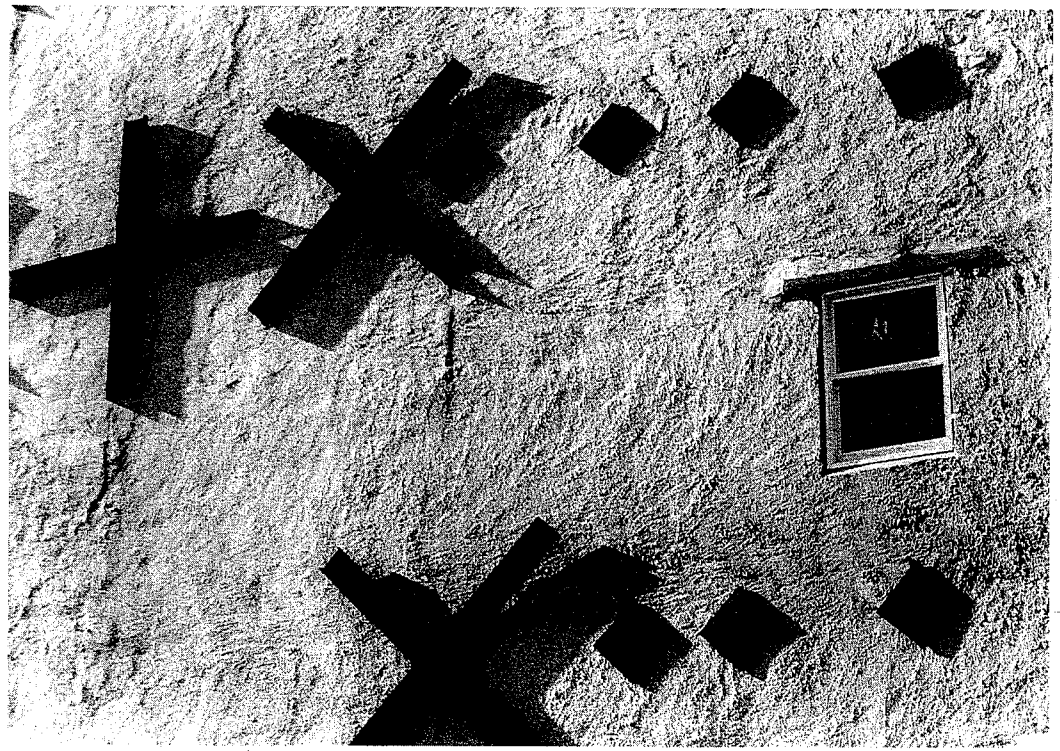
diacritics

a review of contemporary criticism



CLEANING UP BAKHTIN'S CARNIVAL ACT

ANTHONY WALL AND CLIVE THOMSON

André Belleau. NOTRE RABELAIS. *Montréal: Boréal, 1990.*
Renate Lachmann. GEDÄCHTNIS UND LITERATUR: INTERTEXTUALITÄT IN DER RUSSISCHEN MODERNE. *Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990.*
Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson. MIKHAIL BAKHTIN: CREATION OF A PROSAICS. *Stanford: Stanford UP, 1990.*
Emily Schultz. DIALOGUE AT THE MARGINS: WHORF, BAKHTIN, AND LINGUISTIC RELATIVITY. *Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1990.*

Between 1988 and 1993, there has been an enormous international swell of publications on and around the work of the Russian cultural philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin. Books have been published in the United Kingdom (Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd, Michael Holquist, David Lodge, Michael Gardiner), the Netherlands (Pierrette Malcuzynski, Anton Simons), Japan (Takashi Kuwano), Québec (André Belleau), Germany (Renate Lachmann), Sweden (Anders Öhman), and the United States (Don Bialostosky, Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, David Danow, Paul Thibault, Peter Hitchcock), and more volumes are now in press in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. Special issues of the following journals have appeared: two issues of *Critical Studies* (Amsterdam), two issues of *Russian Literature* (Amsterdam), as well as single issues of *Sociocriticism* (Montpellier and Pittsburgh), *Discours social/Social Discourse* (Montréal), *The Bakhtin Newsletter* (Kingston), *Studies in the Literary Imagination* (Atlanta), and the *Revue de la pensée d'aujourd'hui* (Japan). It is becoming increasingly clear that ideological camps are being established and that these are likely to determine the future shape of Bakhtin's reception in the West. In the following essay we explain why certain aspects of this tendency are particularly disturbing. Our attention is limited primarily to the four studies under review, all published in 1990. Although they represent four different approaches to Bakhtin, we attempt to stress some of their most important points of intersection.

To use Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson's term, repeatedly stressed in *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics,* "mess" is a fundamental dimension of Bakhtin's works [2, 29–30, 45, 50, 56, passim]. Editors have nevertheless imposed order upon his writing by selecting certain studies for publication now and keeping others for later—how much later we can never know.[1] Critics try to impose order by stressing certain texts at the expense of others, or as has recently been the case, by concentrating too heavily on essays

1. No one seems willing or able to tell us just how much more material still remains in the Bakhtin archive in Moscow and when we are going to be able to see it. No one has explained why English-language editors have taken so long to translate what has been published in Russian, why they have changed the ways in which Bakhtin's essays were grouped together in the Russian editions, or why new titles are needed for his books. This slowness results in an unpleasant tendency to take each "new" Bakhtin text as the key to everything else he wrote. This process seems about to repeat itself with respect to Bakhtin's early "Toward a Philosophy of the Act" (written in the early 1920s).

from either the beginning or the end of Bakhtin's long career (something we would call—adding to the list drawn up by Morson and Emerson of structuralist, embryonic, and teleological approaches to biography [7], the "conservative book-end" theory of Bakhtin's intellectual evolution). Everyone discerns, so it seems, a different ordering with a different political agenda in mind. The point for us is that each ordering has a political agenda, whether Bakhtinian critics admit it or not (most don't). What is at stake is the future shape and direction of the accepted interpretation attached to the writings of someone who is already exerting a great influence on research in the social sciences and humanities during the waning years of our century.

It therefore becomes necessary to realize that what one says about Bakhtin is never what Bakhtin himself says. A clumsy pattern of readings, linked to the oftentimes unadmitted politicization or even depoliticization of Bakhtin, can be seen in some critics' habit of conflating their politics with Bakhtin's and allowing the former to engulf the latter. It is increasingly clear from the skimpy biographical information that we do have on Bakhtin, especially in regard to his ambiguous relation to contemporary religious and political groups, that we shall never know his personal views on particular questions of his time. It is equally obvious that we shall never know what his views *would have been* on issues of our times. This being said, we put forth a *first* fundamental premise, and we do so to counter some of the claims being made either implicitly or explicitly to the contrary, that no study of Bakhtin's work can ever function "within Bakhtin" or even "from within Bakhtin's thought" [Morson and Emerson 433]. This may well be *our* political position, and we would claim that no such mystical *unio* is ever possible, at least not on earth. Our political agenda could be construed as follows: to set the record straight on any versions of Bakhtin that claim to have no political agenda. Political agendas or politically charged presentations of the issues are by no means limited to members of radical left-wing parties.

We submit that Bakhtin wrote from within many different and strange chronotopes, using many different and strange languages. When we use the Bakhtinian notion of the chronotope, which he borrowed from research in physiology of the 1920s, we mean that there are particular combinations of time and space that not only inform but also contain and constrain anyone's meaning-making possibilities. The notion of the chronotope, "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" [Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope" 84], stresses the fact that time and space are inseparable, not only in literature, where "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole" [84], but also elsewhere: in all meaning-making situations. In the case of literature, the chronotope both "defines genre and generic distinctions" and "as a formally constitutive category determines the image of man in literature as well" [84–85]. Although Bakhtin speaks of chronotopes as the concrete sense of possibilities—of potential actions and potentialities of meaning—that a novel or a genre creates, he also extends the concept beyond literary genres, particularly in the final notes of his chronotope essay and in his published notebooks. In the former he writes for instance that "[o]ut of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and *created* chronotopes of the world represented in the work (in the text)" [253; his emphasis]. In the latter, he explicitly makes the jump from his earlier conception, where chronotopes are purely represented phenomena, to a more flexible notion, useful for us, where chronotopicity is said to lie in the very event of representation [*Speech Genres* 134]. To give an example that Bakhtin discusses, a stairway, as a material object, is also a concrete space that carries an indelible temporal element within itself when it is used in a cultural space. This spatio-temporal element can of course be preserved when stairways are represented in artistic works, a chronotope Bakhtin classifies amongst many other types of thresholds. But the chronotopicity of a stairway can also be active in the very cultural space in which we live, that is in that time and space from which we represent

other things. We must always *pass through* stairways and they always lead us to *somewhere in the near future,* which we represent to ourselves from that space. And the fact of living in a particular country or a particular social space, say contemporary Québec, at a specific time in history can also be described in terms of a chronotope, because time and space work together from within, not from the outside, that is, within the very mechanisms that make the creation of meaning possible in the ways that they mesh and grind together.

