academic philosophy. Derrida's specific moves within this frame through his investigations of Husserl and Heidegger will be detailed in this section and following, but let us initially recall a couple of general points about his habits of reading. By asking, "What gives a theory of knowledge the authority to determine the essence and origin of language?" Derrida turns the phenomenology of language from a Husserlian question of epistemology towards a Heideggerian matter of ontology (Derrida 1973 [1967], p. 7). Yet in so doing he follows a predominant tendency within the phenomenological movement: that language can tell us more about social or individual being than it can about some abstract, ideal truth has been a conviction of certain linguists (for instance, Bühler) long before Heidegger. Derrida to some extent can establish his radical revision of phenomenology because he neglects other strands of the diverse schools, before, after, and contemporaneous with Husserl, suggesting difficulties in dilating his work from his comments on Husserl to phenomenology in general, let alone the Western philosophical tradition. Secondly, an important way in which Derrida's work self-consciously returns to phenomenology is through an analysis of the word's etymology, persistently scrutinising the connections it implies between light, seeing, and presence:

the prevalence granted to the *phenomenological* metaphor, to all the varieties of *phainesthai*, or shining, lighting, clearing, *Lichtung*, etc., opens up onto the space of presence and the presence of space, understood within the opposition of the near and the far – just as the acknowledged privilege not only of language, but of spoken language (voice, listening, etc.), is in consonance with the motif of presence as self-presence.

(Derrida 1982b [1972], p. 132; cf. also 1995 [1992], p. 100; 1998a [1996], p. 7)<sup>19</sup>

What is most significant may be invisible and unspeakable, suggests Derrida, and that which is visible needs to account for its capacity to be seen. This investigation in itself, however, is derivative of the opening of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, where the etymology of "phenomenology" is similarly analysed, and the polysemy of "logos" underscored.<sup>20</sup> Derrida's

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<sup>19</sup> This leaves aside the numerous times Derrida employs "logos" with a nod to the phenomenological tradition.

<sup>20</sup> It also follows through an Heideggerian revision of the weight placed on each element: both Derrida and Heidegger are more interested in *logoi* than *phainomenoi* or, as part of the subtitle to *Speech and Phenomena* has it, "The problem of the sign" (Lawlor 2002, pp. 166-7).

suspicion of phenomenology – which includes scepticism towards certain of Heidegger's premises and concepts, including the *Lichtung* mentioned above – is essentially a Heideggerian figure.

It is therefore no surprise that Derrida's early critique of Husserl follows quite clearly Heideggerian lines. The basis of Derrida's critique in *Speech and Phenomena* and *Edmund Husserl's Origin of Geometry: An Introduction* is temporalisation and recalling Husserl to the complexity of presence that he elsewhere acknowledges:

phenomenology seems to us tormented, if not contested from within, by its own descriptions of the movement of temporalization and of the constitution of intersubjectivity. At the heart of what ties together these two decisive moments of description we recognize an irreducible nonpresence as having a constituting value, and with it a nonlife, a nonpresence or nonself-belonging of the living present, an ineradicable nonprimordially.

(Derrida 1973 [1967], pp. 6-7)

This emphasis on time and the radical human finitude offered by Derrida's reading suggests one model for the text as Heidegger's work on Kant, which again privileges ontology over any sort of epistemology.<sup>21</sup> Derrida is as concerned with death as Heidegger, arguing that the effect of Husserl's firm linkage between presence and the present "is to open myself to the knowledge that in my absence, beyond my empirical existence, before my birth and after my death, *the present is*" (Derrida 1973 [1967], p. 54, 97; cf. 1982b [1972], p. 316). In Derrida's later work, this is nuanced with an understanding of the necessity of an openness towards the future that forms part of a relationship with death: the unexpected, like death, will be completely unknowable, and recognising its hidden role in conditioning everyday existence is essential for epistemological and ethical probity (e.g. Derrida 1996 [1995], p. 36; 1994 [1993], p. 90). There is also an emphasis on the specifically human experience of time that, while certainly present in Heidegger, may come to him from Bergson, and therefore through an alternative genealogy to Sartre and existentialism, not a school habitually associated with Derrida.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* is referred to on page 83 of *Speech and Phenomena*; for extensive commentary on the engagement of ontology and epistemology in transcendental phenomenology, cf. Crowell 2001.

<sup>22</sup> For a reading of Derrida in relation to Sartre, see Hobson 1998, and Howells 1988.

Derrida's criticisms operate within a traditional framework of textual exegesis, and rely heavily on the texts for which they provide commentary, in a manner within the spirit of Heidegger's work if not the more violent letter. For instance, one turning point of the argument is introduced with the phrase, "*Husserl's premises should sanction our saying exactly the contrary*" (Derrida 1973 [1967], p. 96). Part of this chastisement of Husserl for failing to follow his own logic is criticism of his self-closure, especially when it comes to the genetic project of *The Origin of Geometry*. Here, Husserl attempts to write the phenomenology of a history that relies on phenomenology, making it no surprise when he discovers his own premises and conclusions in the body of analysis (Derrida 1978 [1962], p. 30). One of the basic problems in Husserl's investigation is his assumption that the geometers of today are employing the same tools and methods to produce the same results as the originators of their science, in other words taking the past to be simply a variation on the present. Husserl phrases this as a *Rückfrage*, a return inquiry, which Derrida seizes on as one of his favourite postal metaphors: "From a received and *already* readable *document*, the possibility is offered me of asking again, and *in return*, about the primordial and final intention of what has been given to me by tradition." (Derrida 1978 [1962], p. 50). As should be clear from Derrida's other writings about postal systems, all communication is *telecommunication*, from a distance, temporal and geographical (at the very least), and subject to delays, misunderstandings, and the possibility of not arriving (the locus classicus here is Derrida 1987 [1980], e.g. pp. 33-4). It is all of these hazards that Husserl neglects. From Derrida's perspective, he is too caught up in his subjective historical limitations, for instance in seeing the basis of geometry as axioms or rules, an idea dominant in mathematics of the 1930s and that the work of Gödel and others, by emphasising the power of indeterminacy, fundamentally disturbed (Derrida 1978 [1962], p. 55; cf. 1982a [1972], p. 219). Ultimately, Husserl's investigation of geometry neglects its own warnings about historical constitution and the slippage of meaning over time, and discovers determinacy where indeterminacy might as easily have been found.

Derrida drew from his work on Husserl a philosophy of language that acted as a scourge of structuralism and its assumptions. To some extent, this necessitated making a straw man of Husserl and accusing him of a linguistic naivety in which he is only, considering the qualifications about his voluminous archive and internal contradiction, half-culpable; Husserl's philosophy of language is not included in the late turn to a concept of the *Lebenswelt*, and so

remains trapped in a rather subjectivist perspective as an easy target for critics (Simons 1995, p. 132). Husserl posits language as voluntary exteriorisation of knowledge, a revelation of the subject's intention through simple representation which, like Heidegger, ties in what we can know with what we can say (Derrida 1973 [1967], p. 33). Because of this emphasis on consciousness, the disruptive potential of temporality, misunderstanding, and saying more than you intend are all neglected, and it is left to Derrida to theorise more thoroughly a Freudian-informed view of the subjective operation of language. Indeed, when Husserl does discuss consciousness, his is a strongly normalised view, which relies on maturity, sanity, honesty, and other veridical factors, leaving it exposed to a psychoanalytical (or even simply psychological) rebuttal (e.g. Derrida 1978 [1962], p. 80; 1973 [1967], p. 63). Even when the sanity of the participants can be relied upon, language is not so simple a structure that it can be taken at face value. Husserl knows, and Derrida underscores, that language always folds back on itself and becomes commentary as well as argument (Derrida 1973 [1967], p. 57). Partly because of this, language is far less ideal than Husserl desires:

the word's degree of ideal Objectivity is only, we could say, *primary*. Only within a facto-historical language is the noun "Löwe" free, and therefore ideal, compared with its sensible, phonetic, or graphic incarnations. But it remains essentially tied, as a German word, to a real spatiotemporality; it remains interrelated in its very ideal Objectivity with the de facto existence of a given language and thus with the factual subjectivity of a certain speaking community. Its ideal Objectivity is then relative and distinguishable only as an empirical fact from that of the French or English word "*lion*".

(Derrida 1978 [1962], p. 70)

What Husserl wants to take as ideal, and upon it build a transcendentalism, Derrida recognises as socially imbricated and constrained by time and place. So although Husserl suggests geometry becomes idealised when it is formalised in language, Derrida rebuts this as a forgetting of the locality that marks the language (Derrida 1978 [1962], p. 90). Transcendentalism for Husserl is the point at which individual consciousness stops being part of the world, and becomes instead something more primordial and creative (Philippe 1995, p. 280). This is a turn that Heidegger (among others) refuses, suggesting we do not rise above Being but instead become more conscious of it, and again Derrida follows, arguing that this consciousness of Being will be

neither complete nor ascertainable.<sup>23</sup> Once more this is played through language, which Derrida reads as an unbinding of self-presence rather than the guarantee Husserl desires:

To speak to someone is doubtless to hear oneself speak, to be heard by oneself; but, at the same time, if one is heard by another, to speak is to make him *repeat immediately* in himself the hearing-oneself-speak in the very form in which I effectuated it.

(Derrida 1973 [1967], p. 80)

While Husserl's theory of essences and their perception may *result* in a metaphysical structure, it does not *begin* from one: the effort Husserl describes is to experience the originary givenness of the object rather than anything transcendental (Lyotard 1991 [1954], p. 40). In one sense, therefore, Heidegger's and Derrida's revisions are designed to recall Husserl to this project rather than divert him from it. One can also construct a valorised philosophical line of descent: Kant revised Descartes' collapse of knowledge and experience; Husserl redesigned Kant's new scheme; and Derrida Husserl's rewriting (Norris 2000a, p. 117). Concepts such as *différance*, presented as radically new by Derridean acolytes and literary theorists, if not by Derrida himself, develop questions about the possibility of achieving certainty in human knowledge and the special place of temporality, which, while significantly treated by Husserl, also feature in a wide philosophical tradition before him.

To argue as I have that Derrida's critique of Husserl cannot be too rapidly expanded to other branches of the phenomenological movement should prompt the critic to examine possible points of influence from these other diverse offshoots. While Derrida himself has described the importance of Husserlian phenomenology as "a discipline of incomparable rigour", he carefully qualifies the lineage he has in mind:

Not – especially not – in the versions proposed by Sartre or by Merleau-Ponty which were then dominant, but rather in opposition to them, or without them, in particular in those areas which a certain type of French phenomenology appeared at times to avoid, whether in history, in science, in the historicity of science, the history of ideal objects and of truth, and hence in politics as well, and even in ethics.

(Derrida 1983b, p. 38)

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<sup>23</sup> Merleau-Ponty suggests the other possibilities open to phenomenology by taking this in a different direction, not considering the authenticity or completeness of the transcendence (after all, "The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction"), but the social dimension: "Transcendental subjectivity is a revealed subjectivity, revealed to itself and to others, and is for that reason an intersubjectivity" (Merleau-Ponty 1962 [1945], pp. xiv, 361).

The division of the types of phenomenology gestured at from those proposed by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty is not, to say the least, rigorous, and Derrida appears to have in mind what can be broadly labelled as materialist phenomenology, an investigation of perceptions that refuses the transcendental turn and concentrates instead on the things themselves. This is perhaps best exemplified by Gaston Bachelard, whose creative and abundant work I will turn to in a moment, but first let us follow Derrida a little while in his intellectual autobiography:

I should like to recall here, as one indication among others, a book which is no longer discussed today, a book whose merits can be very diversely evaluated, but which for a certain number of us pointed to a task, a difficulty and no doubt an impasse. This is Tran Duc Thao's *Phénoménologie et matérialisme dialectique*. After a commentary which retraced the movement of transcendental phenomenology and in particular the transition from static constitution to genetic constitution, the book attempted, with less obvious success, to open the way for a dialectical materialism that would admit some of the rigorous demands of transcendental phenomenology. One can imagine what the stakes of such an attempt might have been and its outcome was of less importance than the stakes involved.

(Derrida 1983b, p. 38)

Thao's work is indeed rarely discussed today, and his *Phenomenology and Dialectical Materialism*, along with the later *Investigations into the Origins of Language and Consciousness*, are commonly relegated to footnotes of history.<sup>24</sup>

Tran Duc Thao (1917-1993) was born in Vietnam as a French subject, and travelled to France in 1936 to continue his education, receiving his *agrégation* in 1943 with a thesis on Husserl.<sup>25</sup> He was a student of Merleau-Ponty's and a contributor to *Les Temps modernes*, leading the anti-colonial wing of that journal and writing *Phenomenology and Dialectical Materialism*, before returning to the newly Communist nation of Vietnam in 1951. In 1956 he was made Dean of History in Vietnam's first national university, suggesting good relations with the ruling Workers' Party; but he fell out of favour with the Party during the later 1950s, and in

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<sup>24</sup> Much more detail on connections between Thao and Derrida, as well as an investigation of possible motivations for Derrida's separation of Thao and Merleau-Ponty, can be found in my article "A book which is no longer discussed today": Tran Duc Thao, Jacques Derrida, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty", forthcoming in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*.

<sup>25</sup> For this and almost all of the biographical information on Thao I am indebted to one excellent article by Shawn McHale (McHale 2002).



1958 published a scathing piece of self-criticism, resigned his university post, and disappeared into the provinces. He languished in rural obscurity for the next thirty years, translating classics of European philosophy into Vietnamese, and working on his own *Investigations*. A political thaw in the late 1980s allowed him to seek medical treatment in France, where he met friends from the 1940s and 50s, who seemed as impressed by his knowledge of phenomenology of that period as they were disturbed by his regurgitation of Party-line politics. He died in France in 1993, neglected on one level by the post-1950s academic world, but on another, a significant forebear of the political and philosophical excitement of the generation of 1968.

