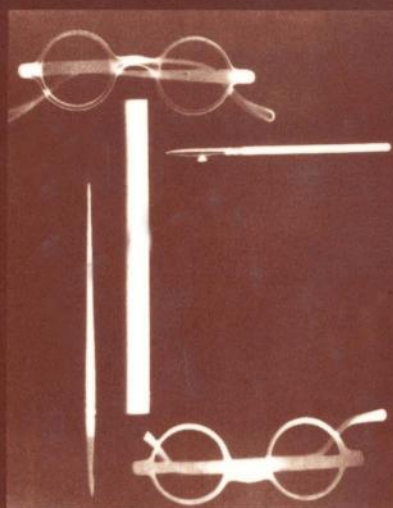


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THE MASTER AND THE SLAVE

LUKÁCS, BAKHTIN, AND THE
IDEAS OF THEIR TIME



Galin Tihanov

OXFORD MODERN LANGUAGES AND
LITERATURE MONOGRAPHS

The Master and the Slave

*Lukács, Bakhtin, and the
Ideas of Their Time*

GALIN TIHANOV

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For my mother and for Adelina

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G. T.

16 February 2000

Oxford

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Bakhtin as Readers of Goethe', *Oxford German Studies*, 1998, Vol. 27, pp. 102-40; 'Voloshinov, Ideology, and Language: The Birth of Marxist Sociology from the Spirit of *Lebensphilosophie*', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 1998, Vol. 97, No. 3/4, pp. 599-621; 'The Novel, the Epic and Modernity: Lukács and the Moscow Debate about the Novel (1934-35)', *Germano-Slavica*, 1998, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 29-42; 'Bakhtin's Essays on the Novel (1935-41): A Study of their Intellectual Background and Innovativeness', *Dialogism*, 1998, No. 1, pp. 30-56; 'Drama, Epic, Novel: From the Prehistory of Bakhtin's Discourse on Genre', *Stanford Slavic Studies*, 1999, Vol. 20, pp. 52-9; 'Ethics and Revolution: Lukács's Responses to Dostoevsky', *The Modern Language Review*, 1999, Vol. 94, No. 3, pp. 609-25.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

(other than those explained in the text)

- AA M. Bakhtin, 'Art and Answerability', in *Art and Answerability*, trans. V. Liapunov, Austin, 1990
- AC G. Lukács, 'Aesthetic Culture', in *The Lukács Reader*, ed. A. Kadarkay, Oxford, 1995
- AG M. Bakhtin, 'Avtor i geroi', *Raboty 20-kh godov*, Kiev, 1994
- AH M. Bakhtin, 'Author and Hero', in *Art and Answerability*, trans. V. Liapunov, Austin, 1990
- BA The Bakhtin Archive, Moscow
- BD *Besedy V. D. Duvakina s M. M. Bakhtinym*, Moscow, 1996
- BMP G. Lukács, 'Bolshevism as a Moral Problem', in *The Lukács Reader*, ed. A. Kadarkay, Oxford, 1995
- BR M. Bakhtin, 'The Bildungsroman and its Significance', in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V. McGee, Austin, 1986
- BW G. Lukács, *Briefwechsel, 1902–1917*, ed. É. Karádi and É. Fekete, Stuttgart, 1982
- D G. Lukács, 'Dostoevsky', in *Dostoevsky: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. R. Wellek, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1962
- DKH *Dialog. Karnaval. Khronotop*, Vitebsk
- DN M. Bakhtin, 'Discourse in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. M. Holquist and C. Emerson, Austin, 1981
- EG G. Lukács, *Entwicklungsgeschichte des modernen Dramas (Werke, Vol. 15)*
- EN M. Bakhtin, 'Epic and Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. M. Holquist and C. Emerson, Austin, 1981
- F V. Voloshinov, *Freudianism*, trans. I. Titunik, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1987
- FG G. Lukács, 'Der Faschisierte Goethe', *Die Linkskurve*, Goethe-Sonderheft, Juni 1932
- FM P. Medvedev and M. Bakhtin, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, Baltimore and London, 1976
- FP M. Bakhtin, 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. M. Holquist and C. Emerson, Austin, 1981
- FTCN M. Bakhtin, 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', in *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. M. Holquist and C. Emerson, Austin, 1981
- GD G. Lukács, 'Goethe und die Dialektik', *Der Marxist*, Vol. 2, No. 5, 1932

- GHA** G. Lukács, *Goethe and his Age*, trans. R. Anchor, London, 1968
HCC G. Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. R. Livingstone, London, 1990
HM N. Bukharin, *Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology*, Ann Arbor, 1976
HN G. Lukács, *The Historical Novel*, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell, Harmondsworth, 1976
HPK G. Lukács, *Heidelberger Philosophie der Kunst (Werke, Vol. 16)*
HA G. Lukács, *Heidelberger Ästhetik (Werke, Vol. 17)*
IMLI Institute of World Literature, Moscow
LA The Lukács Archive, Budapest
LH M. Bakhtin, *Leksii po istorii zarubezhnoi literatury. Antichnost'. Srednie veka*, Saransk, 1999
LK *Literaturnyi kritik*, Moscow
LR *The Lukács Reader*, ed. A. Kadarkay, Oxford, 1995
MFI V. Voloshinov, *Marksizm i filosofia iazyka*, Moscow, 1994
MPL V. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. L. Matejka and I. Titunik, Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1986
NE G. Lukács, *Dostojewski. Notizen und Entwürfe*, Budapest, 1985
OPS G. Lukács, 'On Poverty of Spirit', in *The Lukács Reader*, ed. A. Kadarkay, Oxford, 1995
PCMF M. Bakhtin, 'The Problem of Content, Material, and Form', in *Art and Answerability*, trans. V. Liapunov, Austin, 1990
PDA M. Bakhtin, *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo*, Moscow, 1994
PDP M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. C. Emerson, Minneapolis and London, 1984
PhM G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Mind*, trans. J. B. Baillie, London, 1961
R M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. H. Iswolsky, Bloomington, 1984
RGALI Russian State Literary Archive
RR M. Bakhtin, *Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable*, Moscow, 1965
SC G. Lukács, *Selected Correspondence, 1902–1920*, ed. J. Marcus and Z. Tar, Budapest, 1986
SG M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. V. McGee, Austin, 1986
SS M. Bakhtin, *Sobranie sochinenii*, Vol. 5, Moscow, 1996
TN G. Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. A. Bostock, London, 1978
TPA M. Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, trans. V. Liapunov, Austin, 1993
W G. Lukács, *Werke*, ed. F. Benseler, Darmstadt and Neuwied, 1962–
YH G. Lukács, *The Young Hegel*, trans. R. Livingstone, London, 1975

INTRODUCTION: CHOICES AND JUSTIFICATIONS

This book is a comparative study in the history of ideas. It is an examination of the intellectual background, affiliations, and contexts of two major twentieth-century thinkers and an historical interpretation of their work in aesthetics, cultural theory, literary history, and philosophy.

The heroes of this book entered the canon of twentieth-century thought at different times, and their current standing in it is also rather dissimilar. When Lukács died in 1971 the process of his canonization had been under way for some time, and a significant element of it was the as yet unfinished authoritative edition of his works.¹ The 1970s saw an upsurge in interest in Lukács, stimulated by his former Hungarian students who, along with other Left-minded scholars, published numerous articles in the American journal *Telos*, and edited valuable collective volumes in Germany. Up to the mid-1980s, and to an extent even now, Lukács studies have been dominated by a specific brand of scholarship, which, while remaining loyal to the standards of academic research, was strongly partisan. It is in the 1970s and 1980s that his contribution to a Marxist political and cultural theory, literary history, and aesthetics was most thoroughly studied. Another significant trend in Lukács studies in this period was the concentration on the young Lukács, whose work, however, remained in the shadow of his Marxist writings and was indeed treated either as a cultural critique which pre-dates his Marxism or as an immature philosophical exercise or, very often, as both.² The lingering effect of this approach was to be felt for years to come, and it was only around the mid-1980s that the young Lukács received attention in his own terms in two books which significantly contributed, in the anglophone world, to placing him in a broader historical context.³ From this point on Lukács scholarship, especially outside of Germany and Hungary, experienced a visible slowing-down. After the fall of Communism much of the partisan

¹ *Georg Lukács Werke*, ed. F. Benseler, Darmstadt and Neuwied, 1962–.

² Two studies which share this trend but in many significant ways go beyond it are M. Löwy's classic *Georg Lukács—From Romanticism to Bolshevism*, London, 1979 [French edn. 1976], and N. Tertulian, *Georges Lukács: Etapes de sa pensée esthétique*, Paris, 1980.

³ L. Congdon, *The Young Lukács*, Chapel Hill and London, 1983; M. Gluck, *Georg Lukács and his Generation, 1900–1918*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1984; for a seminal earlier study of this period of Lukács's life, see L. Boella, *Il giovane Lukács: la formazione intellettuale e la filosofia politica, 1907–1929*, Bari, 1977.

scholarship of the 1970s and 1980s lost its previous appeal: in the new political and intellectual climate the heated polemics about how (un)orthodox Lukács's Marxism was and whether he opposed or supported Stalinism,⁴ which used to occupy such a large part of Lukács scholarship, were rendered increasingly obsolete and assumed the status of sectarian debates. Their scholarly value was gradually confined to the history of political ideas and the Communist movement.

Thus, in the mid-1990s, anyone entering the field of Lukács studies was bound to see a picture of stagnation and intellectual fatigue: those who still believed that Lukács should be part of the canon thanks to his Marxist writings needed no further scholarly evidence for or against their belief; those who thought that Lukács was *passé* due precisely to his commitment to Marxism had no inclination to study his other works. Those few who, like George Steiner, insisted on judging Lukács beyond this division had to admit that he is unlikely to be read in the near future, mainly because of his immensely 'old-fashioned form' and because his field (and breadth) of reference were vanishing: there are few people left, Steiner complains, who have read what—and as much as—Lukács did.⁵ From a less elitist perspective Fr. Jameson voiced a cautious optimism in suggesting that in the long term Lukács might become a 'research industry' in Eastern Europe while his adoption by the new German culture after unification would be more problematic, because of his Hungarian nationality.⁶ At the moment, however, the reverse is true: except for Hungary, where serious editorial work and research is continuing in the Lukács archive, it is precisely in Germany, where at the end of 1996 an International Lukács Society was founded,⁷ that a renewed interest in Lukács has become noticeable, with an orientation towards researching the contexts of his thought⁸ and promoting historical and philological scholarship.⁹

⁴ Among the studies of Lukács's relationship to Stalinism the one most pertinent to his aesthetics and literary theory remains D. Pike, *Lukács and Brecht*, Chapel Hill and London, 1985. Pike makes a very strong, if somewhat one-sided, case for Lukács as a thinly disguised Stalinist in the 1930s and 1940s; the opposite case is argued in L. Sziklai, *Georg Lukács und seine Zeit, 1930–1945*, Budapest, 1986.