Our vision of Bakhtin and the stress we place on particular aspects of his work are certainly not immune to this basic fact of interpretation, namely that we cannot recreate Bakhtin's chronotope from within our own. It is especially important, therefore, that we not impose our own order upon the otherness of his chronotope or attempt to set aside certain texts as not genuinely Bakhtinian. There is no one language, natural or artificial, that guarantees access to the truth; certainly knowledge of the Russian language that Bakhtin spoke and wrote does not. The desire to recreate Bakhtin's thought in a faithful fashion seems similar to medieval relic worship, or to the fetishizing wish to know what a decomposed mind would now have to say about important contemporary issues.[2] The invention of ingenious reading strategies that explain away the numerous inconsistencies and contradictions apparent throughout Bakhtin's thinking inevitably reduces the complexity of his thought and does not get to the core of his ideas. It is one thing to point out contradictions; it is quite another to expurgate the politically undesirable half of a contradiction.[3]

To refuse to eliminate inconsistencies and contradictions is the valuable tack taken by Emily Schultz and André Belleau. In *Dialogue at the Margins,* Schultz stresses that Benjamin Lee Whorf, like Bakhtin, was rhetorically caught up in many ambiguous and contradictory statements: "Whorf is a master of double-voiced discourse and the intentional dialogized hybrid construction. This is why explicit position statements can never be taken at face value in his articles" [6]. We can turn her Bakhtinian reading of Whorf back upon Bakhtin by not partaking in the easy task of eliminating those inconsistencies in his thought that might displease us. Renate Lachmann also avoids trying to figure out what Bakhtin may have really meant, situating her work within a problematics that assumes the complexities of the Bakhtinian corpus. This, then, is our *second* premise: to preserve a genuine sense of becoming in Bakhtin's work. This entails, among other things, refusing to enter the continuity versus discontinuity debate (is Bakhtin's intellectual evolution during his lifetime more continuous or discontinuous?). Of course it could be argued that the becoming we wish to stress is not really Bakhtin himself but our version of Bakhtin. What we hope is that our way of reading Bakhtin will prove able to accommodate "new" and "old" Bakhtinian texts as they become known in the West, as well as to admit responsibly new and different interpretations of Bakhtin as they emerge in various quarters.

There is therefore for us a fundamental element of chronotopicity inherent in the way we understand the idea of becoming. "Becoming," by contrast with fixed "being," describes an open attitude towards the future; it means *making room for future time* by displacing parts of ourselves. The process of becoming *takes time,* but we can always let it *take place* if we are prepared to do so. When we include a notion of becoming within

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2. *There is a sharp irony in Ken Hirschkop's recent comment: "Let us imagine, however, that Bakhtin could return to the scene of the 'Bakhtin industry' and respond to the criticial discussion of his work" ["On Value and Responsibility" 13].*

3. *This is the most problematical aspect of Morson and Emerson's attempt to refuel the authorship debate about many of the early texts of the Bakhtin Circle. There seems to be more than intellectual skepticism involved in all the aggressive questions they ask. We sense a desire to rid the Bakhtin canon of its "undesirable" parts. See our review of* Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics *["Bakhtin and the 'Empire of Evil' "] for a fuller account of some points that we make here.*

our own social chronotope, we are in the end referring to "a world that would be totally unchangeable without the enormous future, the real possibilities within it" [Bloch 155]. If we believe that the future is not already permanently closed off or that its outcome has not already been decided, then we may insist on the real possibilities of what we are.

A number of topics will recur in our discussion of recent publications on Bakhtin and his work: (1) chronotope, (2) carnival and becoming, (3) memory, and (4) language in the everyday. In addition, we have an overarching concern that relates to the international dimension Bakhtin studies have assumed over the past two decades. Not only are ideological camps being set up on this international stage; they are increasingly dressing themselves up in traditional national costume. We feel it imperative to refuse such notions as a "French Bachtine" (sic) [Morson and Emerson 4], whether this *Bakhtine* be Todorov's or Kristeva's, just as it is inappropriate to try to reconstitute Bulgarian, German, Russian, Italian, Canadian, or American Bakhtins. Such national labels take on moralistic overtones (our "free-world" Bakhtin is better than their "Communist" Bakhtin), as each camp claims that its own national Bakhtin is closer to the truth than others'. If one American version of Bakhtin chooses to thrust Bakhtin back into the cold-war rhetoric of Marxist-bashing discourses, we ought not to be fooled by that version's pretense to put forward a dispassionate view.

We hope that what Bakhtin becomes in the next few years will not be locked into a set of binarisms, the poles of which are one national tradition and another, or a Marxist and an anti-Marxist Bakhtin. We are looking for a much broader and deeper dialogue than between an exclusive dialogue between the American and the Russian contexts. As we know, Bakhtinian dialogism always contains more than two well-delineated voices. Not only are there the actual voices of the participants who are physically present (this is drama for Bakhtin), but also voices within and around those voices. In our view, Bakhtin studies could become the site of a genuine "dialogue of cultures" in the sense described by Aron Ja. Gurevich:

> *In Bakhtin's works, the idea of a "dialogue of cultures" is comprehensively developed, but not only in the first sense mentioned by me, i.e. as an exchange between our contemporary consciousness and that of the people from past periods of time who have left for us in the appropriate sources their thoughts, a special logic, and a way of experiencing the world. We must also consider the term "dialogue of culture" as meaning that each and every culture in its very core is already dialogic in itself by its own nature, that each culture struggles with itself when it negates its own fundamental postulates or questions them. We must study the dialogic aspect, the plurivocality of culture as a source of its own inner movement.* [272; our translation]

Chronotope

Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson have provided students of Bakhtin with a remarkable book, the most systematic commentary on Bakhtin's writings that has appeared anywhere. The detailed table of contents and the comprehensive indexes (29 pages long!) make it easy to locate passages on specific topics. They have also invented a clear and economical system of abbreviations that allows readers to get their bearings within the labyrinthine complexities of Bakhtinial textology. The scholarly apparatus and the range and substance of the the analyses their study contains will enable Bakhtin studies to move quantitatively and qualitatively to a higher level of discussion than has hitherto been possible.

Morson and Emerson begin with a succinct biography of Bakhtin, whose life they divide into five distinct "periods": in "Period I," the Kantian or neo-Kantian works from the early 1920s were written (the "Author/Hero" study, "Toward A Philosophy of the Act," among others); in "Period II," Bakhtin produced *Problems of Dostoevsky's Creative Art,* which was published in 1929; "Period III," basically the 1930s, includes the major works on the novel, such as "Discourse in the Novel" and the chronotope essay; in the 1940s, "Period IIIb," Bakhtin wrote his thesis on Rabelais; between the 1950s and his death in 1975, "Period IV," Bakhtin wrote many shorter essays on speech genres, epistemology and the humanities, and so on.

Following this overview, Morson and Emerson proceed to analyze Bakhtin's thought in ten chapters, and they take admirable care in their use of critical vocabulary. Their stated objective is to "trace connections without imposing a system" on Bakhtin's intellectual career [10], and they seek to do this by presenting Bakhtin's ideas according to topic or problem. "Although Bakhtin's thought underwent real development and surprising change," they write, "one can discover certain problems that occur with varying but impressive intensity throughout his life" [10]. Three global concepts—prosaics, unfinalizability, and dialogue—are treated as the most important ingredients of his thought.

However, in their chapter on the chronotope (the second-to-last of the book), Morson and Emerson make a peculiar comment: "Bakhtin recognizes the value of exploring the links between *his great concepts* of dialogue and chronotope" [426; our emphasis]. This observation is striking because they have previously claimed that Bakhtin's most important "global" concepts are prosaics, unfinalizability, and dialogue:

> *They appear separately and together, explicitly and implicity, in various combinations and emphases in Bakhtin's work. We do not suppose that Bakhtin mechanically combined those several concepts to produce specific new ones, nor do we imagine that they constitute elements that underwent chemical combination to produce new ideational compounds. Prosaics multiplied by unfinalizability does not yield chronotope. But we do suppose that when Bakhtin hit upon the idea of the chronotope, it reflected and enriched his understanding of unfinalizability and prosaics. . . . These three ["global"] concepts do not cover everything. But we think they are broad enough to serve as a good starting point and will facilitate an understanding of Bakhtin's particular theories, methods of exposition, and style of framing questions.* [10–11]

Morson and Emerson unwittingly draw attention to a major problem in their approach to Bakhtin's works through the concepts they deem "global." If "chronotope" is one of Bakhtin's great concepts, does it not deserve to rank with the other three? Bakhtin, we would argue, was always a chronotopic thinker, even in his so-called neo-Kantian period. Could we not go further and suggest that the chronotope is the most fundamental of all Bakhtin's concepts? These kinds of questions are, of course, futile because they buy into the hierarchizing game that ultimately improverishes Bakhtin's thinking. Morson and Emerson appear to cover themselves in writing that the three global concepts appear "in various combinations and emphases in Bakhtin's work" [10], but the concepts end up having hierarchizing, exclusionary, and reductive effects.