Thao's *Phenomenology and Dialectical Materialism* is a curious hybrid, shifting between three dominant positions: Husserlian phenomenology, Marxism, and science, especially biology and child psychology. The first section of the book is a detailed outline and critique of Husserl, very much along Merleau-Ponty's sociocentric lines, although with a more explicitly Marxist emphasis on an absolute, social and historical truth: "*Transcendental ideality*", he argues, "should not correspond simply to empirical *reality* but also to *absolute reality*" (Thao 1986 [1951], p. 45). Because of this emphasis on absolute reality, it seems logical to turn from phenomenology to the natural sciences, among other things, a history of the fish and the first land-dwelling reptiles, in an attempt to provide a physiological history of man's developing perception. This opens the final movement of the book, a history of social institutions and the money economy, and of how individual perception can be affected by such social conditions. The capitalist division of labour is what stands between an experience of authentic reality and us, and it is the responsibility of a Marxist phenomenology to alter the mode of production and hence, in several senses, the ways we create our world. From the beginning, Thao is quick to emphasize how the encounter between the titular elements is born of necessity, not chance: "it is not a question in any sense of a mere juxtaposition of two contradictory points of view: Marxism appears to us as the only conceivable solution to problems raised by phenomenology itself" (Thao 1986 [1951], p. xxi). The main device phenomenology lacks is the dialectic, a blindness which Thao ascribes to its class origins, arguing that the transcendentalism Husserl opposed to a more naturalistic attitude "does nothing but express the *natural* repugnance of the ruling classes to recognizing in that labor that they exploit the true source of meanings to which they lay claim" (Thao 1986 [1951], p. xxvi). Marxism can move phenomenology beyond this bourgeois prejudice, and open the possibility of changing or naturalizing the world, which the third part of

the text deals with most explicitly. Individual ownership encourages individual perception and an idealization of the object that relies on closure, possession, and a denial of real exteriority (Thao 1986 [1951], pp. 175, 177). All of this builds to a rather messianic conclusion, and one perhaps based more on the early Marx than the hard-nosed materialist relied upon in the introduction:

In the construction of socialism and the passage to communism is realized, finally, that *universal reconciliation* which was the dream of bourgeois thought in the idealistic dialectic of the forms of exploitation and which the proletariat places on its true ground by means of the organization of social labor, where every class structure and every pretext of exclusivity is suppressed.

(Thao 1986 [1951], p. 218)

The balance between the different elements of the title of Thao's work can be seen to shift as it unfolds, from an attempt to correct the errors of phenomenology through dialectical materialism, to a Marxism tinged with the idealism of other philosophical projects.

While Thao may seem an unlikely intellectual bedfellow for Derrida, there are remarkable points of similarity. There are direct points of textual influence; for instance, Derrida follows Thao's translation of Husserl's *Leistung* as "production", and lays a similar emphasis to Thao on Husserl's slogan that "omnitemporality is only a mode of temporality" (Lawlor 2002, p. 54; cf. Derrida 1978 [1962], p. 40, n. 27). In his unpublished *Mémoire* (master's thesis), Derrida calls Thao's note on how Husserlian temporalisation acts as an abstraction of the real world "remarkable", and suggests "Tran-Duc-Thao penetrates the sense of the living present 'very brilliantly'" (quoted Lawlor 2002, p. 247, n. 24). Derrida's early critique of Husserl is, like Thao's, an interrogation of the possibilities of determining original material conditions, most noticeably in relation to the issue of language. He brings to the fore Husserl's worries over the extent to which language should be recognized as an ideal system of meaning, and how its material existence could impact on that judgment. For instance:

Insofar as the unity of the word – what lets it be recognized as a word, *the same* word, the unity of a sound-pattern and a sense – is not to be confused with the multiple sensible events of its employment or taken to depend on them, the *sameness* of the word is ideal; it is the ideal possibility of repetition, and it loses nothing by the reduction of *any* empirical event marked by its appearance, nor all of them.

(Derrida 1973 [1967], p. 41)

Derrida, of course, is interested in how language perpetually slips away from this “ideal possibility of repetition”, while Thao develops this argument so that the ideal “*sameness* of the word” is grounded in society, in a common recognition of an object. The mutually understood indication of a “this here” rather than the perception of an essence therefore becomes the fundamental engine for language (Thao 1984 [1973], p. 15). In both cases, Husserl’s reliance on a division of real and ideal content in language is displaced in favour of more critically materialistic models, which naturally open questions of ontology and being. The Derridean attempt to call an epistemology into doubt through, at the risk of prolixity, an analysis of the possible conditions for an ontology, can also be seen in Thao where the first of his *Investigations* examines

how the indicative sign, which appears at the very origin of consciousness, effects the fundamental mediation between social practice and lived knowledge, a mediation which assures the correspondence between knowledge and things. It is the meaning of this sign which is the basis of the concept of *matter*, as an essential concept of the theory of knowledge.

(Thao 1984 [1973], p. 35)

In *Phenomenology and Dialectical Materialism*, this desire for concreteness is phrased even more strongly, as “There has to be a return to the actual lived in order to explicate the meaning which constitutes its very being. In the *experience* of authentic knowledge is revealed the very thing which constitutes its truth value” (Thao 1986 [1951], p. 28). Derrida remains a great deal more suspicious than Thao as to the possibilities of understanding experience, let alone finding the “truth value” of “authentic knowledge”. Derrida is also more apprehensive of the dialectic, although he readily acknowledges that to step beyond it is extremely troublesome, and that the thought of difference-without-resolution must set out from a dialectical structure (cf. 3.3.2., above). A consequence of this which Derrida would not seek to avoid is the reintegration of politics within philosophy: indeed, during one of his 1967 conference papers, he mentions the situation in Vietnam and popular dissatisfaction with the French government’s policy as indications of the stakes when discussing the concept of man (Derrida 1982b [1972], pp. 113-4). Whereas Derrida’s interest in the dialectic and other political-philosophical forms became more explicit in recent years, one final point of consanguinity with Thao rather dropped out. This is

the early Derrida's ambition to produce a history of philosophy and philosophy of history through the figure of writing. In *Of Grammatology*, for instance, this is quite clearly an aim; yet during the 1970s, the focus shifts from the philosophy of writing to writing about philosophy (Derrida 1974 [1967], pp. 3-5). He does not accept the grand narratives of an author like Thao, and so develops a Marxist perspective more as a critical tool than as a profession of faith.

A rather better-known variant of materialist phenomenology can be found in the work of Gaston Bachelard (1884–1962), and similar traces of influence marked in Derrida. Both accept the fundamental importance of metaphor in human language: that a theory of meaning must account for words being materially different to the things they represent. Bachelard believes a critical location can be found within metaphor to unpack its cultural history, while Derrida would prefer to see all language as metaphorical, and therefore all critique as immanent (Norris 2000b, p. 119; cf. Derrida 1982b [1972], pp. 264-71 for Derrida's argument about Bachelard sliding into metaphor).<sup>26</sup> They also share an interest in the phonological disruption of language, the foregrounding of the artificiality of speech through explorations of words by their sounds rather than their meanings. This is seen in Bachelard's improvisations on the phonetics of words associated with water, and how their presence in other words makes solid objects appear more liquid; and, in a very self-conscious fashion, Derrida's phonological analyses in "Qual Quelle", "The Double Session", and *Glas* (Bachelard 1983 [1942], pp. 190-2; Derrida 1982b [1972], pp. 273-306; 1982a [1972], pp. 173-286; 1986 [1974]). The common literary grounding for these endeavours is something explicitly developed in Bachelard's avant-garde attempts to renew awareness of human perception: "Everyone must learn to escape from the rigidity of the mental habits formed by contact with familiar experiences. Everyone must destroy even more carefully than his phobias, his 'philiias', his complacent acceptance of first intuitions" (Bachelard 1964 [1938], p. 6). This is the same radical awareness that Derrida attempts to foster throughout his work:

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<sup>26</sup> The argument is offered in the Conclusion that Bakhtin too believes that a critical position can be found within language from where philosophy can be criticised, suggesting that it is Derrida's thought which is radical on this point, rather than Bakhtin's conservative.

To “deconstruct” philosophy, thus, would be to think – in the most faithful, interior way – the structured genealogy of philosophy’s concepts, but at the same time to determine – from a certain exterior that is unqualifiable or unnamable by philosophy – what this history has been able to dissimulate or forbid, making itself into a history by means of this somewhere motivated repression.

(Derrida 1981 [1972], p. 6)

Like Bachelard, Derrida chooses to investigate the accretion of cultural and linguistic tradition around common presuppositions without adopting a strictly historical methodology.

Bachelard provides a way for phenomenology to consider science in detail with neither Husserl’s vague enthusiasm nor Heidegger’s terror of encroaching technologism (Norris 2000b, p. 138). This is crucial for Derrida’s project of investigating, to borrow a phrase from Foucault, “technologies of the self” in the most fundamental sense, namely the construction of the idea of selfhood and its effects on our interaction with the world. Derrida is interested in more specific uses of science in technology, tracing the development of the twin phenomena of faith and knowledge as a result of technologies of communication, and the basic conception of writing as a technical activity (Derrida 1998a [1996], p.24, continued pp. 70-1, n. 17; 1998). One sum of this dual emphasis on metaphor and technology is a privileging in Bachelard’s work of the figure of the graft: “The *graft* seems to be a concept essential for understanding human psychology. In my opinion it is the human stamp, the specifying mark of the human imagination” (Bachelard 1983 [1942], p. 10). This emblem of the artificiality and the *historicity* of human culture, consciousness as an artefact determined for specific purposes, is strongly developed by Derrida, and with a similar underlying critique of naïve materialism: “There is no nature, only effects of nature: denaturation or naturalization” (Derrida 1992 [1991], p. 170; 1986 [1974], p. 168b *et passim*; 1982b [1972], p. 320). Bachelard coined the term *surrationalism* to express going beyond and above reason while still preserving it, and as an imitative echo of “surrealism”. It is loosely aligned with psychoanalysis in its attempts to find the basic principles underlying the modern scientific mind, and it relies at least conceptually on the analysis of dreams and texts to reveal certain patterns (Bachelard 1968 [1940], p. 32). This is in some sense a Modernist attempt to uncover the structuring patterns of thought which Derrida’s post- or anti-Modernist project will sublimate, using its own critical methods to call its authority into question, as well as doubting

whether all attempts to step outside of rationalism are of equal validity.<sup>27</sup> One final point touches on probably the most influential of Bachelard's concepts, especially through its appropriation by Louis Althusser, namely the idea of the epistemological break. This radical disjuncture of forms of cognition begins, for Bachelard, with the birth of rationalism and the subsequent conflict with intuition and common sense. It is therefore tied in with psychoanalysis and the unconscious: the scientific mind relies on a repression of what is most obvious, and engages in a necessary antagonism with society (Tiles 1984, p. 57). This concept of forgetting on a cultural level, of fundamental repression allowing key ideas to come into being, is part of the radical use of psychoanalysis which Derrida would also desire (cf. Derrida 1996 [1995]; 1987 [1980], pp. 259-409).<sup>28</sup> It is beholden on us, as critics and historians of ideas, to become as conscious as possible of these actions of forgetting, and try to analyse the social and intellectual conditions helping to determine them.

### 7.5. Conclusion

Phenomenology is significant to Bakhtin and Derrida as a modern formulation of a set of post-Kantian problems that have featured in many of the analyses thus far. It offers a model of the conscious individual interacting with a responsive world, with particular influence from language, and an awareness about the difficulty of separating the subjective individual from all levels of their objective circumstances. This is one way in which the category of intention is so significant, because it enables the early Bakhtin to move towards a historicizing position more fully developed with reference to Hegel and Cassirer, while also allowing Derrida to find a more fundamental level of intention with the linguistic division of the world. Larger differences emerge out of this subjectivist/anti-humanist split. Bakhtin draws on *Gestalt* theory to reinforce his arguments about the phased development of ways of seeing, and phenomenologies of language, such as that offered by Karl Bühler, to link this in with speech and literature. By

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<sup>27</sup> On this point, see Derrida's comments on Foucault's *History of Madness*, and his reflections on the debate which ensued (Derrida 1981 [1967], pp. 31-63; 1998c [1996], pp. 70-118).

<sup>28</sup> This power of forgetting is developed in Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* through an analysis of figures of secrecy, such as drawers, chests, and wardrobes. This includes the striking statement: "The casket contains the things that are *unforgettable*, unforgettable for us, but also unforgettable for those to whom we are going to give our treasures. Here the past, the present and a future are condensed. Thus the casket is memory of what is immemorial" (Bachelard 1992 [1958], p. 84). This surely anticipates Derrida's concept of the *crypt*, the storehouse for what remains inaccessible for individuals but present for culture (e.g. Derrida 1998a [1996], although the concept has quite a history in Derrida's work, dating as far back as the 1970s; cf. 1979, pp. 103, 176).

virtue of his familiarity with the early Husserl, as well as his originary neo-Kantian orientation, Bakhtin develops an idealist-leaning phenomenology that preserves transcendental categories. In contrast, Derrida builds upon the Heideggerian critique of Husserl, synthesised with other variants of materialist phenomenology, in an attempt to reground phenomenology in an awareness of its presuppositions, which for Derrida means language. Perception is as fundamental for Derrida as it is for Husserl, yet much harder to analyse through the traditional structures of philosophy, and not individualistic in the way that Heidegger suggested. Derrida's concept of language as a bearer of social influence is very different to Bakhtin's, although both would regard phenomenology as a significant contributor to their arguments. This chapter has explained the diversity of this understanding, as have previous chapters accounted for varying interpretations of other philosophers and their significance for Bakhtin and Derrida. The next chapter and the Concluding Remarks draw these differences together, concentrating later on how their affiliations inform a debate about literary theory, but first on the staging of their divergence as represented by the Davos debate.

## *Conclusion: The Davos debate and after*

### *8. The Davos debate*

#### *8.1. Introduction*

While the specific topic of the 1929 debate between Heidegger and Cassirer in the Swiss town of Davos was Kant, the encounter also represented the meeting of not just different philosophies (phenomenology and neo-Kantianism), but different concepts of philosophical history. It therefore provides a means of drawing together the different schools and movements examined by this thesis under the aegis of two crucial influences on Derrida and Bakhtin. As an event, the Davos debate brings together the thematic levels of this work (changing responses to Kantian philosophy) with the structural ones (histories of reception and reinscription), and this chapter attempts to summarise the significance and effects of this concatenation. The questions of intellectual history suggested by Heidegger and Cassirer are engaged in a profound sense, in that one concern of the debate is over what is contemporary in philosophy, what has a delayed effect, what should be forgotten and left behind: what, here, now, should we be considering? This is developed in my Concluding Remarks, where past and current developments of literary theory are tentatively explored in order to produce some suggestions about where theory can go next. First, however, the similarities between Bakhtin and Cassirer, and Derrida and Heidegger, are unfolded, and a brief sketch drawn of the Davos dispute as a point of separation for two philosophical traditions.