⁵ E. Corredor, *Lukács After Communism*, Durham, NC and London, 1997, p. 73 (Corredor's collection of interviews is an attempt at resuscitating Lukács's intellectual presence in the post-Communist age).

⁶ Ibid. p. 90.

⁷ The society publishes a yearbook devoted to Lukács studies; two volumes (1997 and 1998), dominated on the whole by historically grounded work, have appeared so far.

⁸ See e.g. U. Luckhardt, 'Aus dem Tempel der Sehnsucht'. *Georg Simmel und Georg Lukács: Wege in und aus der Moderne*, Butzbach-Griedel, 1994.

⁹ A recent example is C. Gallée, *Georg Lukács. Seine Stellung und Bedeutung im literarischen Leben der SBZ/DDR, 1945–1985*, Tübingen, 1996.

Despite these recent developments, in the latter half of the 1990s two main difficulties are still faced by those interested in revealing the significance of Lukács's work beyond its narrowly political dimensions. The first is the almost complete absence of in-depth studies analysing Lukács's thought as a whole, at all stages of its development,¹⁰ and the limited and uneven information about his life: the young Lukács has been thoroughly researched, whereas his Austrian period, the years in Berlin, in the Soviet Union, and especially the last quarter of his life were and still are under-researched.¹¹ In fact, it was only in 1991, when Lukács's place in the canon had already been challenged after the fall of Communism, that the first relatively exhaustive biography by A. Kadarkay appeared.¹² The other problem is the unavailability of a complete corpus of his works, even twenty years after his death and, with few exceptions,¹³ a lack of clarity on textological matters.¹⁴

¹⁰ For exceptions, mostly in the shape of introductions to Lukács's thought, see I. Hermann, *Die Gedankenwelt von Georg Lukács*, Budapest, 1978; I. Hermann, *Georg Lukács. Sein Leben und Wirken*, Vienna, Cologne, Graz, 1985; W. Jung, *Georg Lukács*, Stuttgart, 1989; S. Sim, *Georg Lukács*, New York and London, 1994.

¹¹ On Lukács's Austrian period see, above all, Y. Bourdet, *Figures de Lukács*, Paris, 1972, chapter 2 (devoted, however, almost exclusively to Lukács's political activities); on the Berlin years see A. Klein, *Georg Lukács in Berlin. Literaturtheorie und Literaturkritik der Jahre 1930–32*, Berlin and Weimar, 1990 (while Klein's analysis of Lukács's literary theory is discouragingly trivial for most of the time, the book is useful in that it reproduces some of Lukács's less readily accessible texts of the time); on Lukács's years in the Soviet Union see L. Sziklai, *Georg Lukács und seine Zeit, 1930–1945*, Budapest, 1986 (For a slightly modified version in English see L. Sziklai, *After the Proletarian Revolution: Georg Lukács's Marxist Development, 1930–1945*, Budapest, 1992); D. Pike, *Lukács and Brecht*, 1985.

¹² A. Kadarkay, *Georg Lukács: Life, Thought, and Politics*, Oxford, 1991.

¹³ For a very good case-study addressing these problems see R. Sheppard, 'Georg Lukács, Wilhelm Worringer and German Expressionism', *Journal of European Studies*, 1995, Vol. 25, pp. 241–82.

¹⁴ To start with, Lukács's early correspondence is available in two editions which on several occasions differ in the dating and even in details regarding the signatories of the letters. The earlier edition by E. Karádi and E. Fekete (*BW*) contains 250 letters, 136 of which are not reproduced in the edition by J. Marcus and Z. Tar (*SC*). *SC*, in turn, contains 161 letters, of which 47 cannot be found in *BW*. *SC* gives a different dating (without challenging the dating of *BW*) for at least eight letters published in both editions and on one occasion indicates an absence of a signature in a letter by Lukács, which in *BW* appears signed 'Georg Lukács'. This textological uncertainty also affects Lukács's Moscow writings, many of which exist in at least two different (Russian and German) versions which have never been carefully compared. In Russia, Lukács's texts were translated mainly (but not only) by Igor' Sats, one time the private secretary to Lunacharskii. Commenting on Sats's translations, M. Lifshits recalls that 'everything which could not be accommodated under our Russian tradition or could seem dubious for whatever ideological or tactical reasons, was removed' (L. Sziklai, 'Interview mit Michail Lifschic', in *Literaturtheorie und Literaturkritik in der frühsozialistischen Diskussion. Dokumente*, ed. A. Hiersche and E. Kowalski, Bern etc., 1993, p. 420). During my research visits to Moscow (May 1997 and September/October 1998) I did extensive work on the textology of Lukács's writings, but only those results which are directly relevant to the

Bakhtin's reception has followed a quite different course. Two decades after his death (1975) he enjoys overwhelming popularity and is a highly prestigious and indispensable figure on the stage of literary and cultural studies, philosophical anthropology, social theory, and aesthetics. It was not, however, until the early 1980s, when Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson translated Bakhtin's essays on the novel (1935–41) and when Holquist and Clark wrote his first life,¹⁵ that he was elevated from new-comer to honourable participant in the canon of twentieth-century thought. Thus Bakhtin's scholarly reception, unlike that of Lukács, began straightaway with a more holistic approach, and this trend has been preserved ever since. The result is that nowadays we have one more biography,¹⁶ and several comprehensive, if very different in their scope and strategies, book-length expositions of Bakhtin's thought,¹⁷ but almost no studies of any aspect of his thought in its historical context.

Bakhtin has been appropriated as the mythologically powerful ancestor of current schools of thought or glorified as a lonely Russian genius whose ideas were sublimely detached from cultural background and historical argument. In the latter case, the very idea of rational analysis of and research into his thought was considered somewhat vulgar. The object of intense fascination, Bakhtin has, more often than not, been taken in good faith: he has been appropriated, interpreted, applied, and propagated, but seems to have remained insufficiently studied in his own terms and in his own historical contexts. There was, however, a trend which successfully distanced itself from this uncritical euphoria. A strong body of texts in the late 1980s and early 1990s began to approach Bakhtin from the urgent agendas of cultural and ideological theory, group rights and post-colonial analysis.¹⁸ While

argument of this book have been incorporated. Unless otherwise stated, throughout I will refer to the texts according to the *Gesamtausgabe*, since they reflect Lukács's last authorial will.

¹⁵ K. Clark and M. Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, Cambridge, Mass., 1984.

¹⁶ S. S. Konkina and L. S. Konkina, *Mikhail Bakhtin. Stranstvy zhizni i tvorchestva*, Saransk, 1993.

¹⁷ Special mention should be made of T. Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, Manchester, 1984 [French edn. 1981]; M. Holquist, *Dialogism: Mikhail Bakhtin and His World*, London and New York, 1990; G. S. Morson and C. Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Creation of a Poetics*, Stanford, 1990. See also D. Danow, *The Thought of Mikhail Bakhtin: From Word to Culture*, Basingstoke, 1991; O. Osovskii, *Chelovek. Slovo. Roman*, Saransk, 1993; M. Bernard-Donals, *Mikhail Bakhtin Between Phenomenology and Marxism*, Cambridge, 1994; O. Osovskii, *Dialog v bol'shom vremeni*, Saransk, 1997; S. Vice, *Introducing Bakhtin*, Manchester, 1997.

¹⁸ Particularly seminal contributions to this field are K. Hirschkop and D. Shepherd (eds.), *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, Manchester and New York, 1989; M. Gardiner, *The Dialogics of Critique: M. M. Bakhtin and the Theory of Ideology*, London, 1992; D. Shepherd (ed.), *Bakhtin. Carnival and other Subjects*, Amsterdam and Atlanta, 1993; C. Thomson and H. Dua (eds.),

contributing enormously to problematizing the social relevance of Bakhtin's work, this trend, following its own priorities, remained equally uninterested in the historical setting of his writings.

It was only in the early 1990s that a more persistent interest in the vital contexts of Bakhtin's own intellectual formation arose.¹⁹ This reinforced the latent struggle over Bakhtin's legacy: is he a thinker emerging from Western, mainly German, philosophical culture,²⁰ or an exclusively Russian (Orthodox) philosopher?²¹ The current state of interpretation of Bakhtin continues to be marked by this division, although its artificiality is gradually being understood and work is appearing, both in the West and in Russia, that seeks to dispense with it.²² The passionate discussion of Bakhtin's (inter)national style of theorizing is slowly giving way to a sober examination of the intellectual and biographical sources of his texts as a step towards a more definitive edition of his corpus,²³ intended to span Bakhtin's numerous manuscripts as well as his previously published texts.²⁴

Dialogism and Cultural Criticism, London (Canada), 1995; M. Bell and M. Gardiner (eds.), *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences*, London, 1998.

¹⁹ Very good work in this direction was done as early as 1988–9 by Nina Perlina and Nikolai Nikolaev. By the latter half of the 1990s, the results of this wholesome trend were already to be found in several articles by Brian Poole, in Caryl Emerson's pioneering research on the reception and appropriation of Bakhtin's ideas in Russia (see C. Emerson, *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin*, Princeton, 1997), and in a collection of essays from the 1991 International Bakhtin Conference in Manchester, edited by David Shepherd (*The Contexts of Bakhtin*, Amsterdam, 1998).

²⁰ A strong exponent of this view is M. Freise with his book *Michail Bachtins philosophische Ästhetik der Literatur* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993); support for the same view can be drawn from Brian Poole's article 'Bakhtin and Cassirer: The Philosophical Origins of Bakhtin's Carnival Messianism', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 1998, Vol. 97, No. 3–4, pp. 537–78.

²¹ Russian research on Bakhtin used to be and still is in many ways conducive to this belief. The history of opposing the 'Westernization' of Bakhtin seems to have started with the decision to excise from 'Discourse in the Novel' Bakhtin's references to a number of German scholars (and Marr). About another revealing episode of the Russian reluctance to accept a 'Western' Bakhtin, see D. Shepherd's remarks in D. Shepherd (ed.), *Bakhtin. Carnival and Other Subjects*, pp. xvi–xvii. For recent work in the West on Bakhtin and religious philosophy, see A. Mihailovic, *Corporeal Words*, Evanston, 1997, and R. Coates, *Christianity in Bakhtin*, Cambridge, 1998.