The reduction of Bakhtin's thinking to three main concepts creates an image of fixity which counters the element of "becoming" that should be preserved. Becoming must be an event in our own particular chronotope as much as in Bakhtin's. To say that there are three main concepts is to grant inferior status to the chronotope and to the carnivalesque. Morson and Emerson systematize Bakhtin's thinking unnecessarily, thus undercutting

their commendable objective, announced on the dust jacket, of preserving its "rich strangeness."

Those who know André Belleau's work may find it odd that we choose to discuss him in relation to the chronotope. Our reasons will, we hope, become clear. As his title suggests, Belleau's most frequent reference in *Notre Rabelais* is to *Rabelais and His World. Notre Rabelais* is a posthumous volume (Belleau died in 1986) divided into two sections: "Cinq Entretiens" contains a series of informal radio interviews between Belleau and Wilfrid Lemoine that were broadcast on Radio-Canada in 1984 (the topics range from the grotesque, carnival, and truth to madness and utopia in Rabelais); the second section contains eight "scholarly" articles on Rabelais, the carnivalesque, dialogism, and the Québec novel. We use "scholarly" in a special sense because Belleau, like some other great essayists of this century (Benjamin and Lukács, for example), forged a highly personal form of this particular genre. Many of Belleau's most interesting statements in *Notre Rabelais* are programmatic, as he seeks to articulate at least three different contemporary approaches or perspectives in the field of literary studies—those emanating from sociocriticism, narratology, and Bakhtin studies. Since Belleau's death, the critical interest in his theoretical and methodological proposals has grown considerably.

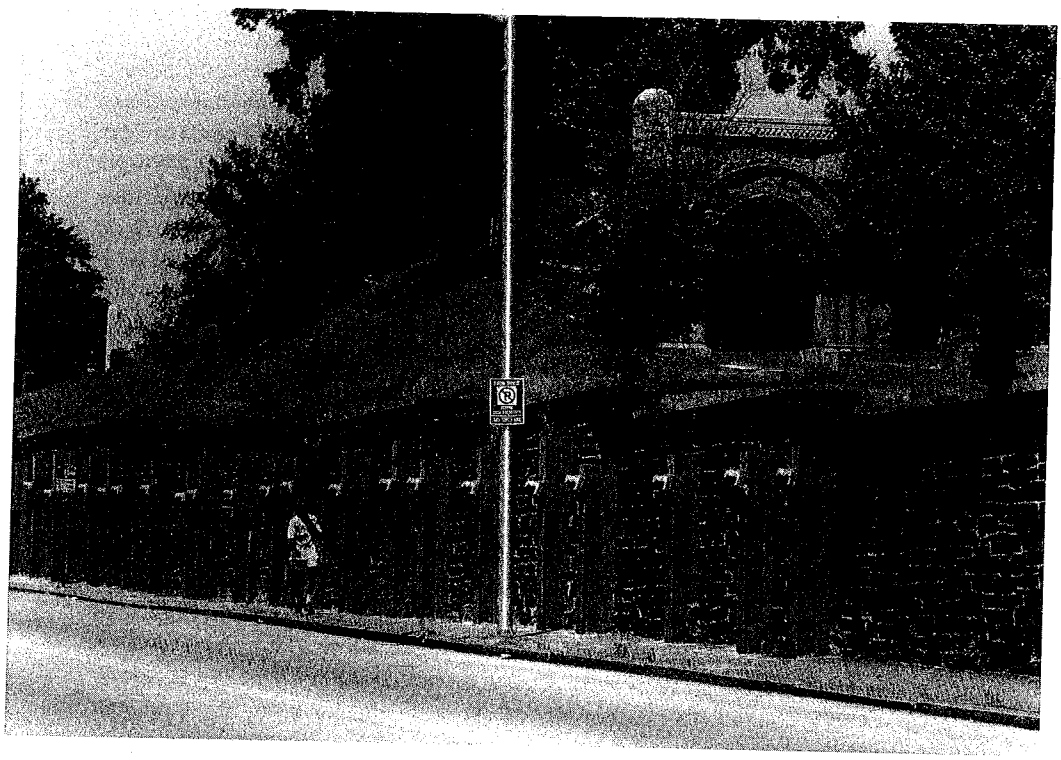
What is fascinating is the way Belleau reads Rabelais and Bakhtin in relation to each other and, in the process, brings us to a new understanding of Québec society, culture, and literature. Belleau's whole oeuvre can be seen as a powerfully eloquent denial of Morson and Emerson's contention that Bakhtin's work on carnival is basically "a dead end" [67]. From 1970 on, when he published his first article on Bakhtin ["Bakhtine et le multiple," *Notre Rabelais* 93–98], Belleau's books and essays constitute a long meditation on what Bakhtin had to say about the carnivalesque. "The multiple" (or multiplicity) was the term chosen by Belleau to evoke what he saw as Bakhtin's major contribution to Rabelais studies:

> *Thanks to Bakhtin, we are now able to broach certain literary realities that we previously had trouble understanding. I would call it* the multiple, *a term under which we can bring together certain great works that have curious similarities in spite of profound differences in inspiration and vision and in regard to which labels like polyphony, heterogeneity, a kaleidoscopic or contrapuntal quality are used.* [93; his emphasis, our translation]

Far from trying to explain or systematize Bakhtin's/Rabelais's thought, Belleau performs what we would call a chronotopic revoicing or reaccentuating of the texts that interest him. This is where a definite sense of becoming can be felt. Always modest ("There are flights of oratory in Rabelais' works for which I am unable to account" [41]), Belleau picks up on certain ideas in Rabelais (Rabelais's "multiplicity is infinite" [25]; Rabelais "invented both words and languages" [25]; Rabelais created a "fantastic realism" [37]), but we constantly hear Bakhtin's voice being reaccentuated.

While Morson and Emerson claim that Bakhtin's work on Rabelais displays "dangerous" utopian tendencies, Belleau is not afraid to analyze two specific utopias in Rabelais's work. First, there is

> *utopia in language, that is, the impossibility of human communication. . . . There is in Rabelais' works something extremely curious, a sort of regulation of languages, which perhaps derives from the fact that his works are carnivalized, impregnated with popular culture. . . . Rabelais does not establish the relationship between speakers and their words as a final, determined, proprietary one.* [65–66; our translation]



The second utopia in Rabelais is social, which Belleau explains as follows:

> *We have in the Thelem episode a beautiful example of interdiscursivity, of encounter, of confrontation, of the reciprocal intersecting of several discourses: the carnivalesque discourse of the counter-monastery which actualizes the world turned upside down, and its ignorant abbot; the humanist discourse which glorifies languages and books; then an aesthetic of neo-Platonic inspiration; and finally the ideological discourse of the Italian Renaissance which advocates the ideals of luxury and liberty.* [76; our translation]

Belleau has a conception of utopia that is different from that of Morson and Emerson, who seem to take the etymology of the word *utopia* literally as a time and space that are nowhere, and they conclude from this that all utopias are hopelessly abstract. As Ernst Bloch has pointed out, this is a classical move in antiutopian thought: "Ever since antiquity, pure wishful thinking has discredited the utopias in a political and practical way as well as in announcing what might be desirable: it has made it seem as if all utopias were abstract" [105]. Morson and Emerson fail to recognize the difference between what an author, say Bakhtin, explicitly says about utopia and the utopian implications of an author's concepts and analytical procedures. In Bakhtin's thought we often feel the pressure of what Bloch calls "concrete utopia" [107], and this concreteness resides in the reality that becomes active within social chronotopes.

Belleau's carnivalesque and utopias are anything but abstract, anything but purely theoretical, because he never fails to come back to a specific context, the unmistakable setting of contemporary Québec. His thought is intimately linked with the rich and complex history of the important nationalist periodical *Liberté,* founded in the 1960s to give a voice to changes taking place during Québec's "Quiet Revolution" and in which he published dozens of essays over more than two decades. The chronotope of contemporary Québec is never outside of his thought but activates it from the inside.

