# Editor's Introduction

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It is indisputable that the work of the Russian social philosopher and cultural theorist Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895–1975) has left an indelible mark on our intellectual and scholarly landscape. As early as the mid-1980s, this explosion of interest was dubbed the "Bakhtin industry." At the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, this once hyperbolic phrase now seems woefully inadequate to describe the current state of Bakhtin studies. Indeed, as Carol Adlam has recently commented, "in the English-speaking world alone there has been a virtual cavalcade of work bearing the marks of assimilation and application of [Bakhtinian] tenets."[1] We can allude to many significant indices of this deep and abiding fascination with the ideas of this once relatively-obscure figure. For instance, a series of highly successful biennial international symposiums on Bakhtin is now in its third decade. The 1995 gathering, which coincided with the centenary of Bakhtin's birth, was celebrated in Moscow amid considerable fanfare and a high level of global scholarly interest. A Bakhtin research centre directed by the internationally-renowned Bakhtin scholar Nikolai Pan'kov has been established at the European Humanities University in Minsk, Belarus, which publishes the multilingual journal of Bakhtin studies *Dialog. Karnaval. Khronotop.* The University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom has sponsored a Western counterpart to the Minsk centre, together with its own library, web-site, electronic newsletter, and on-line database of both primary and secondary materials.[2] The latter lists scholarly articles about Bakhtin numbering around four thousand in at least a dozen major languages, as well as nearly one hundred books, both single-authored monographs and anthologies, including a major intellectual biography published in 1984 by Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist. Bakhtin's best-known work *Rabelais and His World*, written in the period 1938–1941 and published in English translation in 1968, was in 1996 the second most frequently referenced text in the *Humanities Citation Index.* In recent years a large number of Bakhtin web-pages and discussion groups,

both "official" and "unofficial," have appeared on the Internet. The publication of a new, multi-volume critical edition of Bakhtin's complete works in Russian is well underway, with translations in several languages inevitably to follow. Finally, an interdisciplinary journal called *Dialogism: An International Journal of Bakhtin Studies* began publication in 1998 under the editorship of David Shepherd, Director of the Bakhtin Centre.[3]

The reasons for Bakhtin's renaissance are compelling. Despite the difficult vicissitudes of his personal life, Bakhtin managed to sustain a highly successful intellectual career that encompassed a prodigious range of interests, which survives today as a challenging, complex, and many-hued body of work. If we include the writings of the Bakhtin Circle as well as Bakhtin's own undisputed single-authored texts, such an *oeuvre* could be said to encompass the following areas: an existential phenomenology that focuses on human perception, the body, and intersubjectivity; ethics and moral philosophy; the aesthetics of cultural creation; the philosophy of language; literary theory; the revolutionary potential of laughter and humour; the temporal and spatial constitution of human life; and critical interrogations of such schools of thought as Bergsonian vitalism, Freudianism, Marxism, neo-Kantianism, Russian formalism, and Saussurean linguistics, amongst others. These interventions were supplemented by a series of more programmatic reflections on the nature of the human sciences, as well as various applications of his theoretical and philosophical insights to textual and linguistic analysis, European literature, and cultural history.

Especially in the context of the present collection, it is important to stress the multifaceted nature of Bakhtin's impact. For a lengthy period, the scope of Bakhtin's influence was confined mainly to literary studies. However, in recent years, this situation has changed dramatically.[4] The work of Bakhtin is now cited routinely in a wide range of humanities and social science disciplines, including anthropology, history, geography, linguistics, philosophy, political science, psychology, and sociology – and even in the natural sciences – as well as by different and competing scholarly and ideological positions within each of these approaches, such as Marxism, deconstructionism, postmodernism, pragmatism, and so forth. Bakhtin's writings have (perhaps ironically) acquired virtually canonical status in such intrinsically multi-disciplinary projects as cultural studies or feminism, to the point where Bakhtinian concepts like "carnival," "heteroglossia" and "polyphony" have become part of their standard critical lexicon. This wide acceptance is not surprising, in part because of Bakhtin's own repeated insistence that his project, variously dubbed "translinguistics" or "dialogism,"[5] was an inclusive and open-ended one, with broad relevance for all the human sciences. Hence, Western scholars are now beginning to realize what has been long known in Russia: that Bakhtin is best understood as a philosopher, in the broadest possible sense, which is certainly how he viewed himself. The following quotation from the Russian critic Anatolii Akhutin is instructive in this regard:

> [I]t is very easy to confine [Bakhtin] within the field of literary studies. That is, to think of him as a gifted, interesting, original – but still quite traditional – literary critic; or (more imaginatively) to conceive of him as a structuralist, a semiotician.... Bakhtin has certainly made a name for himself in these fields by taking notice of such things as the significance of the dialogic structure of texts, the necessity of taking into account all those components of a text that determine its specific genre, etc. But his *philosophical* intention – and the fact that his intention was first and foremost *philosophical* – this remains unnoticed by the great majority of his Western commentators.[6]

Bakhtin is a *rara avis*, one of those curious intellectual figures who seems to speak the language of, and therefore speaks to, many contemporary theoretical idioms, and in so doing offers something to virtually everyone. For example, by appearing to anticipate a number of key developments that occurred much later within poststructuralism and postmodernism (although for some commentators such prefigurations are perhaps more apparent than real), Bakhtin has been identified by many as part and parcel of the broad assault on the axioms of Western science and rationality that has picked up steam in recent years. It is significant to note, for example, that Bakhtin was at the forefront of the "linguistic turn," perhaps the defining feature of twentieth-century social thought, in that he identified communicative and symbolic practices as the *locus classicus* of human life. All sociocultural phenomena, according to Bakhtin, are constituted through the ongoing, dialogical relationship between individuals and groups, involving a multiplicity of different languages, discourses, and symbolizing practices. By prioritizing the "in-between," the relation over the isolated, self-sufficient monad, his ideas often seem to dovetail with contemporary attempts to supersede what is often referred to as "subject-centred reason." As such, Bakhtin's approach indicates a pronounced hostility toward transhistoric and deterministic theorizing, such as Saussure's structural linguistics or orthodox Marxism, not only because such theories ignored or denigrated the sphere of everyday life, but also inasmuch as they violated his stress on the open-endedness of history and the "unfinalizable" nature of the thoughts and actions of the human subject. As such, Bakhtin, like his postmodernist counterparts, appears to privilege the marginal, the decentred, and the contingent.