²² Alongside that of Nina Perlina, the work of Nataliia Bonetskaia deserves a mention, especially her comments on 'Author and Hero' in *Bakhtinologia*, ed. K. Isupov, St Petersburg, 1995.

²³ The first result of this process is vol. 5 of Bakhtin's *Sobranie sochinenii*, Moscow, 1996; see also the important but uncritically edited *Besedy V. D. Duvakina s M. M. Bakhtinym*, Moscow, 1996. For a review of these two editions see G. Tihanov, 'Making Virtues of Necessity', *The Times Literary Supplement*, 24 October 1997; for an extended review of Vol. 5 of SS, see C. Brandist, 'The Oeuvre Finally Emerges', *Dialogism*, 1998, No. 1, pp. 107–14. In addition to the 'Conversations with Duvakin', Sergei Bocharov's conversations with Bakhtin remain a rich memoir source shedding light on Bakhtin's work (cf. S. Bocharov, 'Ob odnom razgovore i vokrug nego', *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1993, No. 2, pp. 70–89).

²⁴ In the anglophone world, a significant step in this direction is the launch by the Bakhtin

This concise overview demonstrates that no matter how different the current standing of Lukács and Bakhtin, and how dissimilar their scholarly reception, research on both of them has suffered similar problems and limitations. This is particularly true of Bakhtin, whose intellectual background has been even less studied than Lukács's. If he has been made to appear the predecessor of so many modern trends in literary and cultural theory, is it not because we lack awareness of the extent to which he was himself the product of the shared climate of ideas he inherited? If we look more closely into his original contexts, we may realize that a number of historical limitations were inherent in his theoretical discourse and that he had his own predecessors and 'rivals', who participated in shaping his thought. Thus we will cease to be so certain of the seamless compatibility of his writings with later theoretical trends. Evoking the hermeneutical distinction between significance and meaning, we may conclude that in the case of Lukács, and even more so in the case of Bakhtin, in the last twenty years the endeavour to discuss the significance of their work has heavily overshadowed the question of its meaning as a response to the historical contexts and the cultural realities of the times in which they were writing.

Not surprisingly, then, my main approach is that of intellectual history. This approach has two dimensions: firstly, it aims at charting a picture of the dynamics, as well as of the underlying unity, of Lukács's and Bakhtin's intellectual careers; secondly, it seeks to analyse their writings through comparison with their predecessors and contemporaries, in dialogue with whom they developed their own thought.

Within this large field, there has clearly been a need for self-limitation. I have chosen to concentrate on Lukács's and Bakhtin's writings between the start of the first world war and the close of the second, referring, of course, often to earlier (in the case of Lukács) or later (in the case of Bakhtin and, to a lesser degree, also in Lukács's case) works. This chronological choice is motivated by the fact that much of what Lukács and Bakhtin have written after the mid-1940s has its roots in their earlier writings. Thus, Bakhtin's books on Dostoevsky (1963) and Rabelais (1965) both originated in earlier texts: the 1929

Centre in Sheffield of a commented electronic edition of Bakhtin's writings in English (more on this see in C. Brandist and D. Shepherd, 'From Saransk to Cyberspace: Towards an Electronic Edition of Bakhtin', in *Dialogues on Bakhtin: Interdisciplinary Readings*, ed. M. Lähteenmäki and H. Dufva, Jyväskylä, 1998, pp. 7–20).

Dostoevsky book, the essays on the novel (1935–41), and the doctoral thesis on Rabelais which was completed, after some revisions, by the mid-1940s; equally, Bakhtin's work on speech genres of the 1950s was a continuation of ideas from the work of the Bakhtin Circle in the late 1920s, more particularly of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* and *The Formal Method*; the late notes on the methodology of the human sciences were an elaboration of ideas originating in Bakhtin's earliest writings on the philosophy of the act and on author and hero. In Lukács's case, there is ample (and by now well known) evidence that the *Destruction of Reason* was conceived in the 1930s and written in the 1940s; the systematic works on aesthetics and ontology of the 1960s, too, were a continuation of his early work and of ideas of the 1930s. Admittedly, the two works ushered in some new aspects, but they remain insufficient to warrant attention to Lukács's increasingly inflexible, ponderous, and inadequately systematic *Alterswerk*, especially in a comparative perspective involving Bakhtin's writings.

As the reader will notice, many of the texts I discuss are directly or indirectly concerned with the genre of the novel. This preference is motivated by the fact that for both Lukács and Bakhtin the novel became the pinnacle of their efforts to problematize the connections between culture and society. By placing and closely investigating Lukács's and Bakhtin's work on the novel in a broad historical context, I attempt to clarify some hitherto unexamined aspects of the interaction between philosophy, social, and literary theory in inter-war German and Russian intellectual life. I demonstrate that in the work of Lukács and Bakhtin the genre of the novel is a site of intersecting literary and philosophical analyses which strive to understand modernity and to respond to it. All this of necessity means that I have left out some specifically literary questions, which are not immediately relevant to my agenda. Among these are the importance of narratological phenomena (free indirect discourse, focalization etc.) for Bakhtin, or the typology of the hero in Lukács's theory of the novel, whose philosophical implications I believe to be of a more limited scope.

Lukács and Bakhtin followed in time rather similar intellectual paths. They both accomplished a transition from a strong debt to the aesthetic and literary theory of German Romanticism, of *Lebensphilosophie* and neo-Kantianism to Hegelianism and, in Lukács's case more than in Bakhtin's, to Marxism. But also the way in which Lukács and Bakhtin produced a significant part of their work was very much the

same: a great many of their early writings emerged in circles and other close affiliations with friends (a typical feature of the sociology of the production of knowledge in early twentieth-century Central and Eastern Europe). The collective nature of their enterprise is better documented in Lukács's case, where it is easier to discriminate between his ideas and those of Leo Popper, Béla Balázs, or Karl Mannheim, than in Bakhtin's. The present state of research on the authorship of the so called 'disputed texts'²⁵ cannot provide a convincing refutation of the assumption that *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* and *The Formal Method* were written by the signatories appearing on the covers of the first editions, respectively Voloshinov and Medvedev, with Bakhtin's contribution consisting in discussing some key ideas with them and, probably, in providing occasionally adequate phrasing.²⁶ While Bakhtin confirmed his participation in a letter to V. Kozhinov of 10 January 1961 (*Moskva*, 1992, No. 12, p. 176), he refused to claim the copyright. Therefore, in this book I usually use Voloshinov's and Medvedev's names alone, while nevertheless implying that the two books advance ideas which were to a certain degree the result of collaborative work. For this reason, I include *MPL* and *FM* in my discussion of the views of Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle on language and ideology in Chapters 4 and 5. All other works signed with Voloshinov's or Medvedev's names will be referred to as works by them alone. Thereby this book resists the persistent trend, especially among Russian scholars, to ascribe to Bakhtin the majority of the texts written by Voloshinov and Medvedev.²⁷ The scant documentary evidence we

²⁵ For general overviews of the literature on the disputed texts at different stages of the discussion see G. S. Morson and C. Emerson, 'Introduction: Rethinking Bakhtin', in *Rethinking Bakhtin*, ed. G. S. Morson and C. Emerson, Evanston, 1989, pp. 31–49; O. E. Osovskii, 'Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov: ob odnom iz "prokلياتykh voprosov" sovremennogo bakhtinovedeniia', in *Filosofia M. M. Bakhtina i etika sovremennogo mira. Sbornik nauchnykh statei*, Saransk, 1992, pp. 39–54; the exchange in *DKH*, 1995, No. 4, pp. 133–56; and, as far as Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* is concerned, N. Vasil'ev's article 'Paradoksy Bakhtina i paroksizmy bakhtinovedeniia', *Bakhtinskie chteniia*, Vitebsk, 1998, Vol. 3, pp. 68–74, where the entire recent Russian literature on the authorship of Voloshinov's book is listed.

²⁶ Strong internal evidence in favour of Voloshinov's authorship of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* comes from the recently published dedication written by Voloshinov on Medvedev's copy of the book upon its publication in January 1929: 'To Pavel, not just "friendly", but also with love. Valentin 19/23. 1. 29' (quoted in N. Vasil'ev, 'K istorii knigi Marksizm i filosofiya iazyka', in M. M. Bakhtin, *Tetralogiia*, Moscow, 1998, p. 535). If the book was written by Bakhtin, it would have been unthinkable that one member of the circle should have presented it to another member of the same circle as his own.

²⁷ For a recent example of this trend see N. Nikolaev, 'Izdanie nasledii M. M. Bakhtina kak filologicheskaiia problema (Dve retsenzii)', *DKH*, 1998, No. 3, pp. 114–57, where on the

possess can, of course, be supplemented or challenged by hypotheses grounded in anecdotal information derived from interviews or from an often sloppy intertextual analysis heeding to the thematic, stylistic, and conceptual aspects of the texts,²⁸ but these hypotheses can and should not overthrow the fact that both Voloshinov and Medvedev were able, talented, and educated people, whose work was as original and independent as any work written in a close circle of friends and collaborators could be. When Bakhtin claims that 'at the basis of these books [*MPL* and *FM*—G.T.] and of my work about Dostoevsky [the book of 1929—G.T.] there lies a *common* conception of language and of the verbal work [of art]',²⁹ this admission certainly suggests that the exchange between him and Voloshinov and Medvedev was proceeding in either direction, not just from him to them.

These points all suggest that there are solid grounds for a comparative study of Lukács and Bakhtin. The spirit of comparison appears not to have been alien to Lukács's and Bakhtin's own approaches to the realm of ideas. When discussing Jakob Burckhardt's impact on Conrad Ferdinand Meyer in *The Historical Novel*, Lukács suggests that 'it is not this philologically demonstrable influence which is important, but rather the *common character of the reactions to reality* which in history and literature produce analogous subjects and forms of historical consciousness' (*HN*, 204, emphasis original). Bakhtin makes a very similar point in his late notes (*SS*, 377) when he writes: 'What [are] the grounds for comparison (when real contacts were absent): the convergence [. . .] of sense and the unity of tradition.'