Emily Schultz's innovative use of the concept of chronotope also merits our attention. Far from trying to *order* Bakhtin's or Whorf's concepts, Schultz reaccentuates the ideas she finds in Bakhtin's works to provide a dynamic reading of Whorf, a reading that respects its element of becoming. She writes: "[T]he generation of American anthropologists that broke with unilineal evolutionism (including Boas, Sapir, and Whorf) adopted an approach to linguistic and cultural diversity which presupposes the Dostoevsky chronotope. For it is a relativistic chronotope, an Einsteinian chronotope" [122]. Schultz's use of chronotope, although not the central element of her study, provides a useful way of giving a dynamic context to Whorf's intellectual enterprise. As a cultural anthropologist, Schultz is interested in showing that Whorf's annoying tendency to couch his thoughts in ambiguous terms and to avoid direct criticism of his perceived audience's attitudes were the upshots of his inability to explain adequately to his white American audience what was linguistically and culturally unsettling about Native American cultures. In essence Schultz believes Whorf is a writer of artistic prose who had to cope with the complexities of his own intellectual context. Thus, through Schultz, we see that chronotope is more than the recasting of *syzhet* in concrete narrative form, as Michael Holquist suggests [*Dialogism* 113]. It is rather the temporal and spatial concreteness taken on by a set of abstract concepts when they are reaccentuated in a new time and space which they embody.

André Belleau's commentaries on Bakhtinian carnival are intricately linked with his implicit and explicit use of the notion of chronotope. In "The Carnivalesque Dimension of the Québec novel" [*Notre Rabelais* 141–56], Belleau sees the carnivalesque and the dialogic as two interconnected "notions" [147] that can be used to "hear" textual voices: "It's a matter of having a good ear. At the outset, it's less a question of understanding a text than of hearing it, hence the need for a new way of tuning in" [150; our translation]. Belleau, in some of his other essays [*Surprendre les voix*], worked on the idea that Québec culture and society are in a profound state of carnivalization, hence once again our feeling of becoming in his work. This is due to the presence of several conflicting languages: North American English, continental French, native languages, immigrants' languages, and Québec's version of French. Belleau's perspective is a thoroughly sociocritical one that resists any temptation to emphasize the individual at the expense of the collective or vice versa. It would be difficult to dismiss this vision of Bakhtin as a facile collective one.

Emily Schultz sees carnival as connected to Bakhtin's other concepts: "For Bakhtin, therefore, there is a deep connection between heteroglossia, linguistic relativity, prose consciousness, and the carnivalesque (or comic) literary tradition" [57]. In this, she agrees with Belleau. Schultz goes on to use the carnivalesque (or the comic) as a fascinating metaphor for a description of Whorf's intellectual persona: "He tried to hide behind a comic persona, or, more accurately, an elusive parody of a serious scientific persona. But to hide completely would defeat his project, so he risked exposure, tearing himself apart in the process" [137]. This way of dealing with Whorf's writing, of showing how Whorf was constantly obliged to make numerous rhetorical concessions to his white American audience, reveals precisely a number of links between carnival and artistic prose. It is only by adopting sometimes clownlike stances that Whorf is able to show his audience something utterly foreign to their ways of reading and thinking. This inevitable mixture of verbal and "nonverbal means" is what Schultz calls "compositional strategy" [6]. Whorf's writings do indeed display a surprising variety of tones and stances. As already mentioned, Schultz treats Whorf's texts as artistically crafted utterances and not as fixed and silent documents, thereby allowing herself to bring out the distinctive quality of "eventness" in Whorf's work.

Shultz, Belleau, and Lachmann are like many readers of Bakhtin, including the British left, who greatly appreciate the Rabelais book because it allows for the theorization of social aspects of human existence without reducing that existence to the illusion of the ethical individual in complete control of his or her destiny. Schultz approaches the phenomenon as a cultural anthropologist, Belleau from a sociocritical philosophy, and Lachmann as a literary historian. Michael Holquist, whose *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* tries to respect the complexity and the sense of becoming in Bakhtin's work, is another critic who appreciates the importance of the carnivalesque: "It is no wonder, then, that carnival is one of Bakhtin's great obsessions, because in his understanding of it, carnival, like the novel, is a *means for displaying otherness*: carnival makes familiar relations strange" [89; his emphasis]. And yet it is precisely because the collective spirit and utopian public spaces are openly discussed and praised by Bakhtin that Morson and Emerson ingeniously shuffle the Rabelais book to the very margins of the Bakhtinian canon.

Rabelais and His World is seen by Morson and Emerson as an aberration in Bakhtin's thought. Although they maintain that they are simply correcting the imbalance in the reception of Bakhtin, where undue emphasis on "the carnival texts" has "given rise to a dominant critical image of an anarchistic Bakhtin" [67], in fact, they end up marginalizing the Rabelais book and the carnivalesque, which they relegate to their last chapter.

"Carnival," they write, "while offering a provocative insight into much of Rabelais and some of Dostoevsky, ultimately proved a dead end" [67].

Morson and Emerson are faced with a challenging task: how to dismiss as a "dead end" a work that takes up an enormous space within the Bakhtinian corpus, a work whose main concepts appear solidly in other works, and furthermore one that has generated so many energetic commentaries amongst Bakhtinians.

They choose to discredit the Rabelais book on several grounds but principally on ethical ones. In a moralizing tone, they characterize carnival as obscene and vulgar in comparison with the quiet, "responsible" language of Renaissance humanism. Carnival is "irresponsible," whereas ethical individuals are responsible. The vision of carnival expounded in the Rabelais book is thus claimed to be profoundly different from the one put forward in the chronotope essay and the third chapter of the revised Dostoevsky book. In other words, Morson and Emerson compare the period preceding the Rabelais study, during which the chronotope essay was written, with the one in which the Rabelais book was actually written. They also analyze the works of the period immediately following the Rabelais book and claim that the carnival outlined in *Rabelais and His World* is not the same as the one described before and after that same book. Bakhtin's *Rabelais* is therefore dismissed as inconsistent with the "real" Bakhtin. They write: "In retrospect, the 'utopianism' of period IIIb [when Bakhtin wrote *Rabelais and His World*] is inconsistent with the modest and more restrained understanding of parody we find in 'Prehistory' [of Novelistic Discourse]" [435]; "The tone of *Rabelais* differs markedly from that of Bakhtin's earlier and later works" [445]; "From an ethical perspective as well, the role of the 'public-square word' [in *Rabelais and His World*] is somewhat inconsistent with Bakhtin's other formulations" [447].

This position is difficult to square with their view that Bakhtin is a "messy" thinker. It is hard to imagine how anything aberrant could occur within the thinking of someone as "messy" as Bakhtin. Semioticians understand, as Umberto Eco notes in his *Opera Aperta,* that within a "messy" (or entropic) set of propositions inconsistencies are not aberrations; rather, order and consistencies are abnormal.

But there are more substantial problems with their argument. Morson and Emerson's attempt to isolate the Rabelais book as an aberration implies that nowhere in Bakhtin's work outside of the Rabelais book do we find such themes as utopianism, collective bodies, or insistence on laughter as a valid semiotic mode of communication. They wish to convince us that everywhere Bakhtin is a champion of the individual who must square off against the forces of collectivism, everywhere, that is, except in the Rabelais book. They fail to take account of examples of the persistence of carnivalesque elements beyond the "phase" in which Bakhtin wrote the Rabelais book. They do not even mention a short essay, "Rabelais and Gogol," originally written in 1940 as a chapter for the Rabelais book but finally cut out, revised, and reworked until 1970. This text emphasizes many of the motifs Morson and Emerson consider undesirable and seek to restrict to the "dead end" of the Rabelais book: collective popular laughter, carnivalesque collectivities, the universal power of laughter, grotesque human bodies, hawkers, eating, drinking, and sex.

The identification of Bakhtin with individualism also flies in the face of the revised Dostoevsky book, where the idea of genre memory (see below for more on this topic) cannot function without a notion of the collective memory. Their treatment of utopianism as an aberration ignores the chronotope essay, where there are strong elements of utopianism. Witness a passage Morson and Emerson themselves quote: Rabelais's task was "the re-creation of a spatially and temporally adequate world able to provide a new chronotope for a new, whole and harmonious man, and for new forms of human communication" ["Forms of Time and of the Chronotope" 168]. The values of seriousness and responsibility that Morson and Emerson attribute to their non-Rabelaisian Bakhtin are questioned not just in the Rabelais book but in a wide range of texts, on folktale

or *skaz,* for example, which treat laughter as the glue of collective experience. In "Rabelais and Gogol" we read that "the zone of laughter becomes the zone of contact" [Baran 293]. Since laughter is the product of a different type of semiotic event than verbal language, "certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter" [Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 66]. Indeed, Bakhtin writes elsewhere: "Only dogmatic and authoritarian cultures are one-sidedly serious. Violence does not know laughter. . . . Seriousness burdens us with hopeless situations, but laughter lifts us above them and delivers us from them. Laughter does not encumber man, it liberates him" [*Speech Genres* 134].