At the same time, however, Bakhtin remains clearly at odds with those who would celebrate the fragmentation or dissolution of the subject. There is a significant ethical component to Bakhtin's thought that runs through all of his writings, but is especially pronounced in his early phenomenological works. For Bakhtin, ethics is interpreted as a primordial concern for the other and an unequivocal recognition of difference, which is linked inextricably to the experience of alterity, the self/other relation. As Wald Godzich puts it, Bakhtin offers us "an alternative conception of the constitution of the subject to the prevailing one that is anchored in the theoretic and produces the

familiar dyad of subject and object."[7] By developing such a position on the intrinsically ethical character of human life, one that is rooted in everyday sociability and the dialogical encounter between subjects, Bakhtin avoids the twin extremes of moral absolutism and an "anything goes" postmodern relativism, and articulates a pragmatic ethical vision that is highly *à propos* for our times. This preoccupation with ethics raises another significant feature of Bakhtin's thought: that although there do appear to be some broad affinities between his ideas and recent developments in postmodernist theory, Bakhtin is not easily assimilated to the latter. Indeed, his ideas have been marshaled, often quite successfully, by what could be termed the "liberal humanist" wing of scholarly inquiry in order to stem the postmodernist tide. For Bakhtin, the self is an embodied entity situated in concrete time and space, and which is constituted in and through its dialogical relations with others and the world at large. This subject is certainly "decentred," but not erased altogether, for Bakhtin places a considerable premium on human creativity and responsibility. Bakhtin's thought has therefore contributed to the development of a revivified humanistic outlook that is not centred in the monologic, self-contained subject, but on the boundary between self and other, or what Augusto Ponzio has usefully termed a "*humanism of otherness.*"[8]

Somewhat paradoxically, however, Bakhtin's writings on carnival also appear to be compatible with a Marxian or feminist emphasis on the overturning of oppressive social relations and the goal of sociocultural liberation. It can be argued plausibly that Bakhtin maintains a position that has at least some parallels with Jürgen Habermas's notion of a "radicalized modernity." Cognizant of modernity's considerable capacity for violence and domination, Bakhtin is nevertheless aware of the strong potential for an expansion of dialogue in our "postmetaphysical" age. Hence, he envisages the widening and deepening of the public sphere, a process of thorough-going democratization and the empowerment of marginalized groups.[9] Bakhtin does not, therefore, abrogate the need for ideological criticism, as have numerous postmodern theorists, and continues to entertain utopian alternatives to existing sociopolitical conditions, especially in his book on Rabelais. From the perspective of many writers, his writings bespeak the necessity to overturn structures of domination, to challenge illegitimate curtailments of human freedom, and to establish more just and equitable relations of power between individuals and groups. Hence, the construal of Bakhtin's carnival as something akin to a "festival of the oppressed" has led to a widespread interpretation of his work as a form of radical populism.

The protean and open-ended nature of Bakhtin's ideas helps to explain why he has been appropriated by so many seemingly incompatible approaches in the human sciences, a fact that has not escaped critical attention and commentary. But it also cautions us not to impose a false unity or comprehensiveness on Bakhtin's thought. We should, as Peter Hitchcock suggests, be sensitive to the perhaps incommensurable gap between the "Bakhtin" that has been constructed by different scholarly communities in

their own preferred image, and the "real," flesh-and-blood Bakhtin.[10] In a similar vein, Anthony Wall's essay "A Broken Thinker" proffers the following observation: "What is fascinating, but no less problematic, when dealing with Bakhtin as a thinker and as a writer is that in his case there never is a whole, only broken pieces."[11]

With some of these contradictions and caveats in mind, it is important to stress that, despite continuing and intense interest in his ideas across the human sciences, the task of presenting Mikhail Bakhtin as a "Master of Modern Social Thought" raises a number of exceedingly vexed and challenging issues. There are problems of how best to usefully frame and contexualize Bakhtin's abstruse and often fragmentary writings, many of which were never intended for publication and are informed by a tangled skein of influences. The latter include many theoretical traditions not particularly well-known to Anglo-American academic circles, such as (to mention but two) the German neo-Kantianism of Hermann Cohen and Ernst Cassirer or the Tartu school of linguistics and cultural semiotics. Moreover, the interpretation of Bakhtin's ideas and their extension into novel areas of scholarship has been shaped, in a rather dramatic fashion, by the (perhaps surprising) resilience of traditional disciplinary boundaries. Combined with a "Cold War" mentality that has long overshadowed Bakhtin studies, and that continues to linger to this day, Russian academicians and Western Slavists (generally of a conservative or liberal inclination) have often been at loggerheads with Western intellectuals and critics, who tend to be much more enamoured with strategies of sociocultural critique and political engagement. Oftentimes, for instance, such Russian and Slavist scholars have construed Bakhtin as a peculiarly "Russian" thinker who cannot be appropriated to different contexts without an enormous distortion of his actual views and inclinations. This situation has, not surprisingly, encouraged sharp ideological divides and an extremely proprietorial stance *vis-à-vis* Bakhtin's intellectual legacy.[12] Then there are the idiosyncrasies of regional and increasingly global modes of scholarly reception and appropriation, together with the usual vagaries and inconsistencies of translation and publication across various linguistic and national boundaries.[13] And, finally, there are more than a few problematic anomalies with respect to Bakhtin's life and milieu to add to this volatile mix. The most prominent of these concerns the veritable minefield of the so-called authorship debate – that is, who actually wrote many texts attributed, variously, either to other members of the Bakhtin Circle, especially V. N. Voloshinov and P. N. Medvedev, or entirely to Bakhtin's sole authorship.[14] The "authorship debate" is well-trodden territory for those with even a passing familiarity with Bakhtin and the central debates surrounding his life and work, and it is one that, for instance, bears directly on the thorny and complex issue of his relationship to Marxism. More recently, however, there has emerged startling new information that raises serious questions about the originality (or rather lack thereof) of several of Bakhtin's best-known and celebrated texts, especially *Rabelais and His World.* For it appears that Bakhtin relied rather heavily

on secondary texts in his account of Medieval and Renaissance carnival culture, in particular Ernst Cassirer's 1927 book *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, which seem to have been plundered in verbatim chunks without attribution. These revelations have prompted a period of intensive soul-searching and vigorous debate within the burgeoning field of Bakhtin studies.[15] This latter episode now looks like only the tip of the iceberg: it seems that many biographical details that had previously been construed as well-established and documented, including several personal anecdotes that had acquired something approaching mythical status (to the extent that one such story has even filtered into Western popular culture[16]), have now been shown to be either false or unsubstantiated. As the spectre of hagiography, or what Edward Said has referred to as the "cult of Bakhtin,"[17] begins to fade from both his personae and his writings, Bakhtin emerges as a more obviously flawed and problematic figure than previously thought – but ultimately, perhaps, a more recognizably human (rather than saintly) and intriguing personality. As Bertolt Brecht once suggested, perhaps we are happier without heroes after all.

I shall return to some of these concerns and issues in due course. To begin with, however, it is important to note that Bakhtin's status as a "master of modern social thought" is especially problematic because, unlike other theorists included in this series (which to date include such luminaries as Jean Baudrillard, Pierre Bourdieu, Erving Goffman, Jürgen Habermas, and Edward Said), Bakhtin was not an academic in any conventional sense. Indeed, there is now much doubt about whether he had any of the undergraduate academic credentials that in the past had been attributed to him (and as Bakhtin himself claimed in at least one interview), given that there is no direct evidence he attended either Novorossiisk University in Odessa or Petrograd University. (Bakhtin did, however, eventually receive the equivalent of a doctorate on the strength of later publications.) What cannot be stressed enough is that Bakhtin's writings are wedded inextricably to a very specific time and place – or "chronotope," in Bakhtinian terms. The formative years of the Soviet Union and those of Bakhtin himself were marked by a series of convulsive ideological, economic and sociocultural transformations. These would include such epochal events as the 1917 Russian Revolution and subsequent Civil War (in which Bakhtin's brother Nikolai fought for the counter-revolutionary Whites, although he later joined the British Communist Party after emigrating, to the apparent consternation of Mikhail); the consolidation of Stalinism in the late 1920s and 1930s; the concomitant doctrine of "socialism in one country" and the rapid modernization of Russia; a catastrophic war with Nazi Germany in which some 25 million Russians died; and, eventually, the Krushchevite "thaw" and partial liberalization of the 1950s and 1960s. These events in turn impacted upon the shifting sands of official repression and censorship – during which, for example, the writings of Sigmund Freud might be acceptable source material for scholarly research one day, but not the next.