#### *8.2. Davos*

The differences and similarities in philosophical affiliations between Bakhtin and Derrida are to some extent summarised in the Davos debate between Martin Heidegger and Ernst Cassirer. In neither case can it really be cast as a confrontation of neo-Kantianism and phenomenology, as the participants had moved from narrow definitions of those doctrines. The Davos debate is also not really, as advertised, a debate about Kant, as the two interpretations offered speak much more to contemporary concerns and philosophical methods than to Kant's, although hopefully it has



been one of the achievements of this thesis to note how Kantian preoccupations repeatedly recur in different historical guises. Similarly, Bakhtin and Derrida may be initially compared on the level of theories of language and literature, but their commonality or otherwise runs much deeper, and is based more in their contemporary circumstances than sometimes acknowledged. The arguments adopted by Cassirer and Heidegger at the debate will be explored in more detail below after analyses of their respective relations to Bakhtin and Derrida and an outline of the events at Davos.

The Davos debate ran from the 17<sup>th</sup> of March to the 6<sup>th</sup> of April 1929 and was sponsored by the French, German, and Swiss governments as an “International University Course”, arguably an attempt to defuse intellectually the gathering political tensions between the European nations (Friedman 2000, p. 1). It formed part of an annual series of seminars on Kant, and was an opportunity to hear this thinker debated by Cassirer, the editor of a new standard edition and author of a commentary and guide, and Heidegger, one of the brightest stars of modern European philosophy and recent author of his own Kant-book. There is uncertainty over the tone of the debate, and whether Heidegger and Cassirer liked each other as individuals, or even respected each other as philosophers. The attending Ludwig Englert states how well the two men got on, and how Heidegger clearly missed Cassirer when the latter was incapacitated by illness during the lecture series; and Cassirer himself remembered being treated well by Heidegger, and accepted his invitation to lecture at Freiburg around 1933 where their friendship was renewed (Hamburg 1964, p. 210; Friedman 2000, p. 6). There are darker notes, however; Hendrik Pos, admittedly an unfriendly witness, recalls how Heidegger refused to shake Cassirer’s hand at the close of the debate (Pos 1949, p. 69). From the outset, the contemporary audience recognised the stakes of the discussion and the worlds that it brought together; Englert remarks:

The discussion between Cassirer and Heidegger had not just intellectual consequences. We also came to know them personally: this short, dark-brown man, this fine skier and sportsman with his energetic and indisturbable expression who, in imposing solitude, lived for the problems he had raised; and, by contrast, that other one, with his silvery hair, this “Olympian” by appearance as well as by his wide-ranging dimensions of thought, his comprehensive problem-formulations, his cheerful face and kind openness to others, his vitality, elasticity, and distinguished aristocratic bearing.

(quoted in Hamburg 1964, p. 210)

Yet for all their differences, personal and philosophical, both Cassirer and Heidegger oriented themselves by the predominant traditions of neo-Kantian thought. Cassirer, with his close connections to Cohen and the Marburg school, seemed to be the defender of the tradition, while Heidegger, with his Freiburg school background and more radical personal interpretation, looked like the young challenger. Heidegger was also closely associated with Husserl and phenomenology, a movement requiring at least a reconsideration of neo-Kantianism's basic principles. The professed aim of either participant was not to defeat the other in debate or force a change of mind, but rather to understand better what the other was saying, and indeed the encounter renewed an intra-European intellectual exchange. After 1929, a "small but steady stream of French students began to go to Germany to study with Husserl and Heidegger (and to a lesser extent Karl Jaspers): Gandillac, Emmanuel Levinas, Sartre, and Merleau-Ponty among the best known", and the effects of this French resurgence of interest in German philosophy have been evident through this narrative (Heckman 1974, p. xviii). For most observers, the laurels of the debate were won by Heidegger, whose philosophy captured the imagination of the young and intellectually progressive audience, and historically Cassirer's mode of philosophising was certainly soon eclipsed; yet this does not mean that Cassirer's position is exhausted, or that Heidegger's is free from difficulties. Cassirer neatly encapsulates one of the main criticisms of his opponent when he argues that parts of Heidegger's book on Kant revealed him as a usurper rather than a commentator, and this motif of fundamentally different kinds of interpretation is a significant one within Davos (Schrug 1967, p. 95). Cassirer and Heidegger both recognise the significance of philosophy as a tool for individual and cultural intellectual liberation, and support one another's calls for development of this theme, yet in such different terms that their concepts of freedom appear irreconcilable (e.g. Taft 1990, pp. 173, 178). The significance of such terminological differences is perhaps a fitting note on which to close this brief introduction, as it is something recognised by the contemporary audience:

Philological remark: both men speak a completely different language. For us, it is a matter of extracting something common from these two languages. An attempt at translation was already made by Cassirer. [...] We must hear the acknowledgement of this translation from Heidegger. The translational possibility extends to the point at which something emerges which does not allow translation. Those are the terms which demarcate what is characteristic of one group of languages. [...] Should it be found that there is no translation for [a list of suggested terms] from both sides, then these would be the terms with which to differentiate the spirit of Cassirer's philosophy from Heidegger's.

(A question from Hendrik Pos, a participant in the seminar, Taft 1990, p. 180)<sup>1</sup>

So much detail is contained in this short quotation, the only intervention recorded in the transcript – the suggestion of different attitudes of the participants, the separation of the audience from the speakers, the quest for unity against apparent discord – that perhaps the safest generalisation one can make is that language functions on several levels in the debate to separate the speakers. From different grounds and to different extents, both Heidegger and Cassirer would argue for a linguistic determinist model, where what we can say helps determine what we see. If this mutual recognition of the influence of language inhibits communication between them rather than provides a common starting-point, then it is the critic's role to examine and explain the subsequent "parting of the ways".<sup>2</sup> The two very different readings of Kant may not resolve into one coherent synthesis, or indeed point to a third way of doing philosophy, but at the very least they can help elucidate the different traditions which create an apparent divide between Bakhtin and Derrida.

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<sup>1</sup> Before preceding any further, the problematic status of the text of the debate should be explained. The basic version is a transcription by two attending students, Karl Ritter and Otto Friedrich Bollnow, published in the fourth edition of Heidegger's *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* (1929). One of the transcribers is quoted by Heidegger as calling it "not a word-for-word protocol [...] rather a subsequent elaboration based on notes taken at the time" (Taft 1990, p. xvi). It was distributed in a heavily abridged form at the end of the Davos meetings, which was the basis of the earliest translations and commentaries (Krois 1987, pp. 225-6, n. 26). James S. Churchill first rendered a new abridgement of the full transcript in an edition of Heidegger's *Kantbuch* published by the Indiana University Press in 1962, and Carl H. Hamburg offered another version in a stand-alone article two years later (Hamburg 1964). But the full transcript was not translated until Richard Taft in his 1990 edition of *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, which in any case forms the most sensitive rendering. This more complete text remains far from perfect, and reads, as Hamburg suggests, like a series of meetings or exchanges conflated into one; nevertheless, this, and a number of unreliable witnesses to the debate, are all the evidence currently available, and provide enough to gauge the general direction of the seminar (Hamburg 1964, p. 212).

<sup>2</sup> A phrase used by Michael Friedman in the title of his fine work about the Davos debate.

### 8.3. Derrida and Heidegger

As noted above, it would be unfair to regard Heidegger as a representative of phenomenology, as he dropped almost all uses of the word after *Being and Time* (1927), and only reintroduced it during the retrospective writings in the late 1940s (Spiegelberg 1982 [1959], p. 337). Perhaps it is more precise to argue that phenomenology provided the framework for the articulation of Heidegger's own philosophy, the most convenient set of tools for fulfilling a purpose; and a similar argument can be made about Derrida's use of Heidegger (Moran 2000, p. 194). This is not to devalue the profound and far-reaching similarities between the two men's work, but rather to nuance the simplistic portrayal of Derrida as a Heideggerian acolyte with an appreciation of the other contexts that gave shape to Derrida's voluminous works. Derrida publicly stated that "What I have attempted to do could not have been possible without the opening of Heidegger's questions", and there is rumoured to be an unpublished mass of material by Derrida on Heidegger, amounting to some 3000 pages (Derrida 1981 [1972], p. 9; Donato 1984, p. 3).<sup>3</sup> One of Heidegger's projects is to integrate philosophy (specifically, ontology) with an understanding of everyday social life, a set of concerns from *Lebensphilosophie* among other sources (Dreyfus 1991, p. 18). This is an ambition with which Derrida is heavily involved, as his whole attempt to recover the complexity of everyday speech acts (or even acts of understanding of any sort) suggests; to recall one of the quotations central to my argument,

"everyday language" is not innocent or neutral. It is the language of Western metaphysics, and it carries with it not only a considerable number of presuppositions of all types, but also presuppositions inseparable from metaphysics, which, although little attended to, are knotted into a system.

(Derrida 1981 [1972], p. 19)

This return of philosophy to lived experience is also a way of taking a half-step beyond the problems of the philosophy of reflection (as detailed in the chapters on Kant and Hegel), replacing a series of mirrors and images with an emphasis on living in the world and the full understanding of that experience, a deepening of reflection rather than an evasion (Gasché 1986,

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<sup>3</sup> Derrida paid a similarly dramatic tribute to Husserl, saying: "It is true that for me Husserl's work, and precisely the notion of *epoché*, has been and still is a major indispensable gesture. In everything I try to say and write the *epoché* is implied. I would say that I constantly try to practice that whenever I am speaking or writing" (quoted Moran 2000, p. 456).

p. 83). A deal of this refusal of metaphysics and interest in everyday experience is familiar from Nietzsche, a key figure for both Heidegger and Derrida, although, as both noted above, Derrida stringently refuses the essentialism Heidegger finds in his nineteenth-century predecessor. One of the central preoccupations of all three authors, and one which emerges pellucidly in the Davos debate, is an interrogation of the possibility of reducing interpretation to its bare mechanisms: they are all searching for ways of conceiving the essential presuppositions inherent to each act of interpretation. Derrida and Heidegger run this motif through a particular engagement with the history of philosophy that seeks to recover forgotten radical elements or problems in canonical authors, and thereby upset conventional interpretations. This balance of attention and insolence is well summarised by Heidegger: “we can learn thinking only if we radically unlearn what thinking has been traditionally. To do that, we must at the same time come to know it” (Heidegger 1978, p. 350). Yet this project of searching for presuppositions in interpretation is developed elsewhere in the phenomenological movement in less extreme forms (for instance, Husserl’s multiple attempts at understanding the relations between the object and its context), and in other philosophical lines (the neo-Kantian and Romantic solutions which Derrida flatly rejects). There is a whole variety of traditions that act as tributaries to the Davos debate, and more specifically to the relations between Heidegger and Derrida.

A familiar point of commentary about their connection is the terminological similarities that exist. *Deconstruction* (“a word I have never liked and one whose fortune has disagreeably surprised me”, says Derrida) is partially intended as a translation of Heidegger’s *Abbau*, literally, un-building, and contains the same sense of preserving at the same time as demolishing (Derrida 1983b, p. 44). *Abbau* was a Husserlian term, a kind of reduction that involved going behind consciousness to a stratum of experience that is unexplained by logic or psychology (Gasché 1986, pp. 109-10). This complex phenomenological lineage is made explicit by Derrida himself:

deconstruction is not negative. It's not destructive, not having the purpose of dissolving, distracting or subtracting elements in order to reveal an internal essence. It asks questions about the essence, about the presence, indeed about this interior/exterior, phenomenon/appearance schema, all these oppositions which are inherent in the image you used. The question is about this logic itself. On the word "deconstruction", which in my mind was intended to translate a word such as *Abbau* in Heidegger – *Destruktion* in Heidegger is not a negative word either – it's a matter of gaining access to the mode in which a system or structure, or ensemble, is constructed or constituted, historically speaking. Not to destroy it, or demolish it, nor to purify it, but in order to accede to its possibilities and its meaning; to its construction and its history.

(Derrida and Mortley 1991, pp. 96-7)

A consequence of this continual embrace of the multiplicity of meaning is a rewriting of terms to refuse fixity, for instance in "*Différance*" where Derrida raises the stakes on Heidegger's rejection of the name of being with the rather convoluted, "if *différance* is (and I also cross out the is)" (Derrida 1982b [1972], p. 6).<sup>4</sup> Indeed, neither Derrida nor Heidegger can talk clearly about their central concerns because, according to the logic of their own arguments, both Being and meaning constantly resist definition, and language therefore has to be applied in a more reflective and poetic fashion than philosophy has conventionally allowed (Llewelyn 1986, p. 38). This is one reason why Derrida turns to concepts which hover between words and actions, famously "trace" and "*différance*", but also less familiar concepts such as "cinders", which expresses (and, tangled grammar aside, this is important) "the name of the being that there is there but which, giving itself [...], is nothing, remains beyond everything that is [...], remains unpronounceable in order to make saying possible although it is nothing" (Derrida 1991 [1987], p. 73).<sup>5</sup> It is also a reason for Derrida's various analyses and tactical deployments of literature: his name could be substituted for the poet's when he writes, "The source for Valéry, then, must be that which never could become a theme" (Derrida 1982b [1972], p. 279). Rolling out from this is a large-scale suspicion of institutions and established ways of thinking before a constantly-shifting world, which again recalls Nietzsche's mistrust of the generalisations of metaphysics and phenomenology's attempt at constant wonder before the world, but also a more political investigation of how social institutions shape and control individual acts of interpretation

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<sup>4</sup> It may be noted that in the first edition of *Of Grammatology*, Derrida uses "destruction" in the place of "deconstruction", more openly suggesting his proximity to Heidegger's concept (Spivak 1974, p. xlix).