A strong case could be made that Bakhtin does not believe in the validity of their distinction between responsible ethical individuals and irresponsible collective beings. Can we not take him seriously when he writes about the "threshold" that this chronotope is significant precisely because that's where interaction between the interior of the individual and someone else's interior becomes public, a *becoming* public that must be understood as the event of dialogue? We read in his "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book": "Not an analysis of consciousness in the form of a sole and single *I,* but precisely an analysis of the interactions of many consciousnesses. . . . Not that which takes place within, but that which takes place on the *boundary* between one's own and someone else's consciousness, on the *threshold*" [*Problems* 287; his emphasis]. Society is more than a simple conglomeration of separate, unrelated individuals. The social realm is different from the individual realm, but this does not mean that the one is radically *opposed* to the other. In the "Concluding Remarks" to the chronotope essay, written in 1973, we see that Bakhtin never abandoned "the collective" in favor of "the individual." What is significant in the modern novel, he writes, is precisely the possibility of understanding what happens during "the collapse of *social distances*" [243; his emphasis], or what transpires when we witness the "*sociohistorical heterogeneity* of one's own country" [245; his emphasis]. The chronotope is thus a vehicle that allows social contact to happen by providing a concrete potential. The chronotope is "where *dialogues* happen" [246; his emphasis]. But in any such happening, we are never far from the ever-changing and eternal becoming of carnival: "In Dostoevsky these moments of decision become part of the great all-embracing chronotopes of *mystery*—and carnival-time" [248–49; his emphasis]. As we shall see later on, carnival is then also related to the everyday. In the following description of Flaubert's chronotope of the everyday, we find a clear reminder that the peculiar collective events of the carnival are never really cut off from the everyday of the individual: "Day in, day out the same round of activities are repeated, the same topics of conversation, the same words and so forth. In this type of time people eat, drink, sleep, have wives, mistresses (casual affairs), involve themselves in petty intrigues, sit in their shops or offices, play cards, gossip" [248].

We see, then, how a number of major problems flow from Morson and Emerson's desire to show that the Rabelais book is unfaithful to "their" Bakhtin. The problem, of course, is that *all* of Bakhtin's texts are very different from one another. Why is it that the inconsistencies of the Rabelais book are so great as to justify its dismissal? These inconsistencies are discerned in relation to the purported equilibrium that elsewhere persists among the three "global concepts" of unfinalizability, dialogue, and prosaics. Significant inconsistencies discerned in other Bakhtinian texts are, however, quietly explained away. How is it that some inconsistencies are used as evidence to support the hypothesis that Bakhtin could not have written certain texts while inconsistencies in the Rabelais book are simply signs of "provisional solutions" [207]? How is it that Bakhtin is perceived to make other important shifts in his thought, such as the shift toward a central role for "the word" after the first period, or his varying interpretations of Tolstoi, while other shifts such as the shift to an interest in the collective body are dismissed as inconsistent? Why is it that the disputed Medvedev and Voloshinov texts are categorically denied the status of Bakhtinian texts but these same books frequently play a pivotal

role in many of Morson and Emerson's arguments? This is likely to confuse readers as to which arguments were Bakhtin's, Voloshinov's, or Medvedev's [see 39, 40, 32, passim, where affinities among the three thinkers are clearly underlined].

But the way in which Morson and Emerson interpret Bakhtin's well-known "leap" into the study of language is perhaps the most disturbing element of their reading of the carnivalesque. They suggest that one important reason why the Rabelais book is not vintage Bakhtin is that the book's tremendous stress on laughter "represents an experiment with unfinalizability at the expense of dialogue," whereas normally Bakhtin is exclusively concerned with the word [453]. This surprising linguistic provincialism, which suggests that modes of communication such as bodily contact and laughter are not an important semiotic means of expression, implies that the contact established by carnivalesque laughter is less desirable (for reasons left unexplained) than the contact of verbal exchange. Though Tzvetan Todorov claims that "the utterance is contact through and through" [87; our translation], Morson and Emerson seem determined to separate the word from the contact of the carnivalesque—just as they wish to stress that in a proper understanding of chronotope time is more important than space [376] (as is suggested by the fact that even in the neologism "chronotope" time precedes space). We sense a wish for chronotopic contact with clean time separated from unwanted space. Laughter and the body are seen as irrevocably contaminated by the promiscuous public space of the open square, whereas the rational word, protected from this unwanted space, can function in a cleaner environment. The insistence on time at the expense of space plays into a theoretical game where the unclean space of laughter and the body must be wiped away.

Unfortunately, clean time is a time where nothing happens. It cannot be a vehicle of becoming. And more profoundly, the various moves that stress time at the expense of space and emphasize the word at the expense of other semiotic modes suggest that some strands of thought about language have not changed very much from those criticized by Whorf. As Schultz points out, Whorf desperately wished to show his patriotic and optimistic audience that American-style democracy does not necessarily entail complete freedom or ability to say in the English language everything that human beings are capable of expressing. It is as if pure language, free of all the hard facts of social human existence in the unpleasant realm of the public square, would somehow be able to cleanse us of all that is undesirable about our social nature. The strange thing about the undesirable, especially about the repressed undesirable, is that it always manages to remain forever entrenched in our memories, whether we like it or not.

Memory

No one has worked out in more detail the enormously complex issues linked to Bakhtin's notion of memory than Renate Lachmann [*Gedächtnis und Literatur* (*Memory and Literature*)]. For Lachmann, memory is at the center of carnival, because even when carnival is over, we still remember what it was able to do. Lachmann opens up vitally important avenues of research that go beyond some of the aporias connected to Morson and Emerson's view of carnival and some of their conflicting views on the chronotope. She has managed to illuminate new dimensions in Bakhtin's work and done so with a remarkably broad knowledge of the intellectual and artistic context within which Bakhtin worked.

Gedächtnis und Literatur is not a book solely on Bakhtin, but it does deal extensively with many issues that concerned him (only one of the essays on Bakhtin, "Bakhtin and Carnival," has been translated into English). In particular, a profoundly cultural theory of intertextuality is developed out of Bakhtin's work, using memory and carnival as key elements. Carnival is a semiotic of body signs whose cyclical reapparitions are equivalent

to mechanisms of collective storage. The ambivalent body, the central sign of the carnival, stores up more than one message just as the dialogic word can store more than one voice. Carnival, for Lachmann, is not an isolatable phenomenon but has definite and indelible links with everyday life. Thus it is not a mere game, as the latter is always cut off by semiotic framing devices: a mechanism of memory, carnival is an active process of renewal.

Lachmann's studies make it clear that Julia Kristeva's work is not necessarily "alien in spirit" (as Morson and Emerson claim [4]) to everything that is being done outside of France.[4] She uses Kristeva to explore the complex and oftentimes paradoxical link between Bakhtin's conception of memory and the role of writing (*écriture*). This link is forged by the active and evaluating voice, itself a contradictory notion when the context of theoretical discussion is the written word.[5] Lachmann proposes the innovative idea of the "chronotope of the voice" [*Gedächtnis* 187], a time-space where "anticipated past" and "non-presence" can come together.

Like André Belleau in his *Notre Rabelais,* Lachmann puts carnival at the core of her thoughts on Bakhtin without fetishizing the notion or overextending it to cover just about anything. Without going into the details of her subtle analyses, particularly those where she deals with the idea of counterfestivals, we can state that one of the most important contributions of her work is to show that carnival must be an integral part of Bakhtin's thinking. Its expulsion from the Bakhtinian corpus (this is Morson and Emerson's most controversial and, in our view, unacceptable move) would make it impossible to grasp what he had to say about memory and many other concepts. Her work further demonstrates that the notions of utopia and the collective play crucial roles in his conception of the carnival per se and in his conceptions of other important issues like voice and memory. Carnival is after all a cultural event, one that embodies contradictory forces. Thus it is extremely difficult, even when we consider their insistence on time at the expense of space, to understand why Morson and Emerson claim that: "Inasmuch as the idea of the chronotope stresses the specific, historically bounded time and space that enables individual acts, carnival could be understood as an *anti*chronotope" [228; their emphasis]. Novels, on the other hand, are said to be quite compatible with a "high degree of chronotopicity" [433]. In our view, as in Lachmann's, carnival can reasonably be seen as a cultural event of memory, and memory can occur only in a real time-space. Events occur neither in clean space nor clean time. Carnival needs real time, real space, real society, and real people in order to happen.