Of course, it is a truism that the ideas of any writer are shaped by their sociohistorical circumstances, but a compelling argument can be made that the impact of context is especially pronounced in Bakhtin's case, in part because of the extreme nature of the events that he and other members of the Circle lived through, and insofar as these circumstances contributed directly to their marginalization in the realm of Soviet intellectual life. What is clear is that Bakhtin could not write what he wanted to write, or in the manner in which he might have preferred – although some speculation as to the extent Bakhtin's writings can be described as "Aesopian" (that is, thinly veiled or coded critiques of Stalinism) or a form of "ventriloquism" (in which other members of the Circle were merely mouthpieces for Bakhtin's own ideas) should, especially in retrospect, be treated with a certain degree of caution. Nevertheless, even the situation of Edward Said, writing in America as a Palestinian exile and confronting issues of the utmost political sensitivity head-on, whilst facing no small degree of hostility throughout his career from mainstream academic, journalistic and political circles in the US and elsewhere, does not compare directly to the sort of drastic politico-ideological constraints that Bakhtin and his "fellow-travellers" were forced to endure and work under for most of their lives. Bakhtin's writings are therefore as much about his sociohistorical and existential situation as anything else, if only in an oblique sense at times. As Ken Hirschkop puts it with characteristic insight, Bakhtin "did not have a coherent argument to make *apart* from the history he lived through, which is to say that history did not just get in the way, but gave him both something to think about and the means to do so. And this is so even though Bakhtin sometimes denies it."[18]

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Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin was born in Orel, Russia in November 1895, the son of a bank clerk and *déclassé* aristocrat.[19] He grew up in Odessa, in the Crimea. As mentioned, although he claimed to have studied philology and classics at the University of Novorossiisk in Odessa, and then transferred to the University of Petrograd where he graduated in 1918, it appears there is no evidence he was ever registered formally at either of these institutions. Indeed, it seems that Bakhtin's brother Nikolai, his "Corsican twin," was the one with these qualifications. Whatever the truth, Bakhtin taught elementary school in several provincial towns in Russia, and ended up in the Russian provincial town of Nevel'. Here a group of like-minded intellectuals, which has since earned the appellation the "Bakhtin Circle," coalesced around him. The Circle was a tightly-knit group of scholars, artists and scientists who met regularly during the late 1910s and 1920s, first in Nevel' and later Vitebsk, in order to indulge in "strong tea and talk until dawn," as one member put it. Although Bakhtin was undoubtedly the leading intellectual force, there were a number of other important participants, including Matvei I. Kagan (philosopher), Pavel N. Medvedev (literary critic and essayist), Lev V. Pumpianskii (literary theorist),

and Valentin N. Voloshinov (poet, musicologist, linguist). As Craig Brandist usefully summarizes, the Circle "focused on the centrality of questions of signification in social life in general and artistic creation in particular, examining the way in which language registered the conflicts between social groups." The key operative assumption here is that "linguistic production is essentially *dialogic*, formed in the process of social interaction and that this leads to the interaction of different social values being registered in terms of reaccentuation of the speech of others."[20] For the members of the Bakhtin Circle, such dialogical properties of language-use, and the cultural forms through which dialogism was expressed, were to be analyzed and fostered so as to counteract the tendency on the part of dominant groups to strive for a kind of semantic and ideological closure *vis-à-vis* the construction of socially-relevant signs and meanings. This preoccupation with the dialogical qualities of language and culture (especially as manifested within the novel), together with the desire to undermine the monological tendencies of "official" society, were to remain hallmark principles of the Circle's written output.

The Circle gave a number of informal talks and produced an extraordinarily wide-ranging body of work. Some of its members were influenced strongly by neo-Kantian philosophy; Kagan, for instance, had studied with the neo-Kantian "Marburg School" in Germany. Others, such as Voloshinov and Medvedev, were more overtly Marxist, and gave considerable support to the newly-established Soviet regime. (Medvedev even occupied several important government positions in education and culture.) During this time, often referred to as the Nevel'/Vitebsk period (roughly 1918–1924), Bakhtin wrote a series of texts unpublished in his lifetime, in which he sought to develop a theory of "alterity," a phenomenological exploration of how individuals and their subjectivities are constituted, especially in an ethical sense, through their intersubjective relations. This was a project that owed a considerable debt to such European philosophers as Martin Buber, Søren Kierkegaard, and Immanuel Kant, but especially the existential phenomenologists, which would include Edmund Husserl, Heinrich Rickert and Max Scheler. For Bakhtin, the comprehension of alterity was to be combined with general aesthetics of artistic creation, one that concentrated on the phenomenon of authorship. These fragments were eventually published in English under the titles *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (1993) and *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin* (1990). Unfortunately, in this period Bakhtin contracted osteomyelitis, a serious bone disease, which eventually led to the amputation of most of his right leg in 1938. It is significant that Bakhtin was plagued by chronic ill health throughout much of his life, and he owed much to the care-giving skills of Elena Aleksandrovna Okolovich, whom he married in 1921. (The irony of Bakhtin's health difficulties in light of his celebration of the festive body in *Rabelais and His World* has often been remarked upon.)

In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, which contains his earliest writings, Bakhtin meditates at length on the implications of the disjuncture between

immediate experience and our *a posteriori* symbolic representations of this experience. Bakhtin's primary interest at this formative stage in his intellectual development was to "get back to the naked immediacy of experience as it is felt from within the utmost particularity of a specific life, the molten lava of events as they happen," as Michael Holquist adroitly puts it. Bakhtin sought to "understand how the constantly aetiolating difference between what is *now* and what is *after-now* might be bridged in the relation I forge between them in all the singularity of my unique place in existence."[21] What Holquist here terms the "molten lava of events" is crucial for Bakhtin, because this is where the unique character of our everyday actions and deeds, and indeed our very selfhood, is constituted. It is the paramount reality where "we create, cognize, contemplate, live our lives and die – the world in which the acts of our activity are objectified and the world in which these acts actually proceed and are actually accomplished once and only once."[22] Our judgements, values and behavioural orientations must emerge organically out of the terrain of the everyday, and we need to be acutely aware of and responsive to the moral and existential demands of this realm of ordinary life. However, there is an omnipresent danger, especially in the context of modernity, that we are tempted to abrogate personal responsibility in the face of theoretical abstractions. Scientific rationalism in particular has encouraged the transcription of what Bakhtin calls "Being-as-event" into a series of universalistic abstractions that stifle our potential for continual growth or "becoming." As such, what Bakhtin terms "discursive theoretical thinking" – or, more succinctly, "theoreticism" – denigrates the sensuous and tangible character of the lived event, perpetrating a "fundamental split between the content or sense of a given act/activity and the historical actuality of its being."[23] Such a purely cognitive relation to our world is reflected in the unabashedly utilitarian character of modern science and technology, in which any activity is justified by reference to the overriding goal of technical efficacy and control. In order to counteract this theoreticist drift, Bakhtin argues that we must grasp the nature of the concrete deed or "act" as it constitutes the essential "value-center" for human existence. Only if we think and act in a "participative" fashion, in tune with the rhythms and textures of everyday life, can we be wholly "answerable" for our actions, in the sense that we are reflexively conscious of the existential and ethical implications of our deeds, and attempt to heal the split between objective and subjective culture, an issue that the German sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel was also keenly preoccupied with.