<sup>5</sup> In the specific context of *Cinders*, this is also a nod to Levinas whose concept of something underlying being, which he referred to as the *il y a*, is clearly a significant intertext (Shakespeare 1998, p. 247).

(Heidegger 1978, p. 96; Derrida and Mortley 1991, pp. 106-7). This makes the interpretive violence of Derrida and Heidegger often noted by commentators – essentially forcing texts into readings where they sanction ideas contrary to the author’s intention – a challenge to or engagement with the real-world social forces that have established guidelines for commentary. This violence can be justified by Heidegger not least because the concept of a thing “does not lay hold of the thing as it is in its own being, but makes an assault upon it”, suggesting an originary violence which *Destruktion* overcomes (Heidegger 1978, p. 155; compare Derrida 1974 [1967], p. 18, where the “necessary violence” of writing is contrasted to the “no less necessary” violence of the book). This justification of violence clearly connects with Heidegger’s vision of truth as a process of *alethia*, unconcealment or “unforgetting”, and Derrida’s more radical continuous preservation of possibilities and attempts to always remain open to the unexpected (Heidegger 1978, pp. 176-7; e.g. Derrida 1996 [1995], p. 36).<sup>6</sup> Naturally, these justifications do not always play in the larger academic world, encouraging a certain defensiveness, and hence self-consciousness, about academic status. Heidegger complains, “We are so filled with ‘logic’ that anything that disturbs the habitual somnolence of prevailing opinion is automatically registered as a despicable contradiction”, and Derrida, as events such as the dispute over the award of an honorary doctorate from Cambridge demonstrate, was no stranger to controversy over his institutional status (Heidegger 1978, p. 226; cf. Derrida 1995, pp. 399-421). Indeed, he construed this as a strength of his work, for instance suggesting that his work was all the more oppositional to traditional institutions of learning by refusing to adopt a contrary stance:

The reproductive force of authority can get along more comfortably with declarations or theses whose content presents itself as revolutionary, the rhetoric and the institutional symbolism which defuses and neutralizes whatever comes from outside the system. What is unacceptable is what, underlying positions or theses, upsets this deeply entrenched contract, the order of these norms, and which does so in the very *form* of works, of teaching or of writing.

(Derrida 1983b, p. 44)

This concern with the form of his works takes us back to Heidegger, whose own writing incorporated poetic and theological devices, and older traditions, such as Kierkegaard’s fusion of

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<sup>6</sup> Both of these ideas can, of course, be linked back to Nietzsche and his vision of truth as the interaction of differential forces.

fictional and philosophical writing, or Romanticism's rather less complex alignment. It is also part of a strategy of resistance to certain kinds of exclusively rational philosophy, a tactic that is perhaps misunderstood as an outright rejection when Derrida's work is adopted by literary theory during the 1970s and 80s.

There are some more disparate conceptual similarities between Heidegger and Derrida that are worthy of notice before a summary of Derrida's writings on Heidegger. Both men deal with the concept of apocalypse and a final resolution of the ambiguities of life in different ways: Heidegger talks about *ends* but Derrida *closure*, not a final resting point but a place where the strands are gathered together and can be examined as a whole (Donato 1984, p. 13; cf. Derrida 1974 [1967], p. 14, where this distinction is explained). This again connects to Derrida's discomfort with ideas of absolute truth and essential being that Heidegger, at least in his early works, pursues, and which has been evident in the analyses of Derrida's texts on Hegel and neo-Kantianism. An important point of divergence from Heidegger is Derrida's aversion to "ontopology", the binding of place to the thought and destiny of a people which Heidegger deploys to emphasise connections between German culture and Greek, and which gets him into so much trouble from critics of his relations with the Nazi regime ("ontopology" is coined in Derrida 1994 [1993], p. 82). While Heidegger notes with sadness that "Homelessness is coming to be the destiny of the world" and the connections between place and thought are dissolving, Derrida regards this as a positive step and a movement towards a new cosmopolitanism which embraces and legally defends all without distinction (Derrida 2001 [1997], pp. 3-24). This can be seen as influenced by his personal history, as a Jewish French colonial subject, but also as fitting with his intellectual refusal to close down alternatives. Indeed, while Heidegger valued his German identity as a privileged connection with traditions of thought and ways of life, Derrida fundamentally opposes this (e.g. Heidegger 1978, p. 325). For instance, in discussing his self-description as "Franco-Maghrebian", Derrida notes that

The silence of that hyphen does not pacify or appease anything, not a single torment, not a single torture. It will never silence their memory. It could even worsen the terror, the lesions, and the wounds. A hyphen is never enough to conceal protests, cries of anger or suffering, the noise of weapons, airplanes, and bombs.

(Derrida 1998b [1996], p. 11)



Here, the imposition of one (colonial) identity is recognised as a fundamentally violent impulse, tied in with specific social and technological capabilities; yet the option of hybridity and synthesis is equally painful, and risks neglecting the specificity of the individual elements. Therefore neither Heidegger's essentialism nor the counter-positional relativism are workable solutions for Derrida, and as we have seen in his readings of Nietzsche, responsible interpretation must move between the two. The refusal of "ontological" essentialism is one of the themes picked up in Derrida's development of the gift, spiralling out from Heidegger's meditation on *es gibt* as a statement about being, but removing his constraints: the gift is set in perpetual motion, and in an open offering rather than figure of exchange (Derrida 1992 [1991], p. 16).<sup>7</sup> It also factors in Derrida's adaptation of Heidegger's conception of origin as a leap, something which cannot necessarily be explained or limited but which necessarily and inevitably happens (Heidegger 1978, p. 186; there are many places where Derrida explores this idea, but one of the more accessible is Derrida 1983a, p. 10).<sup>8</sup> This originary leap is formalised at a very basic level in Derrida's work, with the thought of the ground of language in difference and deferral, and it differs from the Hegelian project in its attempt to allow difference on its own terms, not the abstractions of metaphysics; in other words, it attempts a Nietzschean rebuttal of Hegelian philosophy. This Nietzschean privileging of difference goes beyond even Heidegger:

to coordinate [...] the entire history of Being with a destination of Being is perhaps the most outlandish postal lure. [...] And this movement (which seems to me simultaneously very far and very near to Heidegger's, but no matter) avoids submerging all the difference, mutations, scansions, structures, of postal regimes into one and the same central post office. In a word [...] as soon as there is, there is *différance* (and this does not await language, especially human language, and the language of Being, only the mark and the divisible trait), and there is postal manoeuvring, relays, delay, anticipation, destination, telecommunicating network, the possibility, and therefore the fatal necessity of going astray, etc..

(Derrida 1987 [1980], p. 66)

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<sup>7</sup> The second volume of *Given Time* promises to deal precisely with Heidegger's thought about the gift in his late collection of essays and lectures, *On Time and Being* (Derrida 1992b, p. 20). However, it has not appeared; was this Derrida's little witticism about the similarly spectral second part of *Being and Time*?

<sup>8</sup> There is some suggestion that Heidegger borrowed this theory of origin from Scheler; at the very least, it demonstrates an interest in *Lebensphilosophie* and Bergson, and possibly at a deeper level Fichte, which might too swiftly be forgotten (Pizer 1995, p. 140).

For Derrida language operates, like Being, by means of a conditioned forgetfulness, and the critical role of philosophy is to recall language to itself and move towards an understanding of its origins in this fundamental difference (Derrida 1989 [1986], p. 123; cf. Heidegger 1990 [1973], p. 159). This does not make for a comfortable or easily-assimilated mode of thought, but it is one that attempts to preserve an analytical fidelity in spite of the manifold obstacles.

Derrida's commentaries on Heidegger draw out some of the particular lapses and blindspots of his work and attempt to understand and remedy them. The main thrust behind his 1987 work, *Of Spirit*, is to analyse Heidegger's relationship with the Nazi party, and note how his use of *Geist* on the rare occasions it engages with fascist ideas attempts to sophisticate them and give metaphysical force to blood-and-soil, and on the majority of occasions when it avoids politics to suggest a much more Christian image (Derrida 1989 [1987]). As with the writings on Paul de Man, there is not a simple denial of political culpability, nor an evasion of the issues, but rather a sophistication of the terms of the debate that attempts to incorporate *and redeem* the errors made by each author.<sup>9</sup> This is partly achieved in *Of Spirit* by investigating the necessity for a concept of the animal in Heidegger's philosophy, which also opens the possibility of dehumanising certain social groups (Derrida 1989 [1987], p. 57). This structural weakness can be addressed by returning to Heidegger's thought on Being (a word which the late Heidegger disavowed) and drawing more radical conclusions that negate the separation of human and animal. In essence, Heidegger's strategy of reading authors away from their intentions is turned against its inventor, with a similarly recuperative aim, and a commitment to pursuing the logic of his argument. Relations between animals and humans are also examined in one of Derrida's "*Geschlecht*" series, where the special place of the hand in Heidegger's thought is made more problematic (Derrida 1987). Doing comes before thinking in Heidegger's scheme, so "The hand thinks before being thought; it is thought, a thought, thinking", an argument that operates in ignorance of other animals with limbs that can grasp and shape, and so represents a veiled attempt to present a new kind of humanism, an absolute divide between man and animal (Derrida 1987, p. 171). This is unconscionable after the ethical commitments to a concept of Being beyond or before any specific forms of life that Heidegger outlines elsewhere. Something similar is attempted in "*Geschlecht IV*", where although *polemos*, struggle, is consistently

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<sup>9</sup> The limitations of Derrida's method here, as well as a critique of his treatment of law more generally, are explicated by Rose 1993, pp. 65-87.

associated with the origin of society in Heidegger's work, the earlier works, in a fashion reminiscent of Karl Schmitt, see this as the positive development of human life, while the later texts conceive this as an inhibition of a fundamentally ethical impulse (Derrida 1992a). Derrida is once again concerned to loosen Heidegger's nationalist emphasis, suggesting that his ontology leads towards something much more universal: "The friend can be a stranger, but like all Dasein it belongs to a community and a people", and hence is worthy of protection (Derrida 1992a, p. 179). Even when dealing with Heidegger's aesthetics (or more properly, deployment of art for philosophical ends), politics is introduced, as Derrida studies the American critic Meyer Schapiro's reading of "The Origin of the Work of Art". Heidegger's attempt to claim Van Gogh's portrait of shoes for the peasantry, for the soil and honesty, is naïve and politically misguided, but Schapiro's certainty in Heidegger's errors is equally wrong; the ambiguities of both positions must be held open in a form of "spectral analysis" (Derrida 1987 [1978], p. 374). The form of the text, which as we noted above is a recurrent concern of both Derrida and Heidegger, is particularly telling in this instance, as Derrida's essay is a dialogue for "n+1 (female) voices", a plurality of oppositions to the binary of the two positions (Derrida 1987 [1978], p. 255). Finally, the development of a more sophisticated framework within Heidegger's metaphysics is a keynote of the early "*Ousia* and *Grammē*" as well (Derrida 1982b [1972], pp. 29-67). The thrust of the essay is to argue that there is no "vulgar concept of time", as Heidegger proposed, but that all thought of time must be necessarily metaphysical. Heidegger therefore remains within the loop of metaphysics, along with its values of authenticity and fallenness (Derrida 1982b [1972], pp. 63-4). The way forward is through a new logic of simultaneity and the logic of the trace: "Two texts, two visions, two ways of listening. Together simultaneously and separately" (Derrida 1982b [1972], p. 65). It is the sort of logic found in Heidegger's "The Anaximander Fragment", which suggests presence is "the trace of the trace, the trace of the erasure of the trace"; just as *Speech and Phenomena* and Derrida's commentary on *The Origin of Geometry* close with a call for *différance* instead of the self-presence Husserl desires, so "*Ousia* and *Grammē*" finds a more radical version of phenomenology within canonical works (Derrida 1982b [1972], p. 66). The question of Being is still paramount; but it has been raised to a level that can also account for errors in its philosophical presentation.

The recovery of Being is, of course, a vocation for philosophy very different to that recognised by neo-Kantianism, and modern-day adherents to that tradition such as Habermas

have criticised Derrida for neglecting more weighty issues such as truth, responsibility, and social existence.<sup>10</sup> In his public debate with Gadamer, Derrida used Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche as an example of the violence done by certain forms of interpretation – as well as the positive results which can be garnered (Derrida 1986). It is therefore no profundity to state that some of the charges Cassirer raises against Heidegger at Davos are, despite Derrida's increasing sophistication and internal criticism of Heidegger's ideas, still pertinent.