Memory is an event which, like any other event, cannot occur outside of time and space. If the words and genres we use can be said to have a memory, it is only because we remember those who have spoken in this or that way and the contexts in which those words were spoken: "Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life; all words and forms are populated by intentions" [Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel" 293]. Context is an intrinsically chronotopic notion: that is, it necessarily implies both space and time, as well as surrounding objects and an institutional setting. It is therefore hard to understand why commentators like Morson and Emerson

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4. Another counterexample to this disparaging remark about Kristeva's work is Anton Simons's introduction to Bakhtin for a Dutch-speaking audience: Het groteske van de taal *(*The Grotesque in Language*) contains an entire section on Kristeva in the last chapter [149–55]. Such examples suggest that what Morson and Emerson choose to represent from contemporary Bakhtin studies is rather limited (their bibliography at the end of* Mikhail Bakhtin, *though rich, contains almost exclusively US and Russian secondary literature, neglecting the broader international context of Bakhtin research).*

5. The problem of writing in Bakhtin's work has received little attention. This subject needs to be dealt with because it would allow for a fuller understanding of how everyday language is supposed to enter the novel.

[376] and Henri Mitterand [passim] insist that chronotopes, for Bakhtin, are more temporal than spatial. Stress on time, at the expense of space, robs chronotopic memory of the dynamically material context in which the brain does its remembering. Our brain is a space, which allows the time of memory to unfold and even to fold back over onto itself:

> *Bakhtin develops the concept of memory against the backdrop of the dichotomy of monologism and dialogism. As a word of culture, the dialogic word is a storehouse [*Speicher*] for "living" memory; the stiffened-up memory (the monument), the memory which imprisons the monological word to insist upon a truth, this is the memory of the law. It is the dialogic word which performs the dialogical interpretation of memory . . . .* [*Gedächtnis* 199; our translation]

If we take this image of a "living memory" seriously, it would seem justifiable to go one step further and to personify, as Bakhtin often does with his notions, that very image. Such a personified, living memory needs not only time to live out its existence. It also needs a space: a social space, a personal space, a sexual space, a psychological space, and an institutional space. We remember only what our memory allows us to retain; our memory is thus a kind of social space in itself, a restricted zone. And it is also important that the notion of event be brought once again into this discussion of memory; indeed, "event" is often stressed in recent commentaries of Bakhtin's work. Michael Holquist writes in his introduction to the latest English-language translation of Bakhtinian texts: "for Bakhtin, aesthetics is a form of embodying lived experience, for consummating action so that it may have the meaningfulness of an event" [Introduction xl]. Any body needs space to breathe, just as it needs time for its biological cycles: "The human body is drenched in time" [Holquist, "Bakhtin and the Body" 23]. We cannot understand why one would be more important than the other, why the *chronos* would have to be more important than the *topos*. Time without space seems to be a deadly combination for the eventness of becoming.

The importance of retaining the carnival and the chronotope within a discussion of memory can be made clearer at this point. Carnival is an event of cultural memory, and memory, through carnival, can become a collective event. As Drew Leder points out in discussing Descartes's view of memory, "there are loci of intelligent ability and memory distributed throughout the body. Practiced hands can tie a knot that words could not explain" [109]. Here it is appropriate to speak of bodily—that is, time-*and*-space-bound—memory (*Körpergedächtnis*), which, as Erika Greber points out, is also the site of the grotesque body, where more than one body comes together in the same chronotope [307–08]. Indeed, how are we to understand what Bakhtin says about "genre memory" if we do not include a public space, the public space of the genre itself, a sort of ritualistic carnivalesque space in which such a memory can be renewed through the very mechanisms by which the genre is at once preserved and transformed? Such gradual metamorphosis brought about by the very fact that the genre can be remembered is what H. R. Jauss calls the "historicization of the concept of form" [105]: "Speaking somewhat paradoxically, one would say that it was not Dostoevsky's subjective memory, but the objective memory of the very genre in which he worked, that preserved the peculiar features of the ancient menippea" [Bakhtin, *Problems* 121]. We would like to suggest that the form of genre is a space, an obligatory space without which there can be no genre memory: "Utterances and their types, that is, speech genres, are the drive belts from the history of society to the history of language" [Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 65]. One of the most important ways we remember a word is by returning to a genre in which we can retrace the "typical expressions that seem to adhere to words" [*Speech Genres* 87]. This statement recalls a passage in *Freudianism* where Voloshinov/Bakhtin describe the

memory processes as a recourse to storytelling, a process of externalizing inward material—even an individual's "private" thought process.[6] This paraphrase of Freud reveals the chronotopic dimensions of any memory as narrative event:

> *When we try to remember some appellation we have forgotten, other names and ideas arise in our consciousness that have some relationship to the forgotten item. These names and ideas that arise involuntarily are analogous to the* substitute images of dreams. *With their help we can work back to what we have forgotten. In such cases it always turns out that the* reason for the forgetting was some disagreeable remembrance associated in our mind with the forgotten appellation. *Exactly that was what had "allured into oblivion" the perfectly innocent word or name.* [Voloshinov 55–56; his emphasis]

We can see memory as the practical face that can be attached to the "problem of incarnating the text" [Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 107] or to "*filled-in* recollections" [160; his emphasis]. Memory is our way of letting things retain their places; something forgotten is something that can no longer "take place" because it no longer has any place within us. Forgotten events result from the extraction of space from the unit of the chronotope. Bakhtin writes:

> *The life of the word is contained in its transfer from one mouth to another, from one context to another context, from one social collective to another, from one generation to another generation. In this process the word does not forget its own path and cannot completely free itself from the power of these concrete contexts into which it has entered.* [*Problems* 202]

This brings us back to the *social* nature of memory so often stressed but then expurgated along with everything carnivalesque in Morson and Emerson's complex reading of Bakhtin. Space for us can never be pure, but it is always socially organized; our bodies are part of that space. Space never seems devoid of the time of social organization, just as time unfolds within different concrete spaces. In any such socialized space, memory selects that which may be retained and that which may be rejected as unworthy of our further attention. Neither remembering nor forgetting is a passive act, as Michel de Certeau has clearly demonstrated [*Heterologies* 4–5]; they are acts perpetrated against the past. Gebhard Rusch makes this point forcefully:

> *Elaborations of memory could now be seen as attempts to compensate for the vagueness or for the fragmentary nature of the way things seem to our senses and for the uncertainties, inconsistencies, and disagreements that result from these appearances. Such compensation would be a means of making impressions more complete.* [285; our translation]

It is difficult to see how any such selection and compensation processes would not be permeated through and through by social and collective criteria such as the notion of "dirt," which Mary Douglas defines as "matter out of place" [48]. By stressing the social aspect of such a notion, we perhaps arrive at one way of interpreting Peter Stallybrass and Allon White's desire "to consider carnival as one instance of a generalized economy of

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6. In this context, Morson and Emerson's criticism that Rabelaisian carnival does not allow for a "private memory" [444] becomes difficult to understand. All utterances, whether actually voiced or kept inside us, are always dialogic and thus enter the public domain, if not openly at least through their make-up.

transgression and the recoding of high/low relations across the whole social structure" [19] and of bringing criteria of selection explicitly into the picture: "The fair as a site of hybridization epistemologically undermined the separation of the economic from play and the clean from the dirty" [31]. We can now see that the idea of the collective, especially when we consider its intricate relation to the operation of memory structures, is not an aberration in Bakhtin's thought:

> *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, "Discourse in the Novel" 276]

In this context it is useful to borrow the notion of a "space of memory" from Michel de Certeau [*Heterologies* 6], which enables us not only to house within active chronotopes the spaces and times contained in memory itself—which means we must understand the inner relations of these elements—but also to understand how memory, as a carnival text, is always activated by a specific chronotope, without which it would remain dormant: "Like birds that lay their eggs in other birds' nests, memory functions in a space which is not its own" [de Certeau, *Invention* 131; our translation]. The very process of memory involves the use of otherness.

In short, we might say that when we combine memory and carnival—that is, when we see memory as a sort of carnivalesque event—we learn to stress the importance of an indelible social space inscribed in the very process. Memory becomes a complex space where new communities and relationships can be forged through such inscription. It seems entirely appropriate to recall Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History," as summarized by Jürgen Habermas: "there exists a solidarity of those born later with those who have preceded them, with all those whose bodily or personal integrity has been violated at the hands of other human beings; and that this solidarity can only be engendered and made effective by remembering" [*Philosophical Discourse* 14–15]. Even the most private of memories have a communal power, again because of the carnivalesque aspect. This aspect consists foremost in the erasure of boundaries. Just as "language enters life through concrete utterances (which manifest language) and life enters language through concrete utterances as well" [Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 63], we see memory as a privileged site for this interaction between the inner and the outer aspects of any social individual. It can then be noted that the "inscription of memories in the soul brings to crisis the very distinction between the inside and outside of mind or spirit" [Krell 7]. Jochen Mecke succinctly brings out this communal and collective aspect of memory, an aspect we have attempted to bring to the fore in stressing the carnivalesque features which erase boundaries between spectator and actor or between inside and outside, when he writes that "[b]y virtue of its openness, every word necessarily establishes a relation not only with the objects but also with other individuals who used it before and will use it later" [201].