Oddly, although there is much about moral philosophy in *Towards a Philosophy of the Act*, there is relatively little about the phenomenon of intersubjectivity. This oversight was redressed in several later essays collected in *Art and Answerability*. Here, especially in the book-length "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity," Bakhtin argues that Being is properly understood as an "open process of axiological accomplishment,"[24] a continuous activity of creating existential meaning, or what he terms the "yet-to-be." His central

argument is that just are we are impelled to attribute meaning to the object-world around us, we need to envisage *ourselves* as coherent entities. But from our own vantage-point (the "I-for-myself"), we are manifestly incapable of envisioning our outward appearance, and of comprehending our location within the lifeworld. Since our ability to conceptualize ourselves as relatively cohesive and meaningful wholes, which is fundamental to the process of self-understanding and moral awareness, cannot occur solely through our own thoughts, deeds and perceptions, Bakhtin places singular emphasis on the phenomenon of "transgredience." By this he means that which exists in a relation of externality (or "exotopy") *vis-à-vis* ourselves, and that transcends our own perceptual and existential horizon. In using the term transgredience, Bakhtin is in essence referring to the phenomenon of the "other." Invoking a visual metaphor, he contends that we can only exist through the "borrowed axiological light of *otherness*."[25] The other, that is, has a "surplus of seeing" with regard to ourselves, and vice-versa. Genuinely participative thinking and acting requires an engaged and embodied – or what he would later call a *dialogical* – relation to the other, and to the world at large. The upshot is that the other is "I-myself," because my body and self can only have a *value* in the presence of another: "I-myself cannot be the author of my own value, just as I cannot lift myself up by my own hair."[26] And because we are ultimately responsible for any "answer" given to others and to the world in the course of (co-) authoring our life, alterity necessarily involves a normative dimension as well. Sharing is not simply an economic or abstractly ethical imperative, but rather a "condition inherent in the very act of being human," as Michael Holquist observes.[27] However, if the "event is transposed in all its constituents to the unitary plane of a single consciousness, and it is within this single consciousness that the event is to be understood and deduced in all its constituents,"[28] mutual impoverishment rather than enrichment is the result. Co-participation in the realm of the everyday world cannot occur solely through the medium of "cognitive discursive thought," for this would be to succumb to the error of what Bakhtin calls "epistemologism." Epistemologism is inherently nonethical, because it cannot tolerate "another consciousness outside itself, cannot enter into relations with another consciousness, one that is autonomous and distinct from it."[29] A properly *ethical* relation to the other, by contrast, requires a "loving and value-positing consciousness," not a neutral, objectifying gaze projected from the vantage point of an isolated, solipsistic ego. Bakhtin's preoccupation with the aesthetic in this text comes to play when he suggests that the connection between author and "hero" (or fictional "other") has many significant parallels with the self/other relation in the social world, in that they are both necessarily value-laden and ethical relationships first and foremost.

In 1924, the Bakhtin Circle moved to Leningrad, where it produced a series of quite remarkable books and numerous shorter essays and reviews. In 1927 [1976], Voloshinov published *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*, an interesting excursus on the shortcomings of Freud's writings, which were the subject

of intense interest in the Soviet Union at that time.[30] Voloshinov refused to treat Freudianism as a *sui generis* development, but located it within a broader current of anti-rationalism that emerged in Europe during the late nineteenth-century. In countering the notion that biological or other irrationalist tendencies were the primary forces that animated human behaviour, Voloshinov insisted that the psychoanalytic tendency to posit the psyche as an entity divided ontologically between conscious and unconscious elements was questionable, in part because any distinction between them was a matter of degree rather than kind. That is, what Freud referred to as the "unconscious" was, in actuality, a realm belonging to the domain of what Voloshinov called "inner signs." Such inner signs were indeed a significant element of the human psyche. However, the closer these inner signs edged towards social and institutional embodiment, the less they could be explained by reference to purely biological or even biographical factors – and, accordingly, the more overtly "conscious" and intersubjective they became. The evolution from the infantile ego to adult consciousness was not, therefore, a matter of the repression of ego gratification, as in classical psychoanalytic theory. Rather, it represented the acquisition of different discursive practices, which was an eminently intersubjective and social process. Voloshinov followed up this impressive debut with *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* in 1929 [1973], arguably one of the most rigorous and innovative books on the philosophy of language published in Europe during the inter-war period. Via sympathetic critiques of (on the one hand) Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics, which posits language as an abstract, self-contained system that makes no reference to the individual speaker, and (on the other) the idealist linguistics of Karl Vossler and Wilhelm Dilthey, wherein language is merely an externalized expression of the subjective inclinations of an given person, Voloshinov concludes that both of these two rival camps are deeply flawed. His central argument is that human consciousness and its symbolic objectifications can only be defined in sociological terms. They are constituted in and through the material of signs, which are themselves the product of social groups engaged in the material practices of daily life. "I give myself verbal shape," writes Voloshinov, "from another point of view, ultimately, from the point of view of the community to which I belong."[31] Hence, for Voloshinov, signification does not take place in some neutral space, in some Archimedean point beyond the social. Rather, the word is always the site of a struggle between multiple and intersecting meanings which, in turn, reflects wider social conflicts. The attempt by the dominant class to fix meaning and neutralize semantic flux is a specifically political act – it represents the perennial authoritarian desire to secure hegemonically an inseparable fusion between signifier and signified, form and meaning. As such, signification is itself inherently ideological. The process by which meaning is shaped cannot be accounted for by the existing precepts of linguistic science, but only a through a broader sociological approach that conceptualizes actual language-use in relation to the continuous struggle over scarce forms of economic, political and cultural capital.