#### 8.4. Bakhtin and Cassirer

If Derrida's relation with Heidegger can be seen as a conscious and politically, ethically, and intellectually motivated rewriting of certain key terms, then Bakhtin's relation with Cassirer is a much less explicit and organised adaptation of a significant thinker into an already crowded pantheon. In Chapter Three, we have investigated how Cassirer uses Hegel to provide a backbone for his theories of language, and how Bakhtin picks up on this and in turn works creatively with an evolutionary history of symbolic forms. This reading of Hegel through Cassirer has greatest force in Bakhtin's 1930s writings on the novel and the subsequent writings on carnival (B. Poole 1998; Brandist 2002a, pp. 105-32; 1997). One of the main elements Bakhtin draws from Cassirer is a neo-Platonic sense of the relations between man and universe; in Poole's pithy phrase, "it is in *Cassirer's* cosmos that Bakhtin finds 'man's own home, holding no terror for him'" (B. Poole 1998, p. 544, quoting *Rabelais and his World*). More broadly, Cassirer grants to Bakhtin an emphasis on the place, history, and social development of language, and in particular the construction of "symbolic forms", human products that mediate between the time-bound individual and the broader sweep of social development. As shown above, this meshes with the weight placed on language within certain strands of phenomenology, yet provides an historical frame to show development and change; it also allows Bakhtin to access neo-Kantian ideas about a separate realm of validity remaining constant throughout human experience. Cassirer's work has helpfully been described as an Hegelian phenomenology which attempts to avoid the schematicism and hierarchies of Hegel's own work, and, with a

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<sup>10</sup> Derrida has frequently rebutted this line of argument against his work, most notably in criticising "Certain German or Anglo-American theorists" who "believe they have discovered an unanswerable strategy" with the accusation of a performative contradiction in asking questions about truth (Derrida 1998b [1996], p. 4). It is thankfully outside the ambit of the current thesis to work through this debate in detail.

deliberate winking at the word “phenomenology”, the same can be said for Bakhtin’s project (Verene 1969, p. 35). Both attempt to describe the different possible structures for perceiving the world without over-emphasising historical or evaluative progression; and both acknowledge the need to investigate the material circumstances of the development of symbolic forms, yet are prevented from doing so because of a residual idealism within their philosophies, very much connected to a political liberalism which refuses practical intervention in favour of a self-regulating intellectual economy. When they begin from the transcendent and work back to the material, Bakhtin and Cassirer necessarily limit what they will find within the actual and everyday. This is, of course, a post-Kantian journey, underscoring both the persistence of Cassirer’s work within a Kantian frame, and Bakhtin’s recurring engagement with Kantian problems, whether in those terms or others. Alongside these direct conceptual affiliations, there are broader typological similarities between the two bodies of work. Cassirer’s first major contribution to philosophy was to outline a theory of formal logic within the context of the Marburg School, partially resolving a dispute between this school and the Freiburg School over the nature of mathematics (Friedman 2000, p. 30). His tendencies as a philosopher were synthetic, reconciliatory, and catholic, all qualities we have traced in Bakhtin’s writing, though perhaps Bakhtin is less certain of the overall whole into which parts fit. This uncertainty could be traced to a number of possible sources: a lack of time and space for Bakhtin to work through his ideas; the chaotic intellectual and social life of his period; a stronger feeling for irrationalist philosophies which refuted any notion of over-arching order; or more ambitious attempts to manage material and perspectives. There is also, as we have seen, a range of contextual influences that militate against the formulation of idealist wholes, apart from within limited political-philosophical terms; and while Bakhtin did deploy elements of acceptable movements such as Marxism, he did so for his own purposes and with an underlying awareness of the difficulties of dogmatism. Cassirer is able to more clearly formulate his opinions on other thinkers, a pertinent example of whom is Max Scheler. Cassirer defends a strong concept of *Leben*, lived experience, against an encroaching version of *Geist*, a metaphysical amalgamation of experience, that he finds in authors such as Scheler, and during his lectures on Scheler during the Davos seminars, uses him as a stalking horse for discussing Heidegger’s work (Verene 1982, p. 134). Yet he praises Scheler’s critique of the empathy theory, as well as his epistemology, which is seen to place a familiar emphasis on the symbolic creation of reality (Cassirer 1957

85, 87). This considered adoption of certain elements of Scheler's work is a world away from Bakhtin's more eclectic approach, where the difficulties of reconciling, say, Scheler's innate value hierarchies with a philosophy-of-life emphasis on experience is evaded rather than resolved through the vagueness of "once-occurrent Being-as-event". Cassirer also engages with *Lebensphilosophie* in order to strengthen his narrative about the integration of symbolic forms with life: like Dilthey, he returns to Goethe to find a model of experience as the fluid medium in which truth is represented, in a mundane and everyday fashion (Krois 1987, p. 63). He finds in Goethe precisely what Bakhtin does, an emblematic unity of individual and world that makes explicit the human role in constructing a world of sense. Bakhtin, who concentrates first on Cassirer's concepts of language, and secondly applies them mainly to literature, takes this Romantic-idealist resolution to problems of meaning and interpretation further, whilst fusing it with phenomenological concepts of the individual's intention. The synthesis of social determination with individual autonomy apparently represented by literature is one of the elements that made Bakhtin's work appealing to literary theory during the 1980s, yet is also one of the most vulnerable to a Heideggerian critique of its assumptions about language and subjectivity.

The influence of Cassirer on the Bakhtin Circle has been treated at two other points in this thesis, leaving the burden of argument as the analysis of cruces particularly pertinent to Davos. In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Voloshinov refers to Cassirer as a representative of "modern neo-Kantianism", and appreciatively explains his theories of the sensorial nature of representation (Vološinov 1986 [1929], p. 11, n. 1). As with Bühler, Voloshinov had read and assimilated Cassirer before Bakhtin, and when Bakhtin is exposed to him during the 1930s the influence on his work is marked (Poole 2001a, p. 127). This can be taken as incidental proof that Bakhtin was not the author of Voloshinov's writings, and a reminder of the intellectual weight of other members of the circle, but more than that it is an indication of the channels which Bakhtin's interest would take. Voloshinov cast Cassirer as a neo-Kantian historian of language, first and foremost, and the broader reaches of culture that his work also covered are subordinated to this term. Cassirer's confidence in historical development and his tendency to trace elements back to primitive societies and primordial consciousness make a clear impression on Bakhtin's writing. It assists him in turning from a phenomenological and neo-Kantian interest in the current state of perception, knowledge, experience and so forth

(for instance, the loose historical typologies of “Author and Hero”) to one of historical development and direction (the narrative of “Discourse in the Novel” and related works). In adapting Cassirer’s concept of symbolic forms, Bakhtin confuses stylistic and generic criteria so that he assumes, erroneously within Cassirer’s terms, that a language can be a symbolic form in the same way an epic can (Brandist 1997, p. 24). This rubs against the grain of Cassirer’s work, most appositely in the argument at Davos that language forms a common bond between varying subjectivities, something which for Bakhtin always exists alongside the centrifugal forces of social difference (Taft 1990, p. 183; e.g. Bakhtin 1981 [1934-5], p. 272). Cassirer argues that “Language [...] *begins* only where our immediate relation to sensory impression and sensory affectivity *ceases*”, asserting a distance from reality and sensibility which, only after his exposure to Cassirer’s work at the start of the 1930s, Bakhtin takes for granted (Cassirer 1953 [1923], p. 189). Bakhtin’s early writings presumed a union between reader, author, and hero through the medium of language, whereas from the 1930s onwards there is a layer of social mediation that fundamentally shifts the boundaries of his categories. Cassirer attempts to reinvigorate the analysis of the Kantian forms of perception by reintegrating them with everyday life, applying the lessons of phenomenology and *Lebensphilosophie* to Kant’s abstractions and terminology (cf. Hendel 1953, p. 10; Cassirer 1957 [1929], p. 10). For the early Bakhtin, this does not go far enough, hence the criticisms of neo-Kantianism as a “scientific philosophy” which “can only be a specialized philosophy, i.e. a philosophy of the various domains of culture and their unity”. Because of this distance from everyday life, it cannot be “about unitary and once-occurrent Being-as-event” but remains on the level of “theoretical cognition” (Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 19). Mid-period Bakhtin narrows this philosophy of culture to a pursuit of symbolic forms in language (as argued in Chapter Three) and finds in literary works the essential kinds of presentation phenomenologists sought in everyday life, with historical development standing in place of the now-disavowed transcendental framework. This is a structure Bakhtin finds in Cassirer, and which marks one of the differences between the latter and Heidegger at Davos. The former wanted to return not just to the things themselves, but to the Being bringing those things into existence; Cassirer, despite his strong support for a notion of experience and life, still seeks it not in being, but in books.

### 8.5. *The Davos debate*

This is only one of many points of disagreement between the two speakers at Davos. Much of the reason for this is the grounds from where both philosophers began, most fundamentally Heidegger's advancement of a new kind of philosophy, and Cassirer's persistent defence or extension of neo-Kantianism. Heidegger is concerned with developing the line of his 1929 book on Kant, namely that "Kant did not want to give any sort of theory of natural science, but rather wanted to point out the problematic of metaphysics, which is to say, the problematic of ontology" (Taft 1990, p. 172; cf. Heidegger 1990 [1973], p. 8). His project is to take Kant into unfamiliar regions, to follow through the logic of Kant's argument with the "violence" described above, and in a manner recapitulated by Derrida (e.g. Heidegger 1990 [1973], p. 100).<sup>11</sup>

Cassirer, as Kant's editor, was more scrupulous in distributing weight between various problems within the canon, and with a hermeneutics of sympathy rather than un-building; although it should be noted that Heidegger's emphasis on imagination as the common root of sensibility and understanding is shared by Cassirer's writings on Kant which argue for a greater emphasis on aesthetic judgement, grounding Kant's idealism in art, language, and myth (Taft 1990, p. 170; Lipton 1978, p. 36). This is a theme treated in more detail below. Serious problems with Heidegger's reading should be quickly noted, most obviously that Kant only uses the term "Being" on two pages of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, both times to deny that the concept has any significance, and that Heidegger excludes from his discussion Kant's explicit writings on ontology (Alexander 1981, pp. 289, 300). Furthermore, Heidegger's suggestion that Kant shrank in terror from where he had been led by reason and redrafted the first Critique neglects the standard scholarly explanation, and the one offered by Kant himself, that readers had misunderstood the first version as a form of subjective idealism (Krois 1987, p. 130). The charge has been frequently raised against Derrida that he is not a very careful reader, and indeed this thesis has made some play with this idea, often excusing it with a gesture to Heideggerian practices of commentary.<sup>12</sup> A similar representation, yet different in evaluative tone, is regularly made about Bakhtin, that he did not have the time, resources, or mental tendency to follow the

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<sup>11</sup> For a summary of Heidegger's argument for an ontological Kant, cf. the notes for his lecture reproduced in the translation of the Kant book (Heidegger 1990 [1973], pp. 169-71). For an example of how this emphasis on time, the faculty of imagination, and human finitude, develops in later criticism, cf. Deleuze 1984 (1963).

<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, there are some critics who laud Derrida as a close reader, attentive to the details of a text (e.g. Royle 2003, p. 5).



details of a philosophical text. Here we have become happy to talk about fruitful misreadings, and confluences of ideas which fail to hang together, but fail in an interesting way (e.g. Poole 2001a, p. 123; Wall 1998a). There is unquestionably a difference in historical distance which exerts an influence here, as well as styles of analysis, but perhaps more fundamentally and emotively, Bakhtin's argument about making sense of the world appeals more to scholarly minds than Derrida's about the inherent weaknesses of sense. Here the Heideggerian critique of knowledge has not been fully accepted, as his fierce limitation of human knowledge to that which is cognisable from individual experiences appears to exclude too much of value. While Cassirer argues that Kant outlines the step from finite human knowledge to transcendental principle, Heidegger suggests that he deliberately remains in the sphere of subjective human finitude, regrounding knowledge in being and sensible experience (Taft 1990, p. 174). A similar pattern is perceivable in the brief discussion of language, where Cassirer suggests it operates as a bridge from individual to individual, a movement into the objective:

Each of us speaks his own language, and it is unthinkable that the language of one of us is carried over into the language of the other. And yet, we understand ourselves through the medium of language. [...] [F]or that reason I start from the Objectivity of the symbolic form, because here the inconceivable has been done. Language is the clearest example. We assert here that we tread on a common ground. We assert this first of all as a postulate. And in spite of all deceptions, we will not become confused about this claim. This is what I would like to call the world of the objective [*objektiven*] spirit. From Dasein is spun the thread which, through the medium of such an objective spirit [as language], again ties us with another Dasein.

(Taft 1990, p. 183)<sup>13</sup>

Heidegger's reply in the Davos notes does not refute this, but rather redefines the terms of philosophy so that it becomes meaningless: "the only trouble for my investigations has been judged to be [the need] to attain the horizon for the question concerning Being, its structure and multiplicity" (Taft 1990, p. 185). Where he does discuss language, it becomes much more an emblem for human ways of intervening in the world than the bridge which Cassirer describes; for instance, "language surrenders itself to our mere willing and trafficking as an instrument of

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<sup>13</sup> It is worthy of comment here how Cassirer adopts Heidegger's language, despite his earlier warning in reply to an audience question: "I believe that what I describe by Dasein does not allow translation into a concept of Cassirer's" (Taft 1990, p. 181). This as much as anything else clearly marks the division of the two men's philosophies of language.

dominations over beings” (Heidegger 1978, p. 199). According to Heidegger’s logic, we need to allow both language, and the objects underneath, to be, in order to attain a more accurate understanding of the truth.<sup>14</sup> Cassirer sees man’s awareness of his own finitude as the doorway to the infinite, while for Heidegger it is precisely what bars him from entering, leading instead to a recognition of man’s limits (essentially, death) (Taft 1990, pp. 173, 175; Kaufmann 1949, p. 843). This point is well understood in Cassirer’s writings on Heidegger – “The ‘impersonal’ does not consist merely in the pale, diluted social form of the average, the everydayness of the ‘they’, but in the form of transpersonal meaning. For this transpersonal, Heidegger’s philosophy has no access” – and proves a site of irreconcilable difference (Cassirer 1996 [1928], p. 202). To some extent it is rolled forward to the distance between Bakhtin and Derrida, as while both are interested in how language moves from the personal to the objective, the former emphasises the inevitability of the passage above the difficulties, while the latter privileges the difficulties above the inevitability. This again can be rooted in their essentially different orientations of philosophy, and hence their readings of other thinkers, as Bakhtin attempts to hold together a neo-Kantian sphere of meaning while Derrida offers a radically phenomenological plurality of interpretation.

In the Davos debate, as in Kant, the question of knowledge is interwoven with the question of human freedom. Cassirer takes from Kant a core faith in the free, rational individual, capable of being led to reason by reflection, which is very different to the freedom, rationality, and indeed reflection of Heidegger’s subject (Lipton 1978, p. 3; cf. Cassirer 1957 [1929], p. 5).<sup>15</sup> For Heidegger, freedom is a confrontation with anxiety and ultimately death, man’s recognition of “the nothingness of his Dasein”, and an appreciation of the significance of existential experience (Taft 1990, pp. 182-3).<sup>16</sup> Bakhtin essentially subscribes to the same voluntaristic conception of the individual as Cassirer, most strongly in the early works, but also in the mid-period writings on the novel and discourse genres with an emphasis on social conditions as human creations, subject to human amelioration. The late methodological works develop beyond

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<sup>14</sup> The distance travelled by Husserl, and the problems of regarding Heidegger purely as a phenomenologist, are emphasised by the late Husserl’s adoption of a theory of intersubjective meaning preserved through language strongly reminiscent of Cassirer’s (e.g. Husserl 1978 [1939], p. 160). It is not for nothing that Derrida finds a neo-Kantian in Husserl, just as Cassirer finds one in Heidegger (Derrida 1978 [1962], p. 27; cf. Taft 1990, p. 171).