Viewed from this perspective, even if we remain suspicious of Bakhtin's unreserved trust in the 'unity of tradition', it is difficult to believe that no exhaustive historical comparison of Bakhtin's and Lukács's texts yet exists.³⁰ Vittorio Strada, in 1976, was the first to promote the controversial basis of a stylistic and conceptual analysis Nikolaev stipulates that Medvedev's 'Scholarly Salieri-ism' was written by Bakhtin and infers from this hypothesis Bakhtin's authorship of all other texts published under the names of Voloshinov and Medvedev (p. 132).

²⁸ For a very good criticism of the inconsistency of this approach, see R. Coates, *Christianity in Bakhtin*, Cambridge, 1998, pp. 57–9.

²⁹ M. Bakhtin's letter to Kozhinov, *Moskva*, 1992, No. 12, p. 176.

³⁰ In March 1999, a year and a half after the submission of my doctoral thesis (October 1997), on which this book is based, I received access to the unpublished doctoral dissertation of Tanja Dembski 'Lukács, Bakhtin und Rilke. Paradigmen der Romantheorie zu Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts' (Free University, Berlin, 1998), for which I am grateful to the author and to B. Poole. Tanja Dembski's thesis is an attempt at a systematic and synchronic comparative description of Rilke's, Lukács's, and Bakhtin's theories of the novel, which has not been concerned with placing them in an historical context or with their examination from the point of view of the history of ideas; it does not contain documentary evidence of Bakhtin's

idea of a contrastive study of the two thinkers.³¹ Since then, however, only a few essays have directly addressed this topic,³² and among them the contribution of the Hungarian scholar Árpád Kovács was the first to refer to a form of contact between Bakhtin and Lukács. Kovács contends that in the mid-twenties, before writing his book on Dostoevsky, Bakhtin already knew Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*.³³ We find the same contention repeated and even extended in Holquist and Clark's biography of Bakhtin. According to them, he not only knew Lukács's early book but also started translating it. Eventually he gave up the translation on learning from a friend that Lukács himself no longer liked the book.³⁴ Neither Kovács, nor Clark and Holquist give any concrete data referring to documentary sources endorsing their statements. Moreover, in the preface to their book, Clark and Holquist inform the reader that they undertook a research trip to Hungary to enquire into the Lukács-Bakhtin connection.³⁵ The book, however, remains silent throughout on this point and one may assume that their detective work, despite all their efforts, was not especially fruitful.

The reason for this state of research may well lie in the fact that the very task of discussing the voluminous work of Lukács and Bakhtin is somewhat daunting; in addition, as we stated earlier, neither Lukács nor Bakhtin have been sufficiently studied in their own terms to warrant a full-range and systematic comparison. In our case, then, the comparison

knowledge of Lukács's texts nor does it refer to unpublished texts by Lukács or Bakhtin. In addition to this, it came to my knowledge that a doctoral thesis on Bakhtin and Lukács had been defended by E. Herczeg at the Wayne State University in 1994, but the Interlibrary-Loan Department of the Bodleian library in Oxford was refused access to it in 1996.

³¹ Vittorio Strada, 'Introduzione', in *Problemi di teoria del romanzo. Metodologia letteraria e dialettica storica*, ed. V. Strada, Torino, 1976, pp. vii–li.

³² See, among others, A. Kovács, 'On the Methodology of the Theory of the Novel. Bachtin, Lukács, Pospelov', *Studia Slavica Hungaricae*, 1980, Vol. 26, pp. 377–93; M. Aucouturier, 'The Theory of the Novel in Russia in the 1930s: Lukács and Bakhtin', in *The Russian Novel from Pushkin to Pasternak*, ed. J. Garrard, New Haven, 1983, pp. 229–40; E. Corredor, 'Lukács and Bakhtin: A Dialogue on Fiction', *University of Ottawa Quarterly*, 1983, Vol. 53, No. 1, pp. 97–107; C. Cases, 'La teoria del romanzo in Lukács e in Bachtin', *Su Lukács et altri saggi*, Torino, 1985, pp. 110–21; J. Hall, 'Totality and the Dialogic: Two Versions of the Novel?', *Tamkang Review*, 1984–1985, Vol. 15, pp. 5–23; P. Jha, 'Lukács, Bakhtin and the Sociology of the Novel', *Diogenes*, 1985, Vol. 129, pp. 63–90; M. Wegner, 'Disput über den Roman: Georg Lukács und Michail Bachtin. Die dreißiger Jahre', *Zeitschrift für Slavistik*, 1988, No. 1, pp. 20–6; B. Orlov, *Suh'ekt. Estetika: Versii Bakhitina, Gadamera, Lukacha: Uchebnoe posobie po spetskursu*, Ekaterinburg, 1992; J. Neubauer, 'Bakhtin versus Lukács: Inscriptions of Homelessness in Theories of the Novel', *Poetics Today*, 1996, Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 531–46. (For a fuller list, including unpublished studies, see section 6 of the bibliography at the end of the book.)

³³ A. Kovács, 'Methodology', p. 386.

³⁴ K. Clark and M. Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*, p. 99.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. x.

of the two necessarily presupposed a selective redefinition and reconstitution of the objects of our attention: not Lukács as such, but the Lukács who emerges when placed next to Bakhtin; not Bakhtin on his own, but rather the Bakhtin who becomes visible only in the light of Lukács.

I wanted this book to be not just a rigorous scholarly exercise in the history of ideas designed to fill up a long-standing gap but also a vivid narrative about Bakhtin's polemics with Lukács, in which abstract ideas took on biographically personified form. In the course of a two-year archival research I managed to establish that Bakhtin, at various moments of his life, had indeed followed closely Lukács's writings. Thus Bakhtin knew Lukács' *Theory of the Novel* and also at least fourteen articles published by him in *Literaturnyi kritik* between 1935 and 1938, some of which were later included in Lukács's book on the historical novel.³⁶ Bakhtin also read and made excerpts from the proceedings of the 1934–5 discussion about the novel at which Lukács presented the central paper and a concluding speech.³⁷ In addition, in the 1940 draft of his thesis on Rabelais Bakhtin referred to Lukács's book of 1939, *K istorii realizma*.³⁸ It is not implausible to speculate that Bakhtin must have known two more works by Lukács: the article 'Die Subjekt-Objekt Beziehung in der Ästhetik' (*Logos*, 1917–18, Vol. 7, pp. 1–39), written at the same time as *The Theory of the Novel*,³⁹ and, through Lev Pumpianskii, an active member of the circle, the article 'Zur Soziologie des modernen Dramas' (*Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*,

³⁶ 'Fridrikh Engel's kak teoretik literatury i literaturnyi kritik (k 40-letiiu so dnia smerti)', *LK*, 1935, No. 8, pp. 65–86; 'K probleme ob"ektivnosti khudozhestvennoi formy', *LK*, 1935, No. 9, pp. 5–23; 'Tomas Mann o literaturnom nasledstve', *LK*, 1935, No. 12, pp. 35–47; 'Bal'zak—kritik Stendalia', *LK*, 1936, No. 1, pp. 95–112; 'Intellektual'nyi oblik literaturnogo geroia', *LK*, 1936, No. 3, pp. 12–48; 'Rasskaz ili opisanie', *LK*, 1936, No. 8, pp. 44–67; 'Chelovecheskaia komediia predrevoliutsionnoi Rossii', *LK*, 1936, No. 9, pp. 13–35; 'Istoricheskii roman' ('1. Klassicheskaia forma istoricheskogo romana'), *LK*, 1937, No. 7, pp. 46–109; 'Istoricheskii roman' ('2. Istoricheskii roman i istoricheskaiia drama'), *LK*, 1937, No. 9, pp. 27–54; 'Istoricheskii roman i istoricheskaiia drama', *LK*, 1937, No. 12, pp. 116–47; 'Istoricheskii roman i krizis burzhuaznogo realizma. Chast' I', *LK*, 1938, No. 3, pp. 59–147; 'Istoricheskii roman i krizis burzhuaznogo realizma', *LK*, 1938, No. 7, pp. 11–52; 'Sovremennyi burzhuazno-demokraticeskii gumanizm i istoricheskii roman. Chast' I', *LK*, 1938, No. 8, pp. 51–96; 'Sovremennyi burzhuazno-demokraticeskii gumanizm i istoricheskii roman. Chast' II', *LK*, 1938, No. 12, pp. 40–74.

³⁷ The proceedings of the discussion on the novel were published in *Literaturnyi kritik*, 1935, No. 2, pp. 214–49 and 1935, No. 3, pp. 231–54. Bakhtin's summaries of and comments on these publications are preserved in his archive.

³⁸ M. Bakhtin, 'Fransua Rable v istorii realizma', IMLI, Department of Manuscripts, fond 427, opis' 1, No. 19, p. 42.

³⁹ M. Freise has argued convincingly that Bakhtin must have known this text (M. Freise, *Bakhtin's philosophische Ästhetik*, pp. 58–61); he does not, however, adduce documentary evidence in support of this strong assumption.

1914, Vol. xxxviii), being the German translation of a portion of the Hungarian edition of Lukács's book *History of the Development of Modern Drama* (1911).⁴⁰

Bakhtin's appropriation of Lukács's *Theory of the Novel* proceeded in the atmosphere of intensive discussions of and growing respect for Lukács's book. By the Spring of 1923 it was already known in the Bakhtin circle, and Pumpianskii provided later a synopsis of Lukács's work in his unfinished study 'A History of Ancient Culture, with a special reference to Literature' (1924). Here Pumpianskii stresses the peculiar position of Dostoevsky in the history of the novel very much in line with Lukács's concluding observations.⁴¹ A further mention of Lukács's theory appears in Pumpianskii's unpublished 'Survey of the Artistic Developments in Literature in 1927'.⁴² From Pumpianskii's published study of *Fathers and Sons* one may also infer that a publication of Lukács's 'remarkable book' was under way in the State Publishing House.⁴³ However, a Russian translation appeared only in 1994 in *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, after the book had been translated into most European languages.

As to Lukács's articles from the 1930s, one unpublished entry in Bakhtin's archive, made in the late 1930s or the early 1940s, proves beyond doubt that he was actively assimilating Lukács's work of the latter half of the 1930s, while at the same time adopting considerable distance from its major postulates. Accentuating Lukács's Hegelian ancestry, Bakhtin points out that 'It is not the features of the depicted order that differentiate the epic from the novel (which is, basically, what Lukács's

⁴⁰ Lev Pumpianskii recorded in his 'Spisok knig, izuchennykh, pročitannykh, promotrennykh. 1 ianvaria—1 iunია 1923 goda' the reading of this article in German. The complete text of Lukács's *History of the Development of Modern Drama* was unavailable in Bakhtin's life-time in languages other than Hungarian; it was translated into German in 1981 as *Entwicklungsgeschichte des modernen Dramas*.