Given the clear relationship of carnival to these various aspects of memory, we find it quite impossible to accept Morson and Emerson's desire to "speak of the 'carnival writings' as a distinct group or period within Bakhtin's work, with their own motivation and internal consistency" [433], as if carnival had nothing to do with anything essential in life or with anything essential in Bakhtin. Michael Gardiner makes the point this way: "In short, Morson and Emerson manage to obscure some of the more radical and subversive implications of Bakhtin's thought and his sense of desperate political urgency that pervades many of his writings (most notably *Rabelais and His World*)" ["Penultimate" 45].

It seems ironic that one would want to expurgate what Bakhtin wrote on the carnival from his oeuvre, for without socially active mechanisms such as carnival, the language of prose (and all language for that matter) risks becoming stagnant. Carnival provides a much-needed means of joining isolated individuals and of renewing their everyday existence by offering it an outsidedness. Carnival is the space that makes everyday time move toward something (the word *prose* derives from the old Latin *prorsus*: "that which goes straight ahead"). This purifying move, if successful, would leave existence sterile, robbing it of the earthy qualities that allow us to breathe something other than the air polluted by too much seriousness. The final irony of Morson and Emerson's move is that it reproduces precisely the sort of reading of Rabelais that Bakhtin sought to counteract. As Lachmann notes, one of Bakhtin's goals was a "new reading of *Gargantua and Pantagruel* which would clear away the scoria of puritanical and puristic 'misinterpretations' as well as the moralizing and officializing ones" [Vorwort 7; our translation].

The image Morson and Emerson paint of the ideal and purified Renaissance man, in contrast to the coarse and disgusting Rabelaisian creature that is always laughing, "when it is not defecating or ingesting" [444], is certainly not the picture given by many Renaissance scholars whom we have consulted. Even the great Erasmus is not always superbly refined: "Socrates brought down philosophy from the heavens to the earth; I have brought it down to the level of the game, of chatting and drinking together" [qtd. in Simons 126; our translation].

Morson and Emerson's work to clean up the carnival act has many facets, including an effort to refuel the authorship debate, an attempt to eliminate from the Bakhtin corpus any hint of Marxist influence or sympathy, and a marginalization of laughter and carnival itself, on both intellectual and moral grounds.[7] Our way of reading Bakhtin consists in using his thought as an antidote to the strong ideological tendency of the West to forget what it means to laugh, "a whole history that begins after the Renaissance and reaches a provisional climax during the French Enlightenment" [Simons 123; our translation]. By proposing a Rabelais-less Bakhtin, suggesting that we should forget, or perhaps amputate, an important part of Bakhtin, Morson and Emerson risk killing him, just as, for Bakhtin, the Renaissance purifiers of Latin killed the language they sought to restore:

> *The historian of the French language Ferdinand Brunot explained how the transfer to the vernacular had been performed during the Renaissance with its classical tendencies. Brunot correctly stated that the endeavor of the Renaissance to reestablish Latin in its classic antique purity transformed it into a dead language. It would have been impossible to maintain the classic purity and to use it at the same time in the everyday life of the sixteenth century.* [Bakhtin, *Rabelais* 466]

Pure Latin is dead Latin. A purified everyday life is unlivable, just as a purified everyday language is unspeakable.

Much has been said in passing about Bakhtin and the everyday, but several points should be emphasized here. First, Morson and Emerson speak as if Bakhtin's stress on the everyday were a blow against theory, an example of what they see as a resolute stance against all forms of theoretism,[8] but, on the contrary, the everyday is, for Bakhtin, a theoretical concept of the first order. Neither the "everyday" nor "everyday language" is

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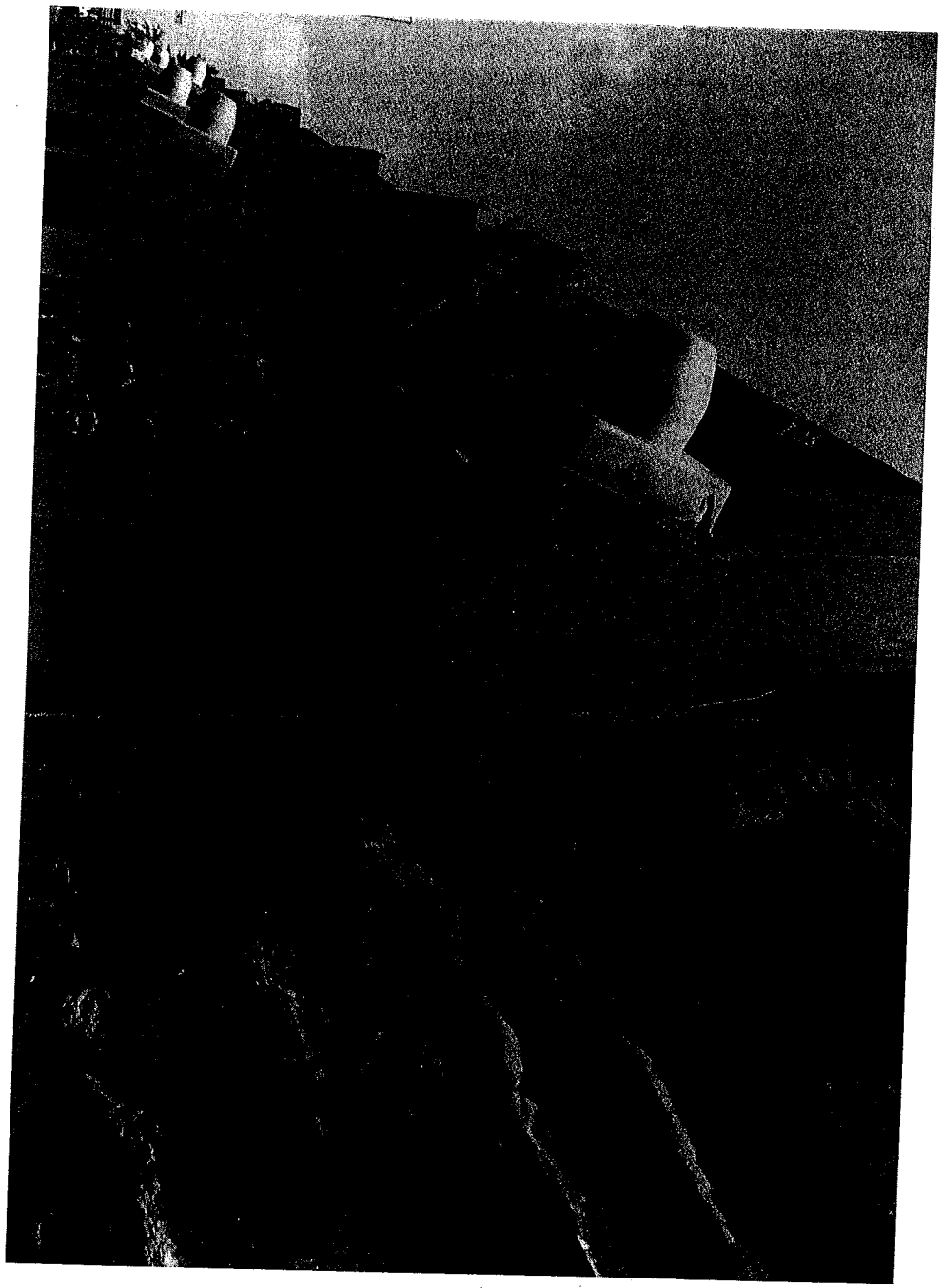
7. Michael Holquist is surely not mistaken when he writes: "The 'authorship question' is thus intertwined with the 'Marx question'" [Introduction xxxix].

8. Samuel Kinser, for example, says something entirely different about Bakhtin's stance toward theoretical positions: "In a book-length essay first written in the 1930s when he was working



a nontheoretical concept, just as there is no such thing as a nontheoretical or even unsocialized "ordinary human body" [Morson and Emerson 491]. Ken Hirschkop has shown that Bakhtin did not abandon the "abstract" conceptual language of Kant when he sought to speak of the real. He "could not envisage reality as something you approached by sidestepping the conceptual" ["On Value" 13].