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of the problem of voluntarism and rationalism in Cassirer’s work, see Wisner 1997.

<sup>16</sup> This difference in conception of the individual is seen by Krois as the focus for the distinction of Cassirer and Heidegger (Krois 1987, pp. 42-3).

this, emphasising the role of transcendent(al) forces (history, divinity, the superaddressee) to control or create meaning; yet even within these larger frameworks man is fundamentally, inherently, free.<sup>17</sup> For Derrida, man's freedom would not be a meaningful category, because the freedom necessarily relies upon constraints in intellectual and social life: as for Heidegger, a deeper understanding of freedom can only come from an encounter with these conventionally negative forces.<sup>18</sup> Cassirer's understanding of the subject and her freedom is heavily influenced by neo-Kantianism, and in particular Cohen's juridical concept, although under the influence of *Lebensphilosophie* Cassirer shifts the balance of emphasis from the transcendental flowing through the individual, to the individual building up the transcendental (cf. Poma 1997 [1988], p. 122). At Davos, Cassirer is on a sticky wicket with his relations to Cohen, needing to defend and deepen a neo-Kantian tradition of interpretation without appearing to support an abstractionism he opposed. He therefore describes his indebtedness to Cohen in guarded terms:

I do not conceive of my own development as a defection from Cohen. Naturally, in the course of my work much else has emerged, and, indeed, above all I recognized the position of mathematical natural science. However, this can only serve as a paradigm and not as the whole of the problem.

(Taft 1990, p. 172)

Indeed, the transcript of the debate opens with the question, "What does Heidegger understand by neo-Kantianism?", and it would not be stretching the point to say the whole debate focuses on the best means of modernising Kant (Taft 1990, p. 171).<sup>19</sup> Cassirer's neo-Kantianism, like Bakhtin's, is already some distance from canonical versions, revised in more sociological and non-logical or non-absolutist directions, with a much greater emphasis placed on culture and individual understanding. Cassirer's description of his relations to Cohen also pulls out the key theme of logic, where neo-Kantianism, even in Cassirer's revision, ascribes a special fundamental status to mathematics and pure logic that makes it the basis for deriving validity (e.g. Cassirer 1957 [1929], p. 328, where logic is used to explore the problem of linguistic

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<sup>17</sup> Free, that is, in a sense fitting with the other Hegelian elements of this period of Bakhtin's work, where freedom is a mysterious unity of individual and trans-historical forces.

<sup>18</sup> This, incidentally, is one line of defence against those who see Derrida as the prophet of limitless freedom of interpretation. The entire thrust of his work has been to call into question such naïve binary divisions as that between freedom and obedience, and here he is in the company of a rich lineage of ancient and modern philosophy.

<sup>19</sup> For a reading of Heidegger's revision of Kant in the context of, and as a response to, Marburg neo-Kantianism, cf. Dahlstrom 1991.

meaning). In contrast, Heidegger sees it as a distraction from truth and a corruption of the ordinary processes of perception, which, for him, “disintegrates in the turbulence of a more original questioning” (Friedman 2000, pp. 31, 150; quoted Cristaudo 1991, p. 472). While the early Bakhtin is not unfamiliar with this model of logic as a corruption of more immediate processes of understanding, in general the notion of “a more original questioning” sits best with Derrida’s work, especially the figure of reason reaching beyond reason which has preoccupied this thesis, although the uniting motif of coming to terms with Kant remains present (cf. Bakhtin 1993 [1920-4], p. 9; Derrida 1983a, p. 9). Heidegger’s assault on neo-Kantianism with a redrafting of logic forms part of a greater strategy of attack seizing on a specific weakness in neo-Kantianism, namely the issue of time. By moving immediacy and the human experience of time to the centre of his Kant-interpretation, Heidegger directly confronts neo-Kantianism’s belief in eternal validities and the asymptotic (thereby determinist) human progression towards truth (cf. Lynch 1990, p. 363). Although this abstractionism is overcome to a great extent in Cassirer, he still maintains an Enlightenment confidence in man’s social development that reveals his post-Hegelian heritage (e.g. Cassirer 1953 [1923], p. 83). Heidegger’s is a fundamental revision of Kantian temporality, where “time is not just a setting in which experiences play themselves out”, but a structure of memory, anticipation, and individual experience beyond the terms of Kant’s own philosophy, and just as Heidegger side-steps Cassirer’s point about language, so Cassirer evades his about time (Taft 1990, p. 177). This temporal revision, indebted to the traditions of irrationalism and *Lebensphilosophie* sketched above, is very much part of Derrida’s line of critique against Husserl (and in the early works, “Western metaphysics”), and the non-linear chronology towards which Bakhtin gropes in his understanding of phenomenology. One key difference is that Bakhtin suggests the recovery of cultural memory is an organised and monitored process, while for Derrida it is much more haphazard and subject to determination by outside forces, not necessarily rational or concerned with equal representation. Heidegger, along with Scheler and much of the phenomenological tradition, privileges intuition, the immediate perception of essences, which Derrida calls into question. Intuition for Cassirer, however, is structurally identical to the expression-mode of symbolic forms, where the individual cannot separate symbol and meaning and so remains on a lower level of cultural development (Hamburg 1956, p. 64). It is due to their different location of the significance of the question of being that Cassirer and Heidegger pass different

judgements on the power of immediacy: is man's first instinct individually experiential or communally signifying? (cf. Cassirer's interest in Gestalt and the fundamental human capacity to create and read signs, Krois 1992, p. 451, and section 6.3.2., above). Cassirer offers the label of "dogmatic sensationalism" to philosophies which emphasise too strongly the individual's sensorial experience, and hence neglect man's symbol-making capacity, and his unpublished writings would suggest he sees traces of this in Heidegger (Cassirer 1953 [1923], pp. 87-8; 1996 [1928], pp. 200-11). This unfolds into a larger difference between the two men's epistemologies, that while Cassirer develops the neo-Kantian idea of knowledge as movement towards the thing-in-itself, Heidegger is more inclined towards an Husserlian argument about the increasing self-awareness of perception rather than a growth in knowledge about the object (Lipton 1978, p. 23). Cassirer looks for consciousness-in-general, which can allow us greater access to the thing-in-itself, Heidegger for individual consciousnesses, not necessarily overlapping, which do not necessarily refer to any real objective world (cf. Brandist 2002a, p. 20, who draws the same general distinction between neo-Kantianism and phenomenology). Cassirer's neo-Kantianism also manifests itself in his willingness to accept a variety of symbolic forms as equally relevant, and arguably as equally perceptive of potentially different realities (Hamburg 1956, p. 33; cf. Cassirer 1953 [1923], p. 78). Heidegger raises this question to a higher level, searching for the commonality of these different symbolic forms on the ground of being, and thereby fundamentally recasting Cassirer's relativism. Something similar could be sketched in Bakhtin and Derrida, where the former examines how specific meanings are constructed, and the latter how meaning itself is possible. It is not, as has been made clear, a simple divide between neo-Kantianism or phenomenology, or even Cassirer's and Heidegger's extrapolations of these; rather, overlapping but non-coincidental approaches to historical philosophical problems and figures.

There is evidence for this overlap in attitudes, even at the Davos summit where so much division is left unresolved. Cassirer and Heidegger are united through their assertion of the importance of the imagination for Kant. Heidegger suggests that "pure sensibility and pure understanding lead back to the power of imagination", undermining Kant's emphasis on reason and suggesting nothing less than the "destruction of the former foundation of Western metaphysics (spirit, *logos*, reason)" (Taft 1990, pp. 170-1). Cassirer accedes – "On one point we agree, in that for me as well the productive power of imagination appears in fact to have a central

meaning for Kant". Yet he continues – "From there I was led through my work on the symbolic", which does not mean Heidegger's rejection of reason but a philosophical anthropology exploring the variety of human experience (Taft 1990, p. 172). In his Kant book of 1918, Cassirer sees Kant as questioning the basic possibility of ontology, asking first "*what the question concerning being in general means*", suggesting that he is not resistant to ontology as may too-hastily be supposed, only Heidegger's manner of approaching it (Cassirer 1981 [1918], p. 146; cf. his comment on the impossibility of distinguishing ontic and ontological, 1996 [1928], pp. 201-2). The two thinkers do not disagree over conclusions so much, or the importance of the questions, but rather the manner in which they are asked. Heidegger consistently turns to more fundamental issues than Cassirer, for instance claiming "the question of what man is must be answered not so much in the sense of an anthropological system, but instead it must first be properly clarified with regard to the perspective from within which it wants to be posed", a championing of self-consciousness which Cassirer's work indicates but does not perform (Taft 1990, p. 181; cf. Heidegger 1978, p. 46). For Cassirer, the fundamental aspect of human existence is its symbolic creativity:

No matter how we regard it or proclaim it as the original source of all reality, life in itself is never the source of the symbols in which this reality is first comprehended and understood, in which it "speaks to us".

(Cassirer 1996 [1928], p. 30)

The historical project through which Cassirer pursues this argument is alien to Heidegger (who, with rather neat modesty, describes *Being and Time* at Davos as "much too narrow, much too preliminary" to be a philosophical anthropology of Cassirer's sort) with his emphasis on the subjective temporal rather than the transcendent narrative (Taft 1990, p. 177). Heidegger attempts to take philosophy beyond its usual confines and transform it into a kind of action – "Mere meditating will never amount to anything productive" (Taft 1990, p. 185). He closes his part of the formal debate with a call to the students to go forth and think, to readdress the "central question of metaphysics" without "occupy[ing] yourselves with Cassirer and Heidegger" (Taft 1990, p. 185). In one sense, Heidegger is trying to bring an end to philosophy, refuse the formalised mode of questioning which Kant and Cassirer adopt and attempt instead a more individualised quest for the truth. Yet in another, he returns to the roots of the Kantian project,

with its recognition of the mysterious fit between human perception and the world it perceives, a recognition that is distorted rather than clarified by transcendental investigation. Cassirer, faced with a similar return to Kant, continues to work at the social end of the problem and investigate how connections between human understanding and the categories with which it is presented have originated and changed. To translate this into the terms of this thesis, Derrida is more inclined to a heuristic model that relies on the slipperiness of language and ambiguities of meaning, while Bakhtin (especially in the late works) would maintain the same space and freedom for interpretation, but with more traditional hermeneutical guidelines of historicity, perspectivism, and coherence. The Davos dispute, and more broadly the encounter between neo-Kantianism and phenomenology, drew together many current and lingering debates about the status of Kant's problems in modern philosophy; and the different forms of resolution offered are again developed and made contemporary by Derrida and Bakhtin.

#### *8.6. Conclusion*

The Davos dispute has been described as a "parting of the ways" between two philosophical traditions, broadly the continental and analytical schools represented respectively by Heidegger and an attendee of the conference, Rudolf Carnap (Friedman 2000, p. 156). Cassirer's philosophy is a spent intellectual force that contributes little to contemporary academic life. While this perception of division is well-grounded, certain points of unity between Heidegger and Cassirer, and by implication Carnap's refusal of both traditions, should be evident from the material above. If nothing else, there is the figure of Kant, although two very different ways of reading can be recognised, and the connected desire to return philosophy to an ordinary level of cognition and experience.<sup>20</sup> Within the terms of academic positioning, Heidegger achieved at least two things at Davos: a questioning of the pre-eminence of neo-Kantianism in European philosophy on its home territory of Kant, and a challenge to Husserl's leadership of the phenomenological movement and his emphasis on rationalism (Friedman 2000, p. 3). Clearly, neo-Kantianism was in decline anyway, and phenomenology as a movement rather than a school did not fall into clear patterns of leadership (as we have seen with the Munich school), thus

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<sup>20</sup> Waite sees these two kinds of philosophical interpretation, one drawing out what is unsaid, and the other giving attention to what is said, as the basis for the Davos debate (Waite 1998, p. 604).

suggesting a certain “smug condescension of history”;<sup>21</sup> yet it is not coincidental that the Heidegger-Derrida model of philosophy seemed better suited to the irrationalism of Europe from the 1930s onwards than the intersubjective transcendentalism of Cassirer. Talk of a cultural crisis in university circles during this period was common, for well-understood social and academic reasons, and Heidegger was seen to speak more to this anxiety than Cassirer (cf. Ringer 1969, p. 385, *et passim*). Yet minority opinions have always offered other interpretations: the German-Jewish philosopher and student of Cohen, Franz Rosenzweig, analysed the debate in a review of Cohen’s work, and concluded that Heidegger was more neo-Kantian than Cassirer. The “engagement with existence” that Heidegger discusses is very much part of Cohen’s philosophy, as is the replacement of the “generating Reason of Idealism” with “Reason as a creation” and the consequent perpetual reinvigoration of philosophical thought (Rosenzweig 1984 [1929]).<sup>22</sup> Cohen – the first Jewish professor in Germany – is shown to have more in common with Heidegger the phenomenologist than he does with Cassirer the neo-Kantian – and, for Rosenzweig more pertinently, the first Jewish German rector. “The school died with its teacher”, he argues; yet “the teacher lives”. A similar complication can be traced in the receptions of Bakhtin and Derrida. Bakhtin’s old-fashioned confidence in truth and social justice has been contrasted favourably with Derrida’s alleged surrender of these values, and the young young guard have flocked to the Russian with as much fervour as the old young guard did to the Frenchman. Heidegger’s victory at Davos was not as complete as some would like, nor is Cassirer’s philosophy as easily dismissed as the bogeyman of “humanism”. Significant questions are opened here, about the development of literary theory within universities and the construction of political and intellectual affiliations, which will be treated in more detail in the rest of my conclusion. Today – indeed, after the Second World War – there is not the same potential hostility between European nations, intellectual traditions, or philosophical schools seen in Davos, more a mutual incomprehension of the other’s position. This is why Davos represents a unique ending to certain traditions of philosophy rather than a paradigm consistently repeated, and why a higher level of discourse, such as literary theory, can be useful in bringing the two strands together. However, the utility that it possesses is held on the condition that it periodically returns to the philosophical problems that bring this incomprehensibility into being.