⁴¹ Entry of 6 November 1924 in Pumpianskii's archive (St Petersburg); the synopsis consists of seven type-written pages. Pumpianskii, like Lukács, credits Dostoevsky with being the only author who freed himself from the age of 'absolute sinfulness' and succeeded in 'conquering the novel'.

⁴² 'Obzor khudozhestvennogo razvitiia literatury za 1927-oi god' (written in 1928, Pumpianskii's archive). In this essay Pumpianskii makes a case for a rigid classification of the classic Russian prose into epic (Tolstoy and Dostoevsky are featured here together), speech work (*rechevoe proizvedenie*), represented by Gogol' and Leskov, and novel, whose exemplary author, as elsewhere in Pumpianskii's work, is seen in Turgenev.

⁴³ 'V Gize gotovitsia perevod etoi zamechatel'noi knigi' (L. Pumpianskii, 'Ottsy i deti'. Istoriko-literaturnyi ocherk', in I. S. Turgenev, *Sochineniia*, Moscow and Leningrad, 1930, Vol. 6, p. 185). In this study, Pumpianskii, leaning on Lukács, once more contrasts the epic (Tolstoy) and the novel (Turgenev) and argues that the new Soviet literature is accomplishing a transition from the path of Tolstoy to that of Turgenev.

point of view comes down to). The characteristic of this order (the "Homeric") is itself shot through with the forms of the epic past. The characteristic of Homer's epoch in Hegel is flawed by naive realism.'⁴⁴

Thus one already can credit the contention that Bakhtin knew a significant part of Lukács's work with the power of more than a mere hypothesis. The evidence adduced suggests that Bakhtin encountered Lukács's ideas about the epic, the novel, and realism at two vital stages of his work: in the process of writing the Dostoevsky book of 1929 and, once again, in the 1930s and 1940s when formulating his own views on the theory of the novel and writing on Goethe and Rabelais.

That Lukács knew any of Bakhtin's writings, seems, by contrast, to be extremely unlikely. The reasons for this are quite straightforward: first, by the time Lukács settled permanently in Moscow, Bakhtin had already been sent into exile and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* remained the only book published under his name.⁴⁵ Secondly, before the late 1930s, at the earliest, Lukács would in any case have been unable to read Bakhtin's book (or any other Russian text of greater complexity) because until that time he did not know Russian well enough, and often complained that the Russian novels he was analysing were only accessible to him in German translations.⁴⁶ The level of Lukács's command of Russian at the time is recorded by one of his biographers, who recounts an incident in which Lukács addressed A. Fadeev in the offices of *Literaturnyi kritik* with an incorrect phrase in the feminine. Fadeev, who had the reputation of being a great womanizer, was not flattered by this. He went home and wrote down in his diary: 'I visited *Literaturnyi kritik* today. They don't speak Russian there and they have broken away from Soviet literature.'⁴⁷

⁴⁴ My translation. The original reads: 'Ne osobennosti izobrazhennogo stroia otlichaiut epopeiu ot romana (k chemu svoditsia, v sushchnosti, tochka zreniia Lukacha). Samaia kharakteristika etogo stroia ("gomerovskogo") naskvoz' pronizana formami epicheskogo proshlogo. Kharakteristika gomerovskoi epokhi u Gegelia greshit naivnym realizmom'. (Working materials on the theory of the novel, notebook No. 4, p. 8, Bakhtin's archive; other references to Lukács appear in notebook No. 1, p. 12 and in notebook No. 4, p. 10.)

⁴⁵ In Moscow Lukács had a personal library of about 600 volumes and most of them were preserved when he left the Soviet Union (Lukács's letter to M. Lifshits of 24.01.1945, The Lukács Archive, Budapest, VII/596, 11⁸). My research failed to identify Bakhtin's book on Dostoevsky or any mention of it in Lukács's personal library or in his manuscripts.

⁴⁶ Sara Leibovich, the editor of Bakhtin's *Rabelais*, is perhaps the only living person who had the chance of communicating with both Bakhtin and Lukács. In 1941 Lukács acted as back-up supervisor of her doctoral thesis on Flaubert. Mrs Leibovich confirmed that at this point of Lukács's life his Russian was already 'very good indeed, though with a strong accent' (Interview with S. Leibovich, Moscow, 27 May 1997).

⁴⁷ Cf. Arpad Kadarkay, *Georg Lukács. Life, Thought, and Politics*, Oxford, 1991, p. 346.

In addition to the language problems, no less important is the fact that at the time Lukács was given over to theoretical problems of Marxist aesthetics and to the Hegelian origins of Marxism. The 1930s saw two exciting events in the field of Marxist studies: the publication of the full text of Marx and Engels's *German Ideology* and the discovery and first publication of Marx's *Manuscripts* of 1842–4. Lukács's attention was nearly entirely engulfed by the attempt to think through these texts and evaluate the place they might have in a Marxist theory of art. There was little room left for considerations which were to take him away from this task and his work showed little evidence that he was prepared to seek intellectual stimulation elsewhere.

This, then, clearly means that the contact between Bakhtin and Lukács went in one direction only. Because of the fact that Lukács himself never read Bakhtin, I chose to take him as a relatively more stable referential point, from which to analyse Bakhtin's work. This is not to say that the book does not contextualize Lukács's thought: it does precisely this when it discusses, for the first time in Lukács scholarship, the entire corpus of his Dostoevsky and Goethe criticism and his interpretation of Hegel against the background of contemporary philosophy and aesthetics. But the deeper value of my narrative might be felt to lie in the attempt to rethink Bakhtin, both in relation to the work of Lukács and other contemporaries, and with reference to the internal (in)coherence of his opus. Lukács and Bakhtin, as I will be concerned to demonstrate in the following chapters, were confronted with similar agendas and questions posed for them by their time. Bakhtin, however, had to find answers not only for this common agenda but also to the answers that Lukács himself had already provided. This makes Bakhtin an especially exciting object of historical analysis.

Bakhtin's considerable (yet almost never acknowledged) debt to Lukács had been incurred over a period of about fifteen years (the mid-1920s up to the early 1940s), in which Lukács managed to secure for himself a central position in Marxist social thought. This was not an uncontroversial process for Lukács, for he had constantly to compromise between his ambiguous status of an émigré thinker (first in Austria, then in Moscow, in Berlin, and once again—for twelve years—in Moscow) who was often in internal opposition and therefore kept, especially in his Moscow years, under stringent Party control, on the one hand, and his bourgeois upbringing, tastes, and an unceremonious consciousness of superiority to his Party comrades, on the other. Nevertheless, in the

1930s he had already gained the reputation of a serious player, and indeed of a canon-maker, in the emerging field of institutionalized Marxist aesthetics.

Bakhtin's intellectual career, by contrast, was evolving far from the noise and struggles of official circles. He was detached, reserved, and apparently disinterested in success, at least not in the sense of getting to control people's external lives. Chronically ill, forced into exile, and nearly forgotten, in the 1930s, the time of his crucial polemics with Lukács, Bakhtin's possibilities for voicing his own stance were largely confined to a silent dialogue with his opponent. Even a manifesto work such as 'Epic and Novel', delivered as a paper under the title 'The Novel as Literary Genre' at the Gor'kii Institute of World Literature in 1941,⁴⁸ could not mention Lukács's name explicitly. The Master's writings could become and were indeed the target of open disagreement, but that was the case solely among comrades who were considered loyal enough to compete for the honourable (or, under Stalin, merely life-saving) title of true believers.⁴⁹ A man whose past was burdened with political trials and enforced isolation could hardly take part in these open polemics, nor did he perhaps consider this a worthwhile business.

One can thus clearly see a justification for the title of this book: it reconstructs Bakhtin's efforts to emancipate himself from Lukács's often officially championed thought and to respond to it in a fashion that brings to the fore the originality of his own ideas despite the inclemency of the social climate and his personal life. But Lukács's voice, however successfully opposed by the force of argument, was not processed out of Bakhtin's mind. While striving to overturn Lukács's ideas, Bakhtin's thoughts often remained in the force-field posited by his rival's masterly formulated theses. Thus the framework of the master-slave comparison, when taken in its fluidity promoted in recent post-structuralist readings of Hegel's wider concept of bond,⁵⁰ rather

⁴⁸ Cf. V. Kozhinov and S. Konkin, 'Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin. Kratkii ocherk zhizni i deiatel'nosti', in *Problemy poetiki i istorii literatury*, ed. S. Konkin, Saransk, 1973, p. 9.

⁴⁹ See, for example, the attacks against Lukács's book *K istorii realizma* (1939) launched between November 1939 and February 1940 in the prestigious and Party sanctioned newspaper *Literaturnaiia gazeta*.

⁵⁰ Derrida's re-reading of Hegel in *Glas* (1974) proved particularly influential in revisiting the notion of family ties and bond; cf. K. Thompson, 'Hegelian Dialectic and the Quasi-Transcendental in *Glas*', in *Hegel after Derrida*, ed. S. Barnett, London and New York, 1998, pp. 239–59, esp. pp. 249–54. Derrida's engagement with Hegel predates *Glas*: by 1974 he had already examined Bataille's use of Kojève's reading of Hegel (J. Derrida, *L'Écriture et la différence*, Paris, 1967, pp. 369–407) and Hegel's complex relation to humanism (J. Derrida, *Marges de la philosophie*, Paris, 1972, pp. 79–127).

than in its constancy, could accommodate the nuances and the actual complexity of the relationship between the two heroes of this study. By realizing the significance of Lukács's thought and responding to the theoretical issues set by Lukács's agenda, Bakhtin, in a sense, chose voluntarily his own master, and thus also the object of his intellectual attraction, criticism, and distantiation. His complex relation to Lukács's ideas seems to reflect Koyré's controversial notion of influence in the history of ideas: 'In one sense, and perhaps the deepest, we ourselves determine the influences we are submitting to; our intellectual ancestors are by no means given to, but are freely chosen by, us'; or 'at least to a large extent', Koyré soberly adds.⁵¹

Yet the personalized biography of these polemics is not all this book is about. Under the metaphor of master and slave, I accommodate the very essence of the problems that concerned both Lukács and Bakhtin. As we shall see in the following chapters, they were both moving within a distinctly humanistic paradigm of thought reigning between the two world wars and recognizing the tension between subject and object, author and hero, culture and civilization as variations of the fundamental conflict of modernity—that between the maturing powers of men and women to master nature and the outer world and their growing enslavement at the hands of their own creations. In the practices of *Bildung*, in carnival, or in the desired harmony between author and hero in the polyphonic novel, Bakhtin and Lukács are seeking to resolve this tension, to reconcile us with the products of our creativity and thus to restore (Bakhtin) or attain (Lukács) a state of peace between masters and slaves in the flow of history and inside individual human beings.