For his part, in 1928 [1985] Medvedev published *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics.* This was a critical examination of the work of the Russian formalist school of literary theory, the best-known members of which included Boris M. Eikhenbaum and V. B. Shklovsky. Medvedev castigates this school for viewing literary history as the unfolding of autonomous, formal techniques of literary expression and textual organization, which are uninfluenced by wider ideological and sociocultural factors. As a Marxist Medvedev found much fault with the Russian formalist school, especially its distinction between poetic (or literary) and practical, everyday language. Medvedev asserts that there is no *prima facie* reason to maintain such an ontological dualism in the sphere of semiotic or linguistic analysis, insofar as the constructive principles of poetic language do not differ radically from those factors that regulate even the most mundane forms of verbal interaction. Accordingly, the characteristics of any linguistic expression can only be grasped through an understanding of the "social characteristics of the communicating groups and all the concrete complexity of the ideological horizon [within which] each practical utterance is formed."[32] In order to overcome the emphasis on pure form, Medvedev asserts that the essential task of a "sociological poetics" is to uncover that aspect of the literary work which mediates between the "depth and generality of meaning" on the one hand and the "uniqueness of the articulated sound" on the other. For Medvedev, this mediating factor is the phenomenon of social evaluation, which (as for Voloshinov) is linked indissolubly to the production of concrete utterances within specific social contexts: "It is necessary to understand the meaning of the utterance, the content of the act, and its historical reality, and to do so, moreover, in their concrete inner unity. Without such an understanding, meaning is dead."[33]

Meanwhile, for Bakhtin 1929 [1984] saw the publication of his first book, *Problems of the Work of Dostoevsky.* According to Bakhtin, what made Dostoevsky's novels special were their "polyphonic" quality, by which he meant the presence of a "*plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices.*"[34] Dostoevsky's utilization of a polyphonic method that incorporated multiple and independent consciousnesses into the text was a pivotal artistic device, and the centerpiece of a dialogical principle that managed to subvert the *monologic* point of view of "official" thought, language and culture. Monologism, a concept that was anticipated in such earlier notions as "theoreticism" and "epistemologism," describes a condition wherein the matrix of ideological values, signifying practices, and creative impulses that constitute the living reality of language are subordinated to the hegemony of a single, unified consciousness or perspective. This situation was precisely what Bakhtin wanted to subvert by championing the dialogical and the polyphonic. Predictably, *Problems of the Work of Dostoevsky* received a generally hostile response from the cultural organizations of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), which were beginning to adopt the official aesthetic of socialist realism in the New Economic Policy era

of the 1920s, a period marked by relative political liberalization and cultural experimentation. Perhaps it was no accident that Bakhtin was arrested in 1929 by the GPU (forerunner of the KGB), ostensibly for his affiliation with the Russian Orthodox Church. Bakhtin was sentenced to five years in a labour camp in the Russian far North, which would have certainly resulted in his demise, given the fragile state of his health. Fortunately, this was reduced to exile in Kazakhstan, but only due to the personal intervention of Anatoly Lunacharsky, who was then Soviet commissar for culture. Lunacharsky, in fact, had been favourably impressed with Bakhtin's book on Dostoevsky, and even wrote a positive review of it in a Soviet literary journal.

Bakhtin's exile effectively signalled the dissolution of the Circle. An even worse fate, however, was to meet most of the other members. Although Medvedev eventually became Full Professor at the Historico-Philological Institute in Leningrad, he fell victim to the sweeping arrests and purges at the height of the Stalinist terror and disappeared in 1938. Voloshinov died of tuberculosis in 1935, and by 1944 all the other major figures within the Circle – except Bakhtin himself – had expired. Whilst in exile Bakhtin worked in various clerical jobs in different institutions in Siberia and Kazakhstan. When his sentence was completed, he was allowed to teach at a teacher's college in Saransk. During this period, he wrote some of his most important works, including a series of essays on the nature of language in literature and society in the context of European cultural history, and a lengthy treatise on what he called the "chronotope," concerning how temporal and spatial relationships connect and interact in both the social world and literary texts. These essays were collected and published in English in 1981 under the title *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin.* Perhaps the most influential of these is "Discourse in the Novel," a book-length tract that contains Bakhtin's most sustained treatment of the phenomenon of "heteroglossia," the multiform speech genres and modes of discourse found in the everyday lifeworld and that are integrated into the modern novel form. This essay is something of a touchstone that contains *in nuce* many of Bakhtin's most important ideas, and provides an important bridge between his earlier writings and what many consider his masterwork, *Rabelais and His World.*

What animates Bakhtin's approach in "Discourse in the Novel" is his critique of various theoretical and aesthetic positions which serve to buttress and legitimate the centralization and hierarchization of what he terms the "verbal-ideological" sphere. Bakhtin argues that a cursory examination of the modern European novel reveals the presence of a diversity of "social speech types." Hence, the "concrete social context" of discourse, and the time-space referents or chronotopes they contain, must be revealed before the dialogical nature of the novel can itself be comprehended. Whilst this multi-voiced quality of the novel has long been recognized, traditional approaches have explained this by reference to the stylistic idiosyncracies of a given author. In Bakhtin's view, this approach is deficient because it assumes that the individual author is responsible for all aesthetic creativity and constitutes the

epicenter of meaning. He dismisses the latter as a vestige of egological idealism, and argues that the authorial voice is secondary to the incorporation of social heteroglossia into the novel form. Indeed, the fetishization of the authorial voice has other, more ominous ramifications: for Bakhtin, it is nothing less than an expression of forces that strive to unify ideologically the social world and smother the concrete particularity of everyday life. According to him, a myriad of philosophical, literary and linguistic movements, from Aristotle's poetics to Saussure's structuralism, can be implicated in this reifying and centralizing process. Far from being innocent examples of "pure scholarship," these traditions have actively contributed to the consolidation of a unified language throughout European history. This official language takes its cue from the rarified conversational and literary generic forms characteristic of the educated elites, and it defines itself in contradistinction to the "low" or everyday speech types found in the street, in the marketplace, and the public square. Officialdom attempts to stamp a fixed order on these heteroglot languages, to introduce a canonical style to which the latter must submit, so as to "preserve the socially sealed-off quality of a privileged community"[35] and solidify the boundary between what dominant groups define as "legitimate" versus "illegitimate" language use. Nevertheless, argues Bakhtin, this drive to unify the verbal-ideological world is never completely successful. Accompanying this centripetal tendency towards integration are (more or less powerful) centrifugal processes that continue unabated. The latter – which Bakhtin identifies increasingly with the folk-festive genres of ordinary people – operate to ensure the subversion and dis-unification of the officially-sanctioned language system from within. As such, he views the social world as the terrain of a ceaseless battle between the official forces of stasis and fixity, and the unofficial impetus towards movement, change and diversification. The proliferation of socio-ideological points of view in modern society effectively ends the hegemony of a single and unitary official language and world-view, and it frees a plurality of "cultural–semantic and emotional intentions" that are inscribed within everyday social relations from the one-dimensional constraints of pre-modern forms of thought and culture. It is this capacity of the novel to assimilate such a variety of everyday speech genres and utterances that makes it an important site through which wider discursive and ideological struggles are condensed and refracted. The novel "denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language [by incorporating] the languages of social groups, professions and other cross-sections of everyday life."[36] This move towards a "direct and even crude contact" with actual history and everyday experience helps to precipitate a shift in human consciousness itself away from the reifications of mythopoetic societies towards a more nuanced and critical appreciation of the circumstances of our mundane social lives.