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<sup>21</sup> The phrase belongs to E. P. Thompson.

<sup>22</sup> I am indebted to Jenny Bletso for her translation of this article.



## *Concluding remarks*

### *Summary of argument*

In this thesis, we have seen how two very different thinkers have constructed common affiliations in ways that befit their differences. We have also seen how their responses to shared resources have been affected by their contemporary environments, and the possibilities for creative reading which these have opened. In these Concluding Remarks, I would like first to summarise the question of overlapping influences; and second to pick up on some subsidiary ideas about how awareness of this could impact on the development of literary theory. The distinction was proposed in the Introduction that Derrida was a thinker of an analytical tendency, responding primarily to phenomenology and Heidegger's development of this, and that Bakhtin inclined towards a synthetic response to his basic orientation, provided by neo-Kantianism. This has been borne out by the text, as given their different modes of philosophising Derrida has persistently chased through the logic of thinkers important to his development (for instance, Kant), while Bakhtin has circled round issues and problems, combining in different proportions a shifting set of influences. One of the persistent motifs of both men's work, and it has been suggested the reason that they both lay such a heavy weight on language, is that they are consistently trying to reincorporate society and social influence into a post-Kantian philosophy which has excluded overtly Hegelian solutions. This ties in with the refusal of totalising systems of thought in both men's works, most fully explored in Chapter Three. Nevertheless, Bakhtin retains an idealist dream of completeness until his very last notes, and Derrida's philosophy of language ultimately requires the kind of fundamental criticism of consciousness to which it cannot explicitly aspire. In general, of course, Bakhtin is more comfortable with the motifs of idealist thought than Derrida, and this unfolds into a whole series of other differences: consciousness, linguistic meaning, and ethical action and knowledge are all troubled for Bakhtin but ultimately held down by a transcendently valid core, while for Derrida they are necessarily subject to constant renewal and reinvigoration. Building on this, Bakhtin believes the problems of language and philosophy can be addressed *within* language and philosophy, while Derrida recognises a need to step outside of them, as in themselves they constitute part of the difficulty. This is why Derrida's works attempt to enact the elusiveness of meaning and interplay of

contraries of which he writes, although Bakhtin, often more by accident than design, can be read as performing a similar reconciliation of form and content. These attitudes can be seen respectively in the commentary on Derrida's reading of Nietzsche, and in Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope. Bakhtin's late methodological writings raise his recurrent questions of meaning, intention, and history to a new level, enabling him to indicate a model of language perpetually reconstituted by time which, if we were to take it seriously, would provide a new way of reading that brought into doubt the possibility for such an idea to be expressed. A similar knot was explored in Chapter Seven, where Bakhtin to some extent displaces phenomenological intention on to language, yet does not follow this through, as Derrida does, to reflexively account for the impact it would have on the constitution of subjectivity. Derrida too develops more carefully the implications of a Kierkegaardian critique of morality, one stage of which is certainly the ethical individualism the early Bakhtin advances, but must ultimately go beyond that to a delimited, unknowable, and *de facto* impossible responsibility to which we must all nevertheless aspire. And what is true of ethical responsibility is also true of the arrangement of life so that ethical duties can be most easily fulfilled, namely, politics. As shown in the sections on language and national identity, Derrida advances a localised, strategic vision of politics that is also enacted in his texts; Bakhtin, through force of circumstance as much as conscious intention, offers a similarly low-level formulation, although this does not necessitate the weakness in either philosopher's theory which the phrasing may suggest. Caputo, in a typically apposite pun, suggests that Derrida's work challenges the "powers that be", while it has been frequently noted that to seriously accept the values behind Bakhtin's critique of ordinary communication and thought would result in a very different world (Caputo 1987, p. 194; e.g. Hitchcock 1993, p. xv).

Alongside the different impacts that various philosophies have had on Bakhtin and Derrida, we have traced the various routes by which they arrived to their own arguments, and the types of influence that are significant. It is now possible to delineate three primary kinds of influence that have been most prominent:

1. *General scene-setting.* This is the role played by neo-Kantianism for Bakhtin, Heidegger for Derrida, and Kant for many of the philosophers treated here.
2. *Specific contexts.* French Hegelianism, and Russian and Soviet Nietzschean and Romantic thought are the clearest examples of a definite contextual influence.

3. *Direct responses.* Bakhtin re-writes Cassirer to conform to his diversified, if less stringent concept of philosophy; Derrida comments on Husserl to draw forth his concealed radical tendencies, and then adopts this approach for a range of other thinkers.

This is by no means an exhaustive list or absolute set of distinctions, as for instance the passages on *Lebensphilosophie* will have made clear, where Bakhtin responds both directly and indirectly, and Derrida receives any influence largely through the heavily mediated form of phenomenology. Similarly, while the general structure of this work has suggested a linear narrative, many of the individual components militate against that, including the cross-currents of influence, the historical delay in the impact of some thinkers (such as Nietzsche), and the multiple revivals and recapitulations within post-Kantian philosophy. A tension between development and return captures something within both Bakhtin's and Derrida's works. It has often been noted how Bakhtin re-examines problems or arguments, with different sets of tools or a different approach, without necessarily coming closer to a resolution; and Derrida himself has noted how his late work dealt with the preoccupations of his early (Hirschkop 1999, p. 54; Derrida 1983b, pp. 27-8). Both thinkers' careers are only partially served by linear narratives, and there is plenty of room for more fragmentary approaches, closer to the styles of some of their texts. A third strand binding the thesis together has been the role of Bakhtin and Derrida within literary theory. They both have a powerful symbolic charge, irrespective of the content of their works: we are all familiar with the "Bakhtin myths", such as his isolation from contemporary scholarship, and the common assumptions about Derrida, which conceal his desire to retain faith with his own ideas behind his apparent difficulty. Yet it should also be clear by this point that Bakhtin had his own assumptions about, for instance, Hegel, which are not necessarily connected to any direct reading; and Derrida is happy to use Nietzsche as shorthand for a method of interpretation that may not be one that he championed. In brief, the process of interpretation as assimilation does not begin with literary theory, nor even with the philosophers I have suggested in some ways underpin it, but goes back, as Derrida and Bakhtin would both argue, as long as there were two people to misunderstand each other. Bakhtin and Derrida are distinguished from their philosophical sources by virtue of being able to respond to some of these ascriptions of identity, a motif explored at the close of Chapter Five, and which is particularly pertinent for

Derrida.<sup>1</sup> His first texts to make an impact on the intellectual world were among the earliest that he wrote; with Bakhtin, the achronological translation of his writings, combined with the current project of revising the editorial arrangements of these works, make the situation much more complex. In this era of globalised academic industries, the stakes of this revision are high, and will unsettle assumptions about Bakhtin that are currently considered unshakeable. Indeed, such assumptions have been overturned several times already; to offer one of my favourite quotations from the last three years of research:

Not much is known of Mihail – he must have been widely read, because as a student in Petersburg in 1914 he was reading Kierkegaard long before he was rediscovered in France. He remained in Russia after the Revolution and published a critical study of Dostoevsky which [Nikolai] Bachtin found by chance in Paris in 1930.

(Wilson 1963, p. 2)

The year of the second edition of the Dostoevsky book, early in the process of his rehabilitation and eventual discovery in the West, and “Not much is known of Mihail”. No matter what we think of Bakhtin and Derrida in the future, and whatever uses we put them to, we must ensure that our awareness of the depth, range, and usage of their original sources is maintained, if for no other reason than to maintain alertness to the possible interpretations that are yet to come.

### *Post-theory?*

And this openness to the future is something addressed at the Davos debate, as both participants call on the attending students to tackle for themselves the central questions of metaphysics, and to forget the names of Heidegger and Cassirer (Taft 1990, p. 185). Today, something similar is required of literary theory, in that it has become institutionalised as a set of schools, authors, and procedures, rather than living as the critical set of questions with which it began. This final section attempts to outline some of the debate about what to do now with literary theory, how Bakhtin and Derrida contributed to its formation, and what their embeddedness in a philosophical tradition can suggest about the discipline as a whole.

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<sup>1</sup> Paradigmatically, “Circumfession” works as a model for Derrida’s response to the construction of his work by others: he always attempts to elude such limiting devices, even if that means risking (once again) charges of vanity and literature (Derrida 1993 [1991]).

One narrative about Derrida's and Bakhtin's impact on the creation of literary theory could run as follows. The structuralist philosophies of France in the 1950s gave rise to the post-structuralist writings of the 1960s, which took to task the scientific terms and preconceptions of its predecessor's view of culture by means of a heavily Nietzschean emphasis on indeterminacy and language. Post-structuralism migrated across the Atlantic and found a home in literature departments that considered themselves the natural defenders of language and ambiguity, and that were searching for legitimisation in an era when the humanities seemed ever-more redundant. In the course of that migration, boundaries between movements became confused, so that, for instance, Derrida's critique of the notion of structure was first made available in America through the 1970 volume *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man* – as the title suggests, a deeply structuralist project (Culler 1997, p. 127). Indeed, with the American adoption of the term “deconstruction”, different thinkers within structuralism, post-structuralism, and other movements were mixed together without distinction, and in a manner recognisable to Anglo-American New Critics, who were equally interested in the priority of the text and its capacity for multi-referentiality.<sup>2</sup> The discipline of “literary theory” was an attempt to resolve some of these confusions by casting post-structuralism as one school among others, but this only reinforced the erroneous premise that post-structuralism was a literary-critical movement. It also marked the point at which a set of philosophical questions was remoulded into step-by-step methods for analysing texts, or, more broadly, for undermining truth-claims from any discipline cast within language. This is particularly true of Derrida's work, initially adapted by a “Yale school” of criticism as a means of bringing to bear philosophical questions and approaches on literary texts, but quickly disseminated to a much wider range of scholars and authors. This irony is compounded by Derrida's awareness of such a process of assimilation, and indeed his work within institutional and academic arenas that furthered such a project. He responded with remarkable tolerance and patience to different variations of his ideas, and even argued that the institutionalised success of “deconstruction” could be a radical political and intellectual step:

it is not by chance that deconstruction has accompanied a critical transformation in the conditions of entry into the academic professions from the 1960s to the 1980s – and also in the sense of the “division of labour” between departments, a division whose classic architecture has also been put into question; for deconstruction is also, and increasingly

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<sup>2</sup> It is for this reason and because of this confusion that Hirschkop's charge of literary theory being “a movement masquerading in the neutral colours of an intellectual discipline” holds water (Hirschkop 1999, p. 120, n. 25).

so, a discourse and a practice *on the subject of the academic institution*, professionalization, and departmental structures that can no longer contain it.

(Derrida 1989 [1986], p. 16)

This may be making the best of a bad lot, and certainly offers a politically progressive reading of the dispersal of Derrida's ideas within the academy, but at the least shows his consciousness of the process. Derrida was able to constantly re-assert the power of his critique for as long as he was alive to watch what was happening to it; Bakhtin, unfortunately, did not have the same privilege. His work was used to stabilise the Anglo-American theory machine, and to turn away the potentially disruptive elements of "deconstruction" by finding a precursor who recognised the plurality of meaning, the instability of the text, the significance of the body and so forth, but maintained a political and ethical framework. Bakhtin was a homeopathic dose of theory to ward off greater evils, and an apparently readily-adaptable guide for reading all sorts of texts. This determined his usage and reception in the Anglophone world:

Although *Rabelais* had been translated into English in 1968, and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* in 1973, it was only in 1981 – when *The Dialogic Imagination* appeared – that conditions were ripe for the "Bakhtin industry" to take off. If intellectual quality were the only issue, would I have been able to buy *Rabelais* at an MIT Press remainder sale for a single dollar? Probably not. [...] In 1981 Bakhtin appeared as the literary critic who had made the linguistic turn without losing his humanist baggage on the way.

(Hirschkop 1999, p. 120, n. 25)

Furthermore, he appeared as a Russian philosopher whose work reached anti-Soviet conclusions, thus suggesting, during the protracted end-game of the Cold War, that democracy was as inherently appealing to Russian citizens and intellectuals as it was to Americans (cf. Hirschkop 1999, p. 114). This is only the beginning of the story in one sense, as the diversity of work on and through Bakhtin during the last twenty-some years suggests, and if Derrida was able to insist on the radical nature of his own work, others have intervened for Bakhtin. Peter Hitchcock, for instance, asserts that "If we accept the ubiquity of dialogism, it negates our ability to theorize from it": it undermines all of the certainties required in the process of advancing general propositions (Hitchcock 1993, p. 5). This is a lesson waiting to be learnt, as Bakhtin is still frequently associated with a liberal, democratic social philosophy that provides a facile way for

literary scholarship to involve political concerns. It would also return us to a point raised in the Introduction, that there always has been a diversity of images of Bakhtin, not all of whom can be easily superimposed, and some of whom would not want to be (cf. Wall 1998). Yet the influence of a concept such as “the carnivalesque” in literary theory, especially as an ethical and embodied alternative to Derridean or post-structuralist play, seems to indicate awareness of the value of such diversity at the point where a more rigorously-argued concept of difference is excluded (cf. Wilson 1986). This preference for (one version of) the Middle Ages over (one version of) postmodernism could perhaps be accounted for by twin desires to preserve the immediate application and practicality of literary theory, and to overcome a lingering anxiety about the validity of the entire discipline. Instead of turning to philosophers to resolve semantic problems, literary critics look to the street and an idealised – even, or perhaps especially, in Bakhtin’s account – version of linguistic reference that seems to dissolve theory into popularly-legitimised festivity. What these supporters of a veiled anti-theoreticism miss, as do some deluded champions of Derrida’s archly theoretical “free play”, is how carnival has always been an *inadequate* resolution to philosophical problems of meaning, that it does not overcome the matters of ethics, responsibility, epistemology, and social hierarchy with which Bakhtin and Derrida are so endlessly preoccupied. Their own works, firmly grounded within a range of philosophical traditions, call attention to this, but one cost of their popularisation has been a falling-away of this contextual awareness. It is to this loss, and how it could suggest ways forward for literary theory, that we now turn.