A few words about the structure of this book. The main problem was how to combine a more systematic analysis of Bakhtin's and Lukács's thoughts with a reading which is sensitive to the changes that their views underwent over time. In an attempt to solve this problem, I have organized the material in layers which are representative of Bakhtin's and Lukács's theoretical interests at different stages of their work.

Thus the first part (Chapters 1–3) deals with their early writings and includes Lukács's writings roughly up to the mid-1910s and Bakhtin's writings up to the disputed texts. The aim of this part of the book is to explore the genesis of the central concepts of culture, form, and genre against the background of the contemporary philosophical debates.

⁵¹ A. Koyré, *From the Closed World to the Infinite Universe*, Baltimore and London, 1957, pp. 5–6.

The second part (Chapters 4–6) traces the transfigurations of these three concepts in Lukács's and Bakhtin's writings in the 1920s and 1930s. I demonstrate how these concepts were transformed into powerful tools for the analysis of the social dimensions of literature and the thinking about literature as responses to the idea of modernity.

The other substantial problem was the need to deal with the repetitive argumentation and the numerous variations in some of the central ideas in Bakhtin's and Lukács's writings.⁵² I have chosen to handle this problem by singling out another layer (Part 3) which is structurally different. The writings discussed in it are held together not chronologically (they come from various stages of Lukács's and Bakhtin's careers), but rather as manifestations of sustained interest in the works of four important writers and thinkers (Dostoevsky, Goethe, Hegel, and Rabelais). This part has a further function: by bringing together texts which often belong to historically distant periods, it enables us to analyse otherwise barely noticeable cracks in what are generally taken to be the monolithic arguments of Lukács and especially of Bakhtin. As will become evident in this part of the book, the type of discourse on literature, practised by Lukács and Bakhtin, had, in the context they were working in, to prove its propositions and demonstrate its validity with reference to the work of individual 'great authors'. Yet we shall see that both Lukács and Bakhtin, while still subscribing to a subject-centred theory that recognizes the rule only when its application is validated by a strong individual achievement, nevertheless found themselves gradually drifting away from it towards a strongly qualified personalistic view of culture and art.

Finally, I have attempted not to overload the exposition with reference material; still, sometimes I had to rely on footnotes to capture nuances which would have otherwise been sidelined or to give justification, only when absolutely necessary, for my translations from Russian and, less often, from German. More significant modifications of existing translations, silent or commented upon in the footnotes, are signalled with an asterisk. The Library of Congress system of Cyrillic transliteration is used; when not part of a transliterated text, Russian writers' names usually appear in the established English form (Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Mandelstam).

⁵² Bakhtin himself points to his proclivity to repetition and variation (*SG*, 155).

I CONCEPTS

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

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

CULTURE

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

The early works of Lukács and Bakhtin champion a theory of culture that springs from the dominant neo-Kantian opposition of culture and civilization and from the philosophy-of-life (*Lebensphilosophie*) subordination of culture to life. The neo-Kantian opposition of culture and civilization has its roots in the growing self-awareness and the often painful self-perception of the German intelligentsia caught up in the contradictory process of social modernization. In a study written in 1936, Norbert Elias, making the best of his position as a thinker drawing conclusions some two decades after neo-Kantianism and philosophy-of-life had lost their aura, traced the origins of the division between culture and civilization back to the eighteenth century. As early as 1784, Kant distinguished between 'culture', comprising art, learning, and morality, and 'civilization', which included the external and material manifestations of social life.¹ This clear distinction was retained in various forms in the debates of the two main schools of neo-Kantianism. It determined the concerns of the entire first generation of German sociologists, shaped the discussions about modern German education in the 1910s and the 1920s, and was strongly echoed in Spengler's summarizing vision of the decay of the West.²

¹ N. Elias, *Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation*, Vol. 1, Basel, 1939, p. 8. The entire first chapter of Elias's classic study is devoted to the 'sociogenesis' of the difference between culture and civilization in German usage.

² A very good exposition of these problems in a broad historical context is to be found in Fritz K. Ringer, *The Decline of the German Mandarins. The German Academic Community, 1890-1933*, Cambridge, Mass., 1969; see also J. Herf, *Reactionary Modernism. Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich*, Cambridge, 1984.

The philosophy-of-life ideas about the pre-eminence of life over culture have a shorter history that goes back to Nietzsche and Dilthey, and culminates in the writings of Bergson and Simmel. Both Lukács and Bakhtin were immensely affected by the philosophy-of-life view of the relations between culture and life, and they both accepted the resulting necessity of analysing the problem of form. It is important to emphasize that neo-Kantianism and philosophy-of-life did not exist in isolation from one another. There is a powerful trend in current Bakhtin studies which sees Bakhtin as the exclusive recipient of neo-Kantian ideas. But neo-Kantianism was not insulated from the ongoing debates in German philosophy and there were recognizable points of intersection between it and philosophy-of-life. Despite all the differences and polemics between the two trends,³ they were both hostile to positivism and willing to admit that the source of value lies in the singularity of individual phenomena rather than in abstract general laws. The intellectual biography of Simmel, who, as Thomas Willey has demonstrated, was informally associated with the Baden school⁴ and made of the split between fact and value the controversial premise of his own theory of culture, furnishes sufficient proof that these were two different yet not isolated trends in the eyes of those exposed to their impact.

Finally, we need to stress that Lukács's and Bakhtin's understanding of culture was shaped not only by neo-Kantian thinking or philosophy-of-life, but also by Hegelian ideas, and especially by the relativization of the boundaries separating the domains of objective and absolute Spirit in favour of a totalizing idea of human culture. Indeed, both Lukács and Bakhtin moved from an early preoccupation with neo-Kantianism and philosophy-of-life towards a stronger respect for and commitment to Hegel. This is a crucial point to make, for it is precisely in the appropriation of Hegel that philosophy-of-life and neo-Kantian theories of culture most evidently meet. Again, the student of Bakhtin will inevitably encounter the current insistence that because of the prevailing influence of neo-Kantianism Bakhtin either did not have anything to do with Hegelianism or, if he nevertheless occasionally sounded

³ The most important document of the neo-Kantian attack against *Lebensphilosophie* is Heinrich Rickert's *Die Philosophie des Lebens. Darstellung und Kritik der philosophischen Modeströmungen unserer Zeit* [1920], where vestiges of the philosophy-of-life attitude are identified even in the thought of Husserl and Scheler, two thinkers of extreme importance to Bakhtin (see H. Rickert, *Die Philosophie des Lebens*, Tübingen, 1922, pp. 29–30). Cf. Voloshinov's ambivalent attitude to Rickert's book (*MPL*, 32, n. 10).

⁴ See Th. Willey, *Back to Kant. The Revival of Kantianism in German Social and Historical Thought, 1860–1914*, Detroit, 1978, pp. 168–9.

Hegelian, this was due solely to the powerful effects of Soviet Marxism, through which he soaked up a diluted form of Hegelianism. None of these contentions is tenable. Lukács's ideas of culture, and especially those of Bakhtin, are Hegelian to the extent that neo-Kantianism and philosophy-of-life themselves were 'infected' with and developing towards Hegelianism. In the eyes of their contemporaries, the Hegelian link between neo-Kantianism and *Lebensphilosophie* was more easily detectable. Writing in 1927, Heinrich Levy convincingly argued the case for Windelband's dual inclinations: towards Hegel, whence Windelband's taste for universal history and philosophy of culture may be shown to come, and towards Kant, to whom Windelband remained indebted for the dualistic framework of fact and value.⁵ In philosophers like Windelband, Levy submits, a symptomatic meeting between neo-Kantianism and *Lebensphilosophie* took place and helped to sharpen interest in Hegel: the neo-Kantian movement was looking for clarification of the general conditions of culture in the concrete life of Spirit, whereas philosophy-of-life was seeking to establish a logical foundation for this concrete life.⁶ This is a rather plausible way of explaining the interest in Hegel both on the part of neo-Kantians such as Windelband, who was ready to accept, though not entirely wholeheartedly, the fact that 'the hunger for world-views [...] finds satisfaction in Hegel',⁷ and also on the part of philosophy-of-life thinkers like Dilthey or the later Simmel. A particularly strong example of the accommodation of

⁵ See H. Levy, 'Die Hegel-Renaissance in der deutschen Philosophie. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung des Neukantianismus', *Philosophische Vorträge*, 1927, Vol. 30, esp. pp. 59–65.

⁶ H. Levy, 'Die Hegel Renaissance', p. 92.

⁷ W. Windelband, 'Die Erneuerung des Hegelianismus', *Präliminarien: Aufsätze und Reden zur Philosophie und ihrer Geschichte*, 5th edn., Tübingen, 1915, Vol. 1, p. 278. Windelband's concessions can be seen as one of the reasons why in an innovative analysis of neo-Kantianism he is said, among others, to better deserve the prefix 'neo' rather than the definition 'Kantian' (see K. Köhnke, *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge, 1991, p. 251); similarly, Paul Honigshiem, in an article discussing the Hegel renaissance in Heidelberg at the time Lukács was there, recalls that Georg Jellinek used to speak of Windelband as an exponent of neo-Fichteanism rather than neo-Kantianism (see P. Honigshiem, 'Zur Hegelrenaissance im Vorkriegs-Heidelberg. Erkenntnis-soziologische Beobachtungen', *Hegel-Studien*, 1963, Vol. 2, p. 299). For an account of the evolution towards Hegelianism of another neo-Kantian thinker, Paul Natorp, see T. Willey, *Back to Kant*, pp. 118–20; the alienation of another Marburger neo-Kantian philosopher, Nicolai Hartmann, and his gradual drift towards Hegel in the early 1910s are noted in U. Sieg, *Aufstieg und Niedergang des Marburger Neukantianismus. Die Geschichte einer philosophischen Schulgemeinschaft*, Würzburg, 1994, pp. 316–24, and in L. Fleishman et al., *Boris Pasternaks Lehrjahre. Neopublikovannyi filosofskie konspekty i zametki Borisa Pasternaka*, Stanford, 1996, p. 85, n. 213 (*Stanford Slavic Studies*, Vol. 11:1). It is, therefore, hardly by accident that in *Safe Conduct* Boris Pasternak recalls the Marburg neo-Kantians as people who were looking at history in a twofold way: through Kantian, but also through 'Hegelian eyes' (B. Pasternak, *The Voice of Prose*, ed. C. Barnes, Edinburgh, 1986, p. 41).