Second, the everyday cannot be opposed to the carnivalesque, as Morson and Emerson intimate. Carnival is steeped in the everyday, and the everyday cannot be divorced from its other—the carnival. Bakhtin's theorization of the everyday as inextricably intertwined with the carnivalesque emphasizes the traces of otherness in the most insignificant of utterances and the "interpenetration of others' voices right into our conversations" [Simons 11; our translation]. By recognizing the otherness of others' discourses, we are much more likely to understand something significant from and about those others—especially if this recognition compels us *not* to treat them as inalterable objects in an unapproachable space, foreign to our own. We are more likely to gain profound insights if we try not to impose our own categories for understanding while claiming that we are being dispassionate. What Bakhtin calls dialogic truth cannot be attained as an externally imposed impersonal truth "as occurs in the monologic world," where many voices fuse into one [Bakhtin, *Problems* 95].[9]

Third, Morson and Emerson seem to fear that by accepting the carnival side of our everyday we are somehow condemning ourselves to hopeless relativity or anarchy, but Emily Schultz's book on Whorf and Bakhtin shows that this is not the case. She confirms what Morson and Emerson admit in one extremely positive aspect of their study: that the study of language is not an all-or-nothing affair, either all system or total chaos. For Bakhtin, "unanimity and cacophony are *not* the only alternatives" [Schultz 145].

But neither can we believe that theoretism or mess are the only alternatives. Morson and Emerson, taking Bakhtin's everyday as a nontheoretical concept, adduce the idea of "mess" to capture his thought. But "mess" tends to congeal into a static notion of useless disorder, like the mess in a child's bedroom. It begins to resemble a chronotope without any dynamic time or space. Mess does not become anything. It cannot even accommodate Kierkegaard's nonprescriptive notion of becoming, the realm of ethics where "man becomes what he becomes" [Kierkegaard 480; our translation]. Mess is not the appropriate notion for understanding everyday language, of which Morson and Emerson's "prosaics" purports to be the appropriate nonscience, especially if that very nonscience cuts it off from all its others: from the body, from the carnival, from carnival contact, from sexual intercourse, from eating, and from laughing. Even if we want to understand "everyday language" as the language we learn "naturally" ("naturwüchsig," as Habermas says ["Umgangssprache" 11]), such an attempt is forever doomed to failure: "everyday language in fact absorbs elements from scientific languages" [13; our translation], thereby taking in theoretical elements that a purifying definition would wish to exclude. It is impossible to understand the plain old everyday if we rob it of its constitutive parts and treat it as "mess."

Ordinary language, which plays a crucial role in Bakhtin's thought, is neither a single language nor a single genre. "Like Molière's Monsieur Jourdain, who, when speaking in prose, had no idea what he was doing, we speak in diverse genres without suspecting that they exist" [Bakhtin, *Speech Genres* 78].[10] Ordinary language is so transparent that we

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on his Rabelais book, but revised before publication in the 1970s, Bakhtin gives an even more Hegelian formulation to his organicist view of Rabelais" [252].

9. See Schultz's account of Lakoff's Women, Fire and Dangerous Things *in the context of her discussion of truth [44–45].*

10. Wlad Godzich and Jeffrey Kittay observe about the very scene to which Bakhtin is referring [act 2, scene 4, of Le bourgeois gentilhomme*]: "No insight was gained here, only a label to be applied to an activity that had not called attention to itself and showed no need of doing so" [x].*

do not even notice it. It seems to be something like water: fragile, abundant, clear, life-giving, and precious. It will take on a different shape every time you try to grasp it. We should not be fooled by the shape of the instrument we use to do this grasping into believing that that very shape is the shape of the water. From eager hands dipping into a puddle of water, more drops seem to fall back down into the puddle than remain in the cupped hands. Morson and Emerson's hands scoop an enormous amount of material from their close and careful reading of Bakhtin but unfortunately they let vast quantities slip back through their fingers. When they insist that "a carnival *chronotope* is necessarily oriented toward historical human values and specific human experience" [440], they are no doubt excluding "irresponsible carnival" from this ideal prosaic world, where no forms of resistance are allowed to organize themselves [30] and where "antihumanistic" or "antichronotopic" [441] images, like pornographic pictures, are to be excluded from the "ideal of the humanist body" [440]. As we saw, they even exclude carnival laughter from such an unreal world, because "The laughing word becomes a general attitude toward the world instead of a specific utterance engendering a specific response. Laughter tends not to combine with the word, but to replace it. When this happens, the word's openness typically becomes dehistoricizing and depersonalizing" [441].

But there are so many drops in the puddle, and we surely have better things to do than to sift through all the molecules ever so carefully to eliminate all the undesirable ones. The everyday world could never be such a pure, laughless, and "humanistic" place. Bakhtin admits, for example, that carnival cannot be adequately translated into literary language, a point underscored by Lachmann [*Gedächtnis* 254–55], but this does not mean that we ought to discard it. Even if we accept that carnival is basically untranslatable into verbal language, as Bakhtin seems to say, this does not justify Morson and Emerson's notion that Rabelais is incompatible with the Bakhtin who in his final notes, as Morson and Emerson put it, "rethinks and reintegrates some of his most important concepts, [and links] the freedom to 'change the sense of existence' exclusively with the *word*" [453; their emphasis]. In fact, Bakhtin writes something subtly different when he says that freedom "cannot change existence, so to speak, materially (nor can it want to)—it can only change the *sense* of existence" [*Speech Genres* 137].

But even if Morson and Emerson were correct in their interpretation of this passage—even if the desire to change the sense of existence involved an exclusive focus on the word—what would dictate that "this" Bakhtin is more genuine than "another" Bakhtin? Morson and Emerson give us a Bakhtin who is a staunch anti-Marxist, a Renaissance humanist rather than a vulgar Rabelaisian, serious and responsible rather than laughing and anarchic, a lover of individualism rather than the collective. It becomes difficult to avoid wondering whether there are not unexplained factors that might help explain this quest to purify Bakhtin of everything that even remotely smacks of a certain carnivalesque or Marxism. Not only does their study seem to set up a traditionally nationalist opposition between the free enterprise, individualist Bakhtin and the evil, collectivist Bakhtin. In a further twist, Marxism is made to encompass *everything* dialectical, utopian, and collective. It seems that Bakhtin has been put on trial, and if he is found to be Marxist he will be guilty. He won't even be allowed to go through a "phase," because that will taint him forever. So despite the claim that Bakhtin was a "messy" thinker, he will also be unflinchingly and courageously anti-Marxist. He will not harbor any Marxist thoughts, not even for five minutes, not even for one sentence.

Morson and Emerson show no interest in the immense range of Marxist thought, from, say, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Antonio Gramsci, Terry Eagleton, and Fredric Jameson to Josef Stalin, Ho-Chi-Minh, and Leon Trotsky, to name but a few thinkers Morson and Emerson never mention. Of all the possible Marxist thinkers they could have chosen to discuss, Raymond Williams is mentioned in a footnote and Jean-Paul Sartre is cited in a problematic way as if he were an anti-Marxist thinker [44]. In fact, a fruitful

dialogue between Bakhtin and a variety of Marxist thinkers has been going on for several years now; as Michael Gardiner observes, "Morson and Emerson seem determined (for whatever reason) to foreclose this potential dialogue" ["Penultimate" 46].

Indeed, a general foreclosure of dialogue seems to be the effect of Morson and Emerson's scholarly presentation. This effect is seen once again in their claim that Bakhtin's work on carnival, "while offering a provocative insight into much of Rabelais and some of Dostoevsky, ultimately proved a dead end" [67]. But even if this were so, which we dispute, dead ends can still form an integral part of everyday life, where we can never know in advance where things are going to lead. And if Bakhtin's carnival act really were a dead end, they never adequately explain why it has remained so controversial and, more importantly, a source of inspiration to so many readers.

If *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics* gives us a new, purified, national Bakhtin, we hope to have shown why it is unproductive to read Bakhtin with such a binary mindset.[11] Fortunately, there are many other ways to read Bakhtin, but in order to take advantage of them we must be prepared to accept an international Bakhtin, not one locked into ancient national feuds.

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11. Harsha Ram expresses concerns that are very close to ours:

> Global politics may not be all that remote from the present landscape of literary criticism, to the extent that both realms present complexities that are impoverished by cold war polarities. Morson's primary example of a Western literary-critical misreading is the history of the West's appropriations of Bakhtin. His own efforts in giving Bakhtin currency in this country are well known; and it is with great respect for his work that I ask, can the ongoing struggle over Bakhtin's legacy be reduced to the either-or of Marxism versus humanism? *[1287]*

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