Most academics would agree that we are past a watershed of literary theory, and the incredibly fertile period of French intellectual life during the late 1960s, with its diverse consequences for Anglophone academia during the 1970s and 80s, has not been repeated. This sometimes takes the form of conservative grumbling about the effects literary theory has had and the possible complicity it enjoyed with changes to academic institutions which it should have resisted; and sometimes optimistic considerations about the avenues it has opened, and the opportunities it has provided within and without the academy (for fairly typical examples of these views, see, respectively, Eagleton 2003; McQuillan *et al.* 1999b). While the proclamations of being post-theory, after theory, or at the end of theory may be premature, and have been with us, like declarations of the end of history, for several years now, it is certainly currently possible to contemplate more clearly the formation and status of literary theory as a respectable

discipline. The first obvious point is to note its institutional success, perhaps to the surprise of some of the participants, and how this happened in conjunction with other historical trajectories. The crisis of legitimisation in the humanities has already been noted, and can be tied in with the resurgence of conservative politics during the 1980s in Britain and America that brought questions of profit and utility to the fore. In this more right-wing political climate funding for higher education was cut, and institutions were expected to teach growing numbers of students with fewer resources. The labour movement suffered a series of defeats, and radical Leftist academic thought became harder to relate to a society that appeared to embrace more self-centred values. During the 1990s British universities were exposed to a process of massification that saw more people entering higher education than ever before, alongside an increased bureaucratisation that formalised hierarchies between institutions and brought them into more direct economic competition. Literary theory spoke to some of these concerns: it dealt with popular culture as readily as high; blended literary creativity with scientific-sounding authority; was marketable as a young interdisciplinary movement; and provided another forum for debates about the political import of culture. It could also be delivered to mass audiences if it were treated as a set of schools and theories, or even as a specialist jargon such as you would find in the sciences (McQuillan *et al.* 1999a, pp. xi-xii). It provided all of this while still allowing the pursuit of some traditional activities of English Literature, only with objects of study that now included modern media, philosophical texts, and cultural practices, and a cross-disciplinary ethos that drew on sociology, psychology, and political theory. Galin Tihanov connects this diversification in study texts and methods with a failure of traditional justifications for art, and to do so, traces the 1960s French theory boom to the interwar generation of literary theorists based in Eastern Europe (Tihanov 2004b, p. 64). In this first phase of theory, legitimisation came from a re-working of the traditional philosophical-political appropriations of art, so that, for instance, in the 1920s Lukács could read the nineteenth-century bourgeois novel as a model for Marxist art that went beyond narrow political dogma (Tihanov 2004b, p. 74). The second phase of theory cast into doubt this justification, faced as it was with art as a commodity, therefore made a virtue out of literature being just one mode of cultural participation among many. Its institutional success, which Tihanov suggests ended perhaps during the early 1990s, is necessarily limited by this poverty of legitimisation (cf. Tihanov 2004b, p. 79).



Of course, once a movement designed to question the institution of criticism becomes part of that institution itself, its radical orientation is fundamentally altered. This leads to the defence of interior critique offered by Derrida above, or more pessimistic commentary: “Theory has itself become doxa, the very state it set out to subvert”, a point that is prominent in the de-radicalised dominant images of Bakhtin and Derrida outlined by this thesis (McQuillan *et al.* 1999a, p. xiv). Intriguingly, this success and normalisation was noticeable even between 1982 and the first publication of a popular theory textbook, and its second edition in 1986:

The most conspicuous development has been the general growth of interest in theory, both in the publishing world and in university and polytechnic courses; what was not long ago an embattled minority pursuit has now become an established subject of study in many, perhaps most, higher education institutions.

(Jefferson and Robey 1986 [1982], p. 21)

Yet after this explosion of the 1980s, alongside both the success and the backlash, there was apparently a loss of energy within the theoretical movement. Once it had established itself in the institutions of academia and even popular culture, there seemed no dynamic fusion with other disciplines, or effort to keep abreast of developments in the philosophical movements that spawned it. Instead, what appears to have happened is a process of colonisation that meant all interdisciplinarity would be on literary theory’s own terms. This is made startlingly clear in the introduction to a recent reader in literary theory. Here, the subject’s origins are traced back to the 1960s, and tied in changes within the philosophy of science summarised as the growth of reflexive awareness, especially through the work of Thomas Kuhn.<sup>3</sup> This means literary theory was part of

a more pervasive intellectual movement that has seen modern doubt turn on the instruments of its own articulation and analysis, so that all objects of knowledge seem to be more artefacts constructed through and within language [...] than they seem to be entities [...] on which language reflects.

(Waugh 2001, p. xiii)

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<sup>3</sup> References to Kuhn can be found on pages xiii, and 2-3. As an elucidation of the roots of literary theory it has some merit, although could be sharpened by reference to the social constructivist tradition in sociology that Kuhn develops, and hence a whole lineage of German and American thought.

So while literary theory forms one front of a larger movement, it still retains a critical priority which validates and renews imperilled disciplines – “English has become the site of a new multidisciplinary which has challenged the methods and assumptions of an earlier literary tradition and those of philosophy and science too” (Waugh 2001, p. xiii). It is questionable whether the “traditions” of philosophy and science are much perturbed by English’s new predominance, as indeed they have produced their own multifarious responses to the general intellectual development of reflexivity. One effect of this colonial tendency in literary theory has been a recent debate over whether there is a single enterprise of Theory which gathers together a range of disciplines, or only a plurality of theories, which overlap and compete (Culler 1997 adopts the first model; Selden *et al.* 1997 [1985] the second). The interests of the publishing industry, which are now a formidable influence on the shape of the subject, seem to incline towards the former view as it still further expands the market for reader’s guides, introductions, and anthologies (e.g. Lucy 2000; Leitch 2001; Easthope and McGowan 2004). Yet academic probity would arguably point towards the latter, especially given the range of targets that theory is seen to attack. There is the well-worn, but still-pertinent criticism of literary theory, that by adopting a piecemeal approach to academic disciplines, it risks mistaking the extent of its effects: a critique of Saussure, in short, does not constitute a demolition of linguistics.

It would be a mistake to think all this began in 1981. The original post-structuralist movement that formed the key inspiration for modern literary theory also relied on limited readings, an eclectic approach, and a bundling together of distinct thinkers and traditions. This has been ably explained by Leonard Jackson:

The modern theory that I am concerned with developed in France in the 1950s and 1960s out of a rethinking of the ideas of Karl Marx, of Sigmund Freud and of Ferdinand de Saussure. It became the ideology of a marginal group of intellectuals, poised somewhere between a very large Stalinist Communist party and an even larger bourgeoisie. It developed under the intellectual influence of French philosophy of the subject – drawing on the ideas of Husserl and Heidegger and in tension with those of Merleau-Ponty and Sartre. Under the misleadingly limited name “structuralism” it briefly succeeded existentialism as a group of popular philosophies; and when the structuralist model collapsed in about 1967, a variety of post-structuralisms succeeded it and were exported to marginal and lonely literary intellectuals all over the world. Hence our present discontents.

(Jackson 1991, p. 2)

As Jackson admits, this is a slightly reductive narrative, but it draws out very well the specific grounding of post-structuralism in a political and intellectual context, as well as its “rethinking” of key figures, which later in Jackson’s work is explained more as a misreading.<sup>4</sup> A similar story is told in Terry Eagleton’s recent work *After Theory*, which I would like to examine briefly here as an indication of the debate over where theory should and should not go. Eagleton too sees the 1960s as the crucible for what he names “cultural theory”, and adds to Jackson’s analysis the more sociological figures of the rise of consumer society, decline of religion, and the struggles over civil rights and women’s liberation (Eagleton 2003, p. 24). Yet radical politics has evaporated from cultural theory, to be replaced by complicity with the social and academic institutions it should be criticising. This leads to Eagleton offering a binary distinction between different kinds of theory: on the one hand, “If theory remains a reasonably systematic reflection on our guiding assumptions, it remains as indispensable as ever”; yet on the other, there is a current orthodox cultural theory which rejects all norms, universalist or essentialist arguments, and therefore any grounds for (political) solidarity (Eagleton 2003, pp. 2, 13-22 *et passim*).<sup>5</sup> What he sees as necessary to shake off this relativist torpor is a new philosophical approach, grounded in a history of problems and problem-solving, and adaptive to the corporeal level of existence. It would carry forward the most precious insights of cultural theory, yet harness them to a political framework that stands a chance of enacting social change. This new cultural theory would certainly be diverse, fusing Aristotelian concepts of virtue with Hegelian concepts of self-determination, and a Heideggerian consciousness of mortality with humanist-socialist arguments about the need to treat one another better, and this multiplicity acknowledges the favourable influence of the old cultural theory (Eagleton 2003, pp. 120, 211). Unfortunately, *After Theory* does not display enough of Eagleton’s expansive knowledge about the key players in post-structuralism, and hence moves far too quickly from criticising the growth of a mass theory enterprise to blaming the thinkers whose work forms one of its foundations. For instance, it

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<sup>4</sup> If criticism were to be offered, a minor point would be that Jackson does not recognise the self-consciousness of thinkers within the movement about their historical grounding. For instance, Derrida remarks ““It was [...] what we had known or what some of us for quite some time no longer hid from concerning totalitarian terror in all the Eastern countries, all the socio-economic disasters of Soviet bureaucracy, the Stalinism of the past and the neo-Stalinism in process (roughly speaking, from the Moscow trials to the repression in Hungary, to take only those minimal indices). Such was no doubt the element in which what is called deconstruction developed – and one can understand nothing of this period of deconstruction, notably in France, unless one takes this historical entanglement into account” (Derrida 1994 [1993], p. 15).

<sup>5</sup> The difficulties Eagleton has with his terminology, as well as conceptual ambiguities which muddy the waters of his thinking, are detailed in Griffiths 2003.

neglects both the reactions of Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard, and the other early critical theorists to the philosophical lineage which Eagleton sketches, and the more sophisticated adaptations of these thinkers and their diverse works which have followed.<sup>6</sup> Instead, it prefers a binary of *either* trivial cultural theory *or* serious, weighty philosophy that forgets much of literary theory's criticism, however disputable, of such black-and-white thinking. In terms of politics, Eagleton avoids a range of Marxist work which attempts to incorporate some of the insights of post-structuralism, from Laclau and Mouffe to Negri, by marking down all cultural theory as irredeemably relativist and incapable of political action (Eagleton 2003, p. 37). This moves too quickly for either the more analytical, relationist philosophy that Eagleton proposes, or the radical post-structuralism, which he indicts but never examines. The main weakness of Eagleton's argument, and the most regrettable missed opportunity, is that the philosophical ideas he sketches, and which form the most rewarding sections of his work, could exist as easily *alongside* theory as *after* it. Eagleton appears to be after theory in the way that Wile E. Coyote is after Roadrunner, with his frustration and single-mindedness constantly preventing him from recognising that the target is no longer where he thought, and is less hostile to his own views than he might expect. Being "after theory" does not necessitate the rejection of theory that Eagleton, in this text if not elsewhere in his work, advances, but rather a re-evaluation of theory in its original contexts, and as part of much larger intellectual currents.

Perhaps more than other critics, and with good reason, Eagleton is aware of the benefits literary theory has afforded. For instance, he readily acknowledges the role of literary theory in freeing the universities of "literary appreciation", Leavisite thinking, and the assumption that literature was essentially a trivial matter (Eagleton 2003, p. 82). Theory provided a specific reflexivity and self-awareness for literary study that had previously been subordinated, and opened debates with other disciplines that have profited all sides. Yet this reflexivity and interdisciplinarity needs to be deepened, not abandoned, in order to progress. There is a tendency in primers on literary theory to offer the subject as something separate from philosophy, or perhaps a playing-out of philosophical concerns in a more approachable arena; and this tendency, it is only fair to note, is not helped by philosophers who regard everyday life as a distraction from ideas, and post-structuralism as a superficial intellectual fashion. This

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<sup>6</sup> A specific example of this is Eagleton's reliance on Aristotle's concept of *philia*, about which Derrida has written extensively, and criticised its presuppositions in a manner that would seriously undercut Eagleton's argument (Eagleton 2003, p. 170; Derrida 1997 [1994]).

version of philosophy is as historically recent and determined by specific interests as the literary theory it disparages, as this thesis most recently suggested by analysing the Davos debate and its engagement with contemporary political and social concerns. Earlier formulations of literary theory regarded it as part of a larger philosophical project, and were deliberately alert to and engaged with its intellectual and political implications (Tihanov 2004b, p. 74). There is a substantial danger in reifying philosophy to make it literature's other, so that post-1960s theory acknowledges its debts to aesthetics but not to the much broader senses of philosophy which include the philosophy of language, methodological awareness, and even epistemology (e.g. Jefferson and Robey 1986 [1982], p. 7). One of the fundamental points of Derrida's and Bakhtin's works is that such an absolute distinction between literature and philosophy cannot hold, as both participate in wider social and intellectual contexts, especially through the intersubjective movements of language. If we are to look for an interdisciplinary movement that can acknowledge and develop this overlap, then it needs to be not on the model of English studies, but in that much older sense of philosophy as a collection of problems about knowledge, or, perhaps better, a fundamental attitude of wonder towards being. In some senses this is a less specialised discipline than literary theory, precisely because it begins from a series of questions rather than pre-formulated responses and doctrines, rather as Kant attempted to reconsider the possibility of perception while assuming nothing about the world or the individual. It would also, quite consciously, accept the limits of interpretation, and the possible fruits of misreadings or limited interpretations. Ideas, schools, and movements do not have to be philosophically rigorous, valid, well-reasoned, coherent, or even long-lasting in order to have effects.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps it is more important that the movement encourages creative responses and hybridisation with other ideas, something which philosophy, again with its basis in enquiry, can facilitate. Literary theory as we currently have it is far from exhausted, and indeed has achieved some very real effects in the consideration and clarification of cultural problems; yet for it to have a wider impact on the intellectual and everyday world, it needs to reaffiliate itself with its broad philosophical sources and recognise its embeddedness within a tradition.

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<sup>7</sup> It is perhaps this point which Leonard Jackson, in attempting to ground literary theory in the same criteria for validity as science, misses, although his passionate and biting critique is still indispensable (Jackson 1991, p. 4).

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