Hegelian philosophy of culture in an initially neo-Kantian theoretical agenda may be found in Cassirer, the last of the great neo-Kantians and one of the central inspirations for Bakhtin's work in the 1930s. Cassirer's *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* is a powerful attempt at re-defining the Kantian forms of human experience into Hegelian stages in the historical growth of human consciousness and culture.⁸

Both Russian and Hungarian philosophical circles were receptive to the polemics surrounding the definition of culture in the first two decades of the century. In Russia, the journal *Logos* provided the main ground for this exchange, with articles on the philosophy of culture by Simmel, Windelband, and Rickert, among others. Separate editions of these authors' works were also available in Russian translation.⁹ In a place like Budapest, not entirely fairly but pointedly described by one Lukács scholar as 'Die Stadt ohne Eigenschaften',¹⁰ and thus as an environment provincially open to influences from outside, German philosophy was a dominant presence. In the Budapest Sunday Circle, initiated by Béla Balász and Lukács, and convening for several years in the latter half of the 1910s, philosophy of culture was a major point of discussions.¹¹

SPIRIT AND CIVILIZATION: LUKÁCS

A lecture by Karl Mannheim, another Hungarian-Jewish philosopher and for a short time even a pupil of Lukács, gives a clear notion of the

⁸ On Cassirer's Hegelianism see H. Levy, 'Die Hegel-Renaissance', pp. 47–9; D. Verene, 'Kant, Hegel and Cassirer: The Origins of the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 1969, Vol. 30, pp. 33–48; D. Lipton, *Ernst Cassirer: The Dilemma of a Liberal Intellectual in Germany, 1914–33*, Toronto, 1978, pp. 70–82; J. Crois, *Cassirer: Symbolic Forms and History*, New Haven and London, 1987. On Cassirer's impact on Bakhtin see B. Poole, 'Bakhtin and Cassirer: The Philosophical Origins of Bakhtin's Carnival Messianism', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 1998, Vol. 97, No. 3–4, pp. 537–78, and C. Brandist, 'Bakhtin, Cassirer and Symbolic Forms', *Radical Philosophy*, 1997, Vol. 85, pp. 20–7.

⁹ For bibliographical references see N. Bonetskaja's notes to 'Author and Hero' in *Bakhtinologia*, ed. K. Isupov, St Petersburg, 1995, and V. Liapunov's notes to *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, Austin, 1993.

¹⁰ G. Hellenbart, *Georg Lukács und die Ungarische Literatur*, PhD thesis, Universität Hamburg, 1975, p. 68. (Hellenbart's debt to Musil is transparent.)

¹¹ On the philosophical undertakings of the circle see especially *Georg Lukács, Karl Mannheim und der Sonntagskreis*, ed. E. Karádi and E. Vezér, Frankfurt am Main, 1985, and P. Por, 'Lukács und sein Sonntagskreis: ein unbekanntes Kapitel aus der Geschichte des europäischen Denkens', *Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik*, 1984, No. 53–4, pp. 108–46. See also Lee Congdon's (1983) and Mary Gluck's (1985) books on the young Lukács and Kadarkay's (1991) life of Lukács.

maturity of these debates and the centrality of the concept of culture in them.¹² Mannheim's lecture, delivered in 1919 in Budapest, records the neo-Kantian approach to culture in relation to civilization, nature, and soul as well as the strict differentiation between fact and value. When contrasted with nature, culture is the domain of the objects that humans produce from the material provided by nature to serve their different goals. This definition, however, is disturbingly broad and Mannheim introduces a further distinction: culture proper covers only those objects that relate to absolute values (the beautiful, the good, and the true), whereas the objects designed to satisfy the practical needs of people are to be considered as phenomena of civilization. The state, for example, is a phenomenon of civilization when we look at it as the protector of the interests of the individual; when we think of the role of the state as an educator called to inculcate absolute values, then we are dealing with the state in its guise of culture (226). In relation to the soul, a further differentiation within culture proper is bound to occur. All products of culture are marked by a certain degree of objectification and for that reason they all have their objective and independent sense (*Sinn*). The soul cannot find expression except in such an object of culture proper which is not, however, merely a means of expression, but is also a self-sufficient whole with its own inherent sense (213). The objects of nature exist in space and time, our psychic processes take place in time, whereas the genuine object of culture abides in the realm of validity and sense (*in der Geltung, im Sinn*). Culture proper, regarded as the bearer of autonomous sense, constitutes the world of objective culture. Subjective culture, on the contrary, is that condition of culture where its objects suspend their independence and acquire meaning (*Bedeutung*) from us and for us.¹³ Subjective culture, in other words, is 'something of significance for the development of our soul' (227). The potential danger is that culture can never be purely subjective and that following the mechanisms of objective culture we may become servants of our own products (221).

This level of lucidity and rigour in drawing the limits of culture both against civilization, and within culture itself, remained unmatched in

¹² See K. Mannheim, 'Die Grundprobleme der Kulturphilosophie', in *Georg Lukács, Karl Mannheim und der Sonntagskreis*, pp. 206–31. Page references will be given in brackets in the main text. For an interesting comparative perspective on Mannheim and Bakhtin, see R. A. Morrow, 'Bakhtin and Mannheim: An Introductory Dialogue', in *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences*, ed. M. Bell and M. Gardiner, London, 1998, pp. 145–62.

¹³ Mannheim's strong debt to Simmel's well-known division of culture into objective and subjective is visible here. We will comment on Simmel's division at more length in Chapter 5.

Lukács's writings. Lukács never sought to outline the scope of culture other than by implicit reference to the ideal spheres of the religious, the ethical, the logical, and the aesthetic, all of them being various types of 'behaviour of the soul' (*HPK*, 22). His approach to culture in the early works vacillated between *Lebensphilosophie* and neo-Kantianism, being closer, as Axel Honneth rightly suggests, to the former rather than the latter.¹⁴

For Lukács, the need to consider culture emerged out of his broad project of aesthetics and philosophy of art. The vital premises of this philosophy of art—the conflict of culture and civilization, the non-identity of objective and subjective culture, and especially the primacy of life over culture—are all taken for granted by Lukács. They are so hugely important for his ideas and so integral to the basis of his work that he rarely, if ever, takes the trouble to make them explicit. Hence the impression that his early philosophical work is opaque and incoherent. It would seem, however, that it might be more profitable to approach his early writings hermeneutically, uncovering the essential foundations of his thought which he considered to be a self-explanatory element of a shared philosophical legacy.

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

Lukács starts with a clear opposition between civilisation and culture:

There are those, who, when the topic turns to culture, prefer to talk about aeroplanes and railways, the speed and efficiency of telegraphs. [. . .] But let us never forget one thing: all these manifestations—even in the best of circumstances—are merely roads to culture; they merely provide an opportunity, enhance the potential, and lend substance to the formative power of culture.

(AC, 146).

But while unproblematically superior to civilization, culture has a rather complicated relation to life. Lukács is uncertain as to which

¹⁴ See A. Honneth, 'Eine Welt der Zerrissenheit. Zur untergründigen Aktualität von Lukács's Frühwerk', in *Georg Lukács—Jenseits der Polemiken*, ed. R. Dannemann, Frankfurt am Main, 1986, pp. 43–4.

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

Every culture denotes the conquest of life. Culture signifies a powerful unity of all aspects of life (this is never a conceptual unity of course), so that no matter what perspective we choose on life, we see essentially the same thing everywhere. In an authentic culture everything is symbolic, because everything expresses—and expresses it equally—what is of paramount importance: how the individual reacts to life, how his whole being responds to and confronts life as a whole.

(AC, 148)

If we recall Mannheim's 'grid' of interpretation, we shall see that Lukács introduces life as a new element against which culture should be defined. Art, presumed to be the core of genuine culture, should capture the fullness of life, but without dissolving passively into it. Art, Lukács insists, has to try and attain the *essence* of life. When Lukács singles out the two 'pure types' produced by modern culture—'the expert and the aesthete' (AC, 147)—he apportions to each of them a specific vice that needs rectification. The expert, an early epitome of the monster of reification that is to occupy such a prominent place in Lukács's work, sees things bereft of the supporting sense of unity and wholeness; the aesthete, an equally pitiful hero of the modern age, mistakes the appearance for the essence: he equates 'all manifestations of life with an affectionate surrender to transient moments' (AC, 149). We can thus discern the delineations of a notion of culture and art that accounts for Lukács's later developments as a thinker. Art, being the core of culture, should strive to oppose the fragmentary purview of the expert; its single most important mission is to restore and render the totality of life. Yet art cannot rest content with life as it is on the surface, in the mere display of the phenomenal; beneath this surface there lies an essence which is assumed to be different from the 'transient moments'. In anticipation of our discussion in Chapter 5, we need to emphasize that in opening himself to a holistic approach to life and closing himself to what he dismisses as its mere appearance, Lukács is

already drafting his theory of realism and typicality as a response to the antinomies of modernity. While propagating closeness to life and the flux of the present, realism, unlike naturalism, seeks to reveal the essence of life which is not immediately available. Although the source of truth for the artist is looked for in the life process in its entirety (a debt to Hegel and *Lebensphilosophie*), the Kantian division of fact and value, of appearance and essence remains intact. Realism is not simply a description of reality, it is an attainment of the real as significant and essential. Those who confuse the two things are bound to become the captives of naturalism or impressionism. Lukács launches an unequivocal attack on the latter trend as early as 1910 in his article 'The Parting of the Ways': 'The very belief that there is something palpably permanent in the vortex of moments, the conviction that things exist and have an essential nature, excludes Impressionism and all its manifestations' (*LR*, 170). 'Aesthetic Culture', too, is a diatribe against mood-driven art that has lost all contact with life and no longer searches for truth. This line of reasoning is corroborated in Lukács's unfinished treatises on aesthetics: although the aesthetic positing (*die ästhetische Setzung*) can in no way be independent of the 'experienceability' (*Erlebbarkeit*) of the world (*HA*, 55–6), art has to go beyond the ephemeral sphere of sheer experience (*HPK*, 26). Thus we may conclude that culture—through art—relates to life in a contradictory fashion: it has to retain and reflect the vigour and the richness of life, but it also has actively to model life and distill its true and deep essence. It is important to keep this contradiction in mind, as it generates the problem of form to which we will turn in the next chapter.