What we can detect in Bakhtin's writings on cultural and literary history of the 1930s is a revisioning and extension of his earlier phenomenological notions of embodiment and intersubjectivity into the realm of social discourse

and various literary genres, wherein "the task of language study is another kind of historiography: the analysis of everyday life," as Stanley Aronowitz characterizes it.[37] We also see the rudiments of a more overtly sociopolitical consciousness emerging, as evinced by Bakhtin's comments about the ceaseless "battle" between official (monologizing, centralizing) and unofficial (dialogizing, multiform) sociocultural forces. The latter he identifies increasingly with the popular culture of the people, the "eternally living element of unofficial speech and unofficial thought."[38] What Peter Stallybrass and Allon White call Bakhtin's "cosmic populism"[39] reaches its apotheosis in what is arguably his most influential and certainly most politically-charged text: namely, *Rabelais and His World.* Here, Bakhtin turns his attention towards the boisterous, disruptive and libidinous qualities of popular cultural forms and the collective body, within an historical period marked by the collapse of Medievalism and the emergence of a more open and humanistic Renaissance culture. He completed this text in 1941 and submitted it as a PhD dissertation, but it was initially rejected. (It seems that it was too overly concerned with "lower" bodily functions for the delicate sensibilities of the Soviet literary establishment.[40]) The Rabelais book was eventually published in the USSR in 1965 and was soon translated into French and English, and since then into many other languages, most recently Korean.

In *Rabelais and his World,* Bakhtin celebrates the sixteenth-century writer François Rabelais and his novel *Gargantua and Pantagruel* for many reasons, but primarily because this work of fiction managed to incorporate the lived, everyday culture of the "common folk [that] was to a great extent a culture of the loud word spoken in the open, in the street and marketplace."[41] According to Bakhtin, the earthy, sensuous, even scatological qualities of popular daily life had a tremendous symbolic power to combat the "monolithic seriousness" of officialdom. The characteristic images and tropes of a "thousand year-old popular culture" (symbolic inversions, ritualized parodies, and so forth) were, in his opinion, capable of deflating the pompous idealism of the "agelasts," the self-appointed scholastic guardians of order, propriety, and respectability, thereby undermining the ideological foundations of a gloomy and moribund Medieval system. In repudiating the asceticism and otherworldly spirituality of Medievalism, this folk-festive culture laid primary emphasis on the utopian promise that lay embedded within the context of an everyday, informal sociality. "These utopian tones were immersed in the depths of concrete, practical life, a life that could be touched, that was filled with aroma and sound," writes Bakhtin. "This was completely in accord with the specific character of all Rabelaisian images, which combine a broad universalism and utopianism with extraordinarily concrete, obvious, and vivid traits, strictly localized and technically precise."[42] *Rabelais and His World* constitutes Bakhtin's most thorough-going and radical attempt to demolish the notion of the sovereign, monological subject and its ontological basis in a rigid dualism between subject and object, mind and body, nature and culture. In particular, he "fleshes out," so to speak, the nascent themes of embodiment

and intercorporeality that he sketchily developed in his early phenomenological writings, by giving these phenomena a markedly higher degree of socio-historical specificity and concreteness. This orientation is best evinced in Bakhtin's discussion of the "grotesque body" and his analysis of a succession of different "body canons" that he claims has occurred in European history since the Middle Ages. The grotesque stresses the sensual and intercorporeal aspects of human existence; all that is abstract and idealized is degraded and "lowered" by the transferral of these images and symbols to the material, profane level, which represents the "indissoluble unity" of earth and body. Grotesque realism acts to "degrade, bring down to earth, turn their subject into flesh."[43] Accordingly, acts of defecation and bodily expulsion, sex, birth, eating, drinking, and conception perform a major symbolic role in folkloric texts and practices. "The material and corporeal," as Renate Lachmann puts it, "are namely the manifest as such, they are what is really 'real'. What matters to Bakhtin is matter."[44] For instance, the act of tasting and consuming food and drink, images that are so often evoked in *Rabelais and His World*, projects the body as open, unfinished; its connection with the universe is most fully revealed because this body transgresses its own limits by assimilating the material world and by merging with the other beings, objects and animals that populate it. The crux of the grotesque aesthetic, which portrays an "open" body irrevocably opposed to the "completed atomized being" of bourgeois culture, therefore lies in its portrayal of transformation and temporal change, of the contradictory yet interconnected processes of death and birth, ending and becoming. "The popular conquest of the world destroyed and suspended all alienation," Bakhtin says. "[I]t drew the world closer to man, to his body, permitted him to touch and test every object, examine it from all sides, enter into it, turn it inside out, compare it to every phenomenon, however exalted or holy, analyze, weigh, measure, try it on. And all this could be done on the one plane of material sensual experience."[45]

Bakhtin's decision to focus on Rabelais and the folk-festive culture of this period is clearly not an arbitrary one. He consciously sets out to identify an historical conjuncture of great significance, a relatively brief interregnum marked by the breakdown of Feudalism (with its denial and mortification of the flesh), but before the consolidation of Cartesian dualism and the valorization of an abstract visuality and the construal of the self as a unified and autonomous ego. As Stephen Toulmin asserts in *Cosmopolis: The Hidden Agenda of Modernity*, the brief flourishing and great promise of Renaissance humanism, exemplified in the writings of Rabelais, Montaigne, and Erasmus, was effectively squandered when thinkers like Descartes and Leibniz came to dominate European intellectual life after the seventeenth-century. Whereas the former emphasized the sensual, local, oral and particularistic aspects of human life and language – in essence, the viewpoint that Bakhtin valorized – the latter transferred cosmology and philosophy to a "higher, stratospheric plane, on which nature and ethics had to conform to abstract, timeless, general and universal theories."[46] The Enlightenment, Toulmin suggests, consolidated this intellectually imperious

and reifying trend. Bakhtin would have undoubtedly concurred with Toulmin's assessment. In successfully combatting pre-modern mythological forms of thought, Bakhtin argues in *Rabelais and His World* that modernity's preference for formalized reason encouraged a condensation and purification of reality. By adhering dogmatically to an "abstract rationalism and anti-historicism," the Enlightenment has in many ways prevented humankind from understanding and participating in the immanent dynamism and open-endedness of the world, and hence precluded a proper appreciation of the "culture of ambivalence" that he so clearly favours.

After the dissertation fiasco, and despite the chaos that followed in the wake of the German invasion of Russia in 1941, Bakhtin managed to write a lengthy work on Goethe's aesthetics. Due to wartime paper shortages, and being an inveterate chain smoker, Bakhtin systematically tore it up and used it for cigarette paper. Or so the story goes. What we do know is that a number of manuscripts were left to rot in a shed at his wartime residence; some were eventually recovered by some younger students who rediscovered his works in the 1960s. After the end of the war, Bakhtin moved back and forth between a small town near Moscow and Saransk until the early 1960s, when he retired and was allowed to move to Moscow, where he died in 1975. Some of his final projects included an extensive reworking of his Dostoevsky book, published as a second edition in Russia in 1963, which incorporated much material on the carnivalesque prompted by his study of Rabelais, and a series of brief notes and fragments, including some programmatic essays on the human sciences, which returned to the more philosophical themes of his early period and that were collected and published in English as *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* in 1986.