At this point we need to take a further step and consider the question of the relation of culture to the soul. Lukács's answer does not strike one as greatly original: the heterogeneous and numerous fields of culture have to contribute to the homogeneity of the soul; all branches of culture obtain their *raison d'être* from the task of bringing unity to the soul and assisting it in finding the way to self-expression. In *Soul and Form*, Lukács couches this answer, which was wide-spread in *fin-de-siècle* and early twentieth-century Europe, in proto-existentialist terms, insisting on the necessity for the soul to exemplify the metaphysical authenticity of life. This authenticity, he fears, is on the wane in the manifestations of the more distinct and verifiable but disunited faculties of man.¹⁵

¹⁵ No other book in Lukács's *oeuvre* has brought about a deeper divide among commentators than *Soul and Form*. Contemporaries, especially in Hungary, gave it a lukewarm reception

Lukács's answer, then, is less interesting in its own right than for its indirect implications. It is in the process of working out this answer that Lukács commenced his transition from neo-Kantianism and *Lebensphilosophie* to Hegel. This transition has not been clearly spelled out nor adequately interpreted by Lukács scholarship. Ruminating upon the unity of the soul and the heterogeneity of the various fields of culture, Lukács was by degrees arriving at the idea that there may be a certain contradiction between the unitary being of the soul and the fragmented existence of culture. Since the unity of the soul was beyond doubt, and rational inspection of it was felt to be vulgar and offensive, the only alternative approach available was to revise the existing status of culture. We can see this process unfolding in Lukács's writings in the mid-1910s. In a much neglected review published in 1915, he already displays some affinity to Hegel's notion of Spirit as an overarching concept of human culture. Under the lingering pressure to sustain the division of culture and civilization, Lukács criticizes Croce and Dilthey for 'removing the sharp demarcation between objective and absolute Spirit' and insists on the separation of art, religion, and philosophy from the products of objective Spirit.¹⁶ This reservation notwithstanding, the first step had been taken in that Hegel's category of Spirit was now firmly accepted as a possible instrument for conceptualizing culture. A few years later, in his *Heidelberg Aesthetics* (1916-18), Lukács presents a more elaborate, if not completely enthusiastic, case for a Hegelian understanding of culture as a possible alternative to Kantianism.¹⁷ Kant, Lukács argues, was adamant that in order to

stressing its opaqueness and chaotic verbosity; Emma Ritoók, later a participant in the Sunday Circle in Budapest (and later still the author of a *roman à clef* in which Lukács figures not to his best advantage), bluntly wrote that the unsystematic genre of the essay cannot be used to convey *philosophical* messages about art (see E. Ritoók, 'Georg von Lukács's "Die Seele und die Formen"', *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 1912, Vol. 7, p. 326; quoted in G. Hellenbart, *Georg Lukács und die Ungarische Literatur*, p. 122). Lukács's numerous attempts to promote his book among leading German scholars yielded only very modest results. In keeping with good form, most recipients of the book were polite without, however, committing themselves to approval or even to a serious perusal (this situation is amply documented in Lukács's early *Briefwechsel*). Of those who embraced the book as innovative and rich, Lucien Goldmann deserves special mention for praising Lukács as the predecessor of Heidegger. That Goldmann's linking of Lukács and Heidegger rests, however, on assumptions of *Zeitgeist* unity rather than on facts has been established by István Fehér in his article 'Lucien Goldmann über Lukács und Heidegger' (*Jahrbuch der Internationalen Georg-Lukács-Gesellschaft*, 1996, Bern, 1997, pp. 153-67).

¹⁶ G. Lukács, '[Review of] B. Croce, "Zur Theorie und Geschichte der Historiographie"', *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, 1915, Vol. 39, pp. 878-85, esp. pp. 879-80.

¹⁷ G. Márkus is right to argue that Lukács's attraction to Hegel in this period was complicated and held in check by a competing sympathy for Fichte's moral activism (G. Márkus,

claim validity every value should be posited as something that cannot be deduced from other values and as resting on a different capacity of the human soul. This led him to assume that the fields of value need not only to be insulated from, but also opposed to one another (*HA*, 211). Hegel took an ironic stance towards what he called Kant's search for various capacities in the 'bag of the soul'. Instead, he proposed that these capacities be regarded as interconnected stages in the development of Spirit. Thus Spirit is credited with begetting unity, and its products are treated as belonging to an unfragmentable whole. Hegel, Lukács concludes, surmounts Kant's 'pluralism of the fields of value' (*Pluralismus der Wertgebiete*, *HA*, 213) and champions a philosophy of culture which renders irrelevant the question 'how is . . . possible?' (any domain of culture can be placed in the space marked by Lukács's dots). Instead, the task of philosophy of culture comes to be one of showing the various fields of culture as moments in the 'Entwicklung' (*HA*, 214) of Spirit. Thus the last chapter of the *Heidelberg Aesthetics* re-evaluates Lukács's own determination to answer the question 'How are works of art possible?', with which his treatise starts (*HA*, 9). Lukács summons Goethe to endorse Hegel's argument with the consecrated power of intuitive wisdom (*HA*, 213), and this is the first moment of many more to come in which Goethe and Hegel are interpreted by Lukács as allies in the history of human thought (we will give closer attention to this parallel in Chapter 8).

This shift sheds profuse light on Lukács's subsequent embrace of totality both as a criterion for judging the perfection of art and as a social desideratum. But it also makes clear his abandonment of the notion of soul after 1918. As he was gradually questioning his own neo-Kantian premises, he quietly eliminated the concerns for the well-being of the soul, which up to 1918, as we will demonstrate in the chapter on Dostoevsky, remained central to his work. After Spirit took over the powers of producer of culture, culture was no longer viewed as informing the individual human soul. Instead it was made to serve the growing self-awareness of Spirit on the road to identity. Thus with the rise of Hegelian Spirit, the notion of culture had to be transformed while that of soul simply fell into oblivion. The link between aesthetics

'Lukács' "erste" Ästhetik: Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Philosophie des jungen Lukács', in *Die Seele und das Leben. Studien zum frühen Lukács*, ed. A. Heller et al., Frankfurt am Main, 1977, pp. 227–8). But it seems to me that Márkus's conclusion that the young Lukács was never a Hegelian thinker in the strict sense (p. 228) prevents us from fully appreciating Lukács's dramatic move from undisputed reverence for Kant to a shared allegiance to Kant and Hegel, with the last of his early writings moving still closer to Hegel.

and ethics was severed or at least de-personalized. In the years to come Lukács was to be interested in how culture relates to collective identities: those of class and of human species. The purely philosophical approach gave way to the agenda of social theory and ideology.

It is this aspect of Lukács's understanding of culture that needs to be examined briefly in the last part of this discussion. The main question to be answered is what is the relation of class as a collective historical subject to culture within the process of social change? When in 1910 Lukács discusses the art of Hungarian post-impressionism, he praises it with the words: 'This art is an old art, the art of order and values; it is a constructive art' (*LR*, 171). Here one can already discern Lukács's aesthetic conservatism and his reluctance to accept the new as necessarily the better.¹⁸ It is essential to realize that the basis of this aesthetic conservatism remains unshaken even when Lukács begins to notice the presence of the proletariat as a new social force. In the eyes of the early Lukács, a new class is not any better equipped to create genuine culture than the old (i.e. the dominant) class. For this reason in 'Aesthetic Culture' Lukács insists that socialism 'cannot become the real adversary of bourgeois aestheticism, as it wants to be and knows it ought to be'. The proletarian art, which socialism strives to create in the midst of bourgeois culture, is no more than 'a weak and gross caricature of bourgeois art; just as fragile and superficial, but without the seductive charm of bourgeois art' (*AC*, 151–2). The aesthetic imperfection, or the lack of 'seductive charm', is one of the staple accusations Lukács levels against proletarian art in the 1930s, since, for him, it never quite manages to match the solid standards of bourgeois realist literature. As E. Lunn has rightly observed, Lukács does not see the new culture as 'qualitatively redefined by self-determining, collectivist production, but as the passive quantitative distribution of the given traditional literary forms'.¹⁹ Thus the so-called new culture is reduced to the democratization of the one already existing: 'Communism aims at creating a social order in which everyone is able to live in a way that in pre-capitalist eras was possible only for the ruling class.'²⁰ Small won-

¹⁸ Lukács's regressivist interpretation was endorsed by the prominent Hungarian art historian Lajos Fülep who spoke of the post-impressionists, and in particular of Cézanne, as 'the firmest affirmation of the reality of the real world'. Cézanne, he went on, 'represents a piece of the Middle Ages amidst the age of Impressionism' (quoted in M. Gluck, *Georg Lukács and his Generation, 1900–1918*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1984, p. 141).

¹⁹ E. Lunn, *Marxism and Modernism. A Historical Study of Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, and Adorno*, Berkeley and London, 1982, p. 126.

²⁰ G. Lukács, 'The Old Culture and the New Culture', in *Marxism and Human Liberation*, ed. E. San Juan, Jun., New York, 1973, p. 5.

der, then, that throughout his career Lukács remains attached to the traditionalist values of reason, order, and proportion and shows no tolerance for the spirit of experimentation in art. Moreover, he always assumes that grand bourgeois writers, who enjoy the noble back-up of tradition and talent, are far better placed to fight the bourgeois order and fascism than is the literature of the working class. This may sound like a surprising paradox. Lukács's early writings, however, prove that it is rather the logical outcome of long-held values and approaches.

BOUNDARIES, LIMITS, AND MORAL ACTS: BAKHTIN

Against the background of Lukács's writings Bakhtin's early work strikes one as drawing very much on the same philosophical sources and traditions (neo-Kantianism and *Lebensphilosophie*²¹) and discussing similar problems (the authenticity of life, the alienation of culture and life, the place of art in culture). These similarities should, however, not be exaggerated. An important difference is the fact that Bakhtin remained untouched by Hegel's thought in his early works. In Bakhtin's case, Hegel came onto the stage only in the late 1920s and the early 1930s when he made a perceptible contribution to Bakhtin's understanding of the novel, culture, and society in the essays on the novel (we shall be discussing this in Chapter 6), in *Rabelais* (to this we shall turn in Chapter 9) and, in an often elusive but none the less effective way, in the notes of the 1970s. A further dissimilarity lies in Bakhtin's openly stated aversion to