Apart from the essay "The Problem of Speech Genres," which concerns the generic forms that speech acts take and the modes of "communicative competence" that enable us to tailor given speech plans in response to the relevant sociocultural constraints, this collection is best known for a series of fragmentary and somewhat gnomic texts, wherein Bakhtin tackles the issues of textuality and dialogical interpretation *vis-à-vis* the human sciences. Here, Bakhtin suggests that human experience is "always-already" mediated by pre-existing semiotic and linguistic practices which are in need of creative interpretation, or what he refers to as an "active dialogic understanding." Genuine understanding therefore entails the comprehension of meaning through a creative reconstruction of the original "verbal-semantic context" of textual production in a form that is in many respects analogous to a conversation or dialogue. Only then can we grasp the inherent situatedness of symbolic practices and their reception by specific reading communities. Moreover, a properly dialogic understanding of a text requires that we make it meaningful to ourselves, to encourage it to "speak," in an analogical and reflexive sense, to our practical, everyday concerns as moral and social beings. Understanding is certainly a textual process, but it is also historical and "inter-contextual," involving the active translation of meaning across different contexts

which may be temporally and geographically remote, thereby involving what Bakhtin calls "great time." Insofar as this process cannot avoid an entanglement with signs, which are constitutively polysemic and unstable, Bakhtin rejects the position that a particular interpretation can be justified by reference to an objectivistic, *a priori* methodology. It must instead be grounded in the interpreter's ontological relation to history and to society. For Bakhtin, the model of the natural sciences is therefore entirely unsuitable for the elucidation of relations that are *inter vivos*, between living persons. Unlike the analysis of objective causal relations, the subject–subject relation that is the defining feature of the human sciences must be dialogical and moral-affective. An interpreter must reflexively enter the "stream of language" as an active participant; she or he must make a Wittgensteinian descent into the relevant language-game – or, more accurately, a conflicting plurality of such language-games *à la* Lyotard – in order to comprehend living speech as it is "actually and continuously generated." Only then can the full "semantic potential" of a text or utterance be revealed and ourselves enriched through a dialogic encounter with other practices and traditions. Hence, active understanding precludes the detached, neutral contemplation of textual materials, and success in sociocultural inquiry can only be measured by the degree of mutual communication and understanding achieved between subjects engaged in dialogue (whether direct or metaphorical) in the context of "great time." It seems fitting to conclude this discussion with one of Bakhtin's best-known, but still no less powerful passages about the redemptive power of the word.

> There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future). Even *past* meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) – they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of the dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development along the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival.[47]

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The goal of the present collection is to provide a focal point for the best of the diverse scholarship that has emerged on Bakhtin in the last thirty years or so from a wide range of disciplines. Selections have been made in such a way as to present Bakhtin primarily as a philosopher and social and cultural theorist, so there are few essays that deal with issues intrinsic to literary or textual criticism *per se*. There are six sections organized into four volumes. Part One is concerned with the salient biographical and contextual aspects of Bakhtin's work

of the sort already alluded to, including the "authorship debate" and the contributions of other members of the Circle (especially Medvedev and Voloshinov), and some of the new evidence surrounding Bakhtin's use of unattributed sources in *Rabelais and His World.* Part Two looks at the central trends and intellectual contexts that shaped the writings of the Bakhtin Circle, including such figures as Bergson, Freud, Kant, Marx, and Saussure, as well more diffuse influences, especially having to do with the peculiarities of Russian and Soviet intellectual life. Part Three concerns itself with interpretations and reconstructions of Bakhtin's key concepts, such as aesthetics, carnival, the chronotope, and dialogism. Part Four focuses on the central debates and diverse interpretations that have animated Bakhtin studies, including feminist, postmodernist, liberal humanist, Marxist, and poststructuralist readings of his *oeuvre.* This section also contains a number of more critical assessments that address perceived limitations and blind-spots in Bakhtin's work, especially his alleged undertheorization of power and other sociohistorical phenomena. Part Five deals with contrasts and comparisons between Bakhtin and a number of prominent twentieth-century theorists who (unlike in Part Two) did not have a direct impact on his thinking, such as Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, and Jürgen Habermas, but whose work deals with such roughly congruent themes as ethics, discourse, and aesthetics. Finally, Part Six looks at creative appropriations and extensions of Bakhtin's work across the human sciences generally, including one essay on natural science. Given that it is widely felt Bakhtin's work holds considerable relevance with respect to the recent upsurge of research on sexuality, the new media, gender issues, everyday life studies, body politics, new social movements, postmodern identities, spatiality and temporality, and so forth, mainly because the Bakhtin Circle highlighted the dialogical relations between different symbolic systems and practices that have generated the kinds of hybridized and composite cultural forms we are becoming increasingly familiar with today in the wake of a pervasive globalization process, this final section looks at the creative utilization of his ideas in such areas as anthropology, cultural studies, geography, psychology, and sociology.

## Notes

1. Adlam, C. (2001) "Critical Work on the Bakhtin Circle: A New Bibliographical Essay," eds. Hirschkop, K. and Shepherd, D., *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory,* Second Revised Edition, Manchester University Press, 2001, p. 241.

2. The Sheffield University Bakhtin Centre website can be found at: http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/academic/A-C/bakh/bakhtin.html.

3. See Hitchcock, P. (1998) "The Bakhtin Centre and the State of the Archive: An Interview with David Shepherd," ed. Hitchcock, P., *Bakhtin/"Bakhtin": Studies in the Archive and Beyond,* Durham, Duke University Press.

4. See, for example, such multi-disciplinary collections as: eds. Javornik, M. *et al.*, *Bakhtin and the Humanities,* Ljubljana, University of Ljubljana, 1997; ed. Mandelker, A., *Bakhtin in Contexts: Across the Disciplines,* 1995, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University

Press; eds. Brandist, C. and Tihanov, G., *Materializing Bakhtin: The Bakhtin Circle and Social Theory*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press; eds. Bell, M. M. and Gardiner, M. (1998) *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences: No Last Words*, London, Sage.

5. Michael Holquist defines dialogism as "a pragmatically oriented theory of knowledge" that seeks to "grasp human behaviour through the use human beings make of language" ([1990] *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*, London, Routledge, p. 15), whereas Tzvetan Todorov designates translinguistics as "the discipline that studies the stable, non-individual forms of discourse" ([1984] *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, p. 82).

6. Akhutin, A., in Akhutin, A. and Bibler, V. (1993) "Bakhtin's Legacy and the History of Science and Culture: An Interview with Anatolii Akhutin and Vladimir Bibler," *Configurations*, Vol. 1(3), p. 357. This is not say that the Russian tendency to construe Bakhtin first and foremost as a philosopher is unproblematic. As Hirschkop points out in "Bakhtin in the Sober Light of Day," *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, *op. cit*, the most common position amongst Russian scholars is that Bakhtin's work consists of a philosophical "core," which is concerned with essentially timeless issues of philosophical anthropology or interhuman ethics, surrounded by a sociological "shell" that Bakhtin adopted out of expediency to keep the Soviet *apparatchiks* happy. Hirschkop's point is that the sociological component of Bakhtin's writings, especially in the later work, cannot simply be ignored, although there exists a considerable (but not wholly unproductive) tension between philosophy and sociology that Bakhtin never resolved. For more on this, see also Hirschkop, K. (1999) *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.

7. Godzich, W. (1991) "Correcting Kant: Bakhtin and Intercultural Interactions," *Boundary 2: An International Journal of Literature and Culture*, Vol. 18(1), p. 10.

8. Ponzio, A. (1991) unpublished ms., p. 3.

9. See, for instance, Hirschkop, K. (1990) "Heteroglossia and Civil Society: Bakhtin's Public Square and the Politics of Modernity," *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, Vol. 23(1); also Nielsen, G. M. (1995), "Bakhtin and Habermas: Toward a Transcultural Ethics," *Theory and Society*, Vol. 24(6).

10. See Hitchcock, P., "Introduction: Bakhtin/'Bakhtin'," *Bakhtin/"Bakhtin"*, *op. cit.*

11. Wall, A. (1998) "A Broken Thinker," *Bakhtin/"Bakhtin"*, *op. cit.*, p. 670.

12. For more on the ideological divisions within Bakhtin studies, see Wall, A. and Thomson, C. (1993) "Cleaning Up Bakhtin's Carnival Act," *Diacritics*, Vol. 23(2); and Shepherd, "Introduction: (Mis)representing Bakhtin," ed. Shepherd, D., *Bakhtin: Carnival and Other Subjects*, Amsterdam, Rodopi.

13. On the reception of Bakhtin in different national contexts, see eds. Scott, L. and Thomson (1996) *The Bakhtin Newsletter – Bakhtin Around the World: Special Issue*, Vol. 5.

14. The beginnings of the authorship question can be traced to 1971, when the eminent Soviet academician V. V. Ivanov put forward the thesis that at least three key works of this Circle – Medvedev's *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* and Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* and *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique* – were in fact written by Bakhtin himself. Voloshinov and Medvedev, alleged Ivanov, merely edited or transcribed Bakhtin's own material. Precisely why these books were originally attributed to Voloshinov and Medvedev is unclear, especially given that Bakhtin was simultaneously publishing other works under his own name, in particular the Dostoevsky book. The potential political sensitivity of these works may have been a factor – and, given that Medvedev failed to survive Stalin's purges in the 1930s, it may have been a rather cunningly successful strategy. Or, perhaps less cynically, it may have been the result of Bakhtin's cavalier regard for official recognition, and by the fact that

he often considered authorship to be a collective and not an individual phenomenon. The literature on the authorship question is voluminous: V. V. Ivanov ([1974] "The Significance of M. M. Bakhtin's Ideas on Sign, Utterance, and Dialogue for Modern Semiotics," ed. Baran, H., *Semiotics and Structuralism: Readings from the Soviet Union*, White Plains, International Arts and Sciences Press, Inc.) and Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist (*Mikhail Bakhtin, op. cit.*; [1986] "A Continuing Dialogue," *Slavic and Eastern European Journal*, Vol. 30 [1]) are the principle defenders of the thesis that Bakhtin is responsible for the disputed works, while Tzvetan Todorov (*Mikhail Bakhtin, op. cit*) is more cautious and I. R. Titunik ([1984] "Bakhtin &/or Voloshinov &/or Medvedev: Dialogue &/or Doubletalk?," ed. Stolz, B. *et al.*, *Language and Literary Theory*, Ann Arbor, Michigan Slavic Publications; [1986] "The Baxtin Problem: Concerning Katerina Clark's and Michael Holquist's *Mikhail Bakhtin*," *Slavic and East European Journal*, Vol. 30 [1]) rejects this suggestion altogether, as do Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson ([1990] *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, Stanford, Stanford University Press). Personally, I am sympathetic to Robert Young's contention ([1985–6] "Back to Bakhtin," *Cultural Critique*, Vol. 2) that the currently widespread impulse to reduce the authorship of these texts to Bakhtin himself contradicts Bakhtin's ethical strictures against monologic thinking (to say nothing of his comments *vis-à-vis* the nature of authorship), and it ignores very real differences in style and content between the disputed works and those texts which are undeniably Bakhtin's own. And, following a detailed textual comparison of these texts, Nina Perlina ([1983] "Bakhtin–Medvedev–Voloshinov: An Apple of Discourse," *The University of Ottawa Quarterly*, Vol. 53 [1]) comes to the conclusion that Bakhtin clearly wrote or dictated parts of the works in question, whilst the hand of Voloshinov or Medvedev can be discerned in other passages, a position which strikes me as a very reasonable compromise.

15. See Poole, B. (1998), "Bakhtin and Cassirer: The Philosophical Origins of Bakhtin's Carnival Messianism,"*Bakhtin/"Bakhtin"*, *op. cit.*; also Lock, C. (1999), "The Bakhtin Scandal," *Literary Research*, Vol. 31.

16. Wayne Wang's 1995 film "Smoke" contains a reference to Bakhtin, when the writer Paul Benjamin (played by William Hurt) refers to a Russian writer called "Bakhtin" who, unable to obtain rolling papers for his cigarettes during the siege of Leningrad, tears up and smokes the only copy of a manuscript he has. Assuming the story is even true, the film has several details wrong, but the reference is clear to Bakhtin aficionados.

17. Said's comments on the "cult of Bakhtin" can be found in an interview entitled "Media, Margins and Modernity: Raymond Williams and Edward Said," included in Williams, R. (1989) *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists*, London, Verso.

18. Hirschkop, "Bakhtin in the Sober Light of Day," *op. cit.*, p. 10.

19. The standard biography in English remains Clark, K. and Holquist, M. (1984) *Mikhail Bakhtin*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

20. Brandist, C. (1996) "The Bakhtin Circle," *The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (www.utm.edu/research/iep/b/bakhtin.htm), p. 1.

21. Holquist, M. (1993) "Forward," Bakhtin, M. M. (1993) *Towards a Philosophy of the Act*, eds. Liapunov, V. and Holquist, M, trans. Liapunov, V., Austin, University of Texas Press, p. x.

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23. *Ibid.*

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26. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
27. Holquist, M., *Dialogism*, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
28. Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability*, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
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33. *Ibid.*, p. 121–2.
34. Bakhtin, M. (1984) *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans Emerson, C., Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 6.
35. Bakhtin, M. M. (1981) *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Holquist, M., trans. Emerson, C., Austin, University of Texas Press, p. 382.
36. *Ibid.*, pp. 366–7.
37. Aronowitz, S. (1995) "Literature as Social Knowledge: Mikhail Bakhtin and the Re-Emergence of the Human Sciences," *Bakhtin in Contexts*, *op. cit.*, p. 140.
38. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
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40. For an account of this event, see Pan'kov, N. (2001) "'Everything Else Depends On How This Business Turns Out ...': Mikhail Bakhtin's Dissertation Defence as Real Event, as High Drama and as Academic Comedy," *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, *op. cit.*
41. Bakhtin, M. M. (1984) *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Isowolsky, H., Cambridge (Mass.): The MIT Press, p. 182.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 185.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 20.
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45. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, *op. cit.*, p. 380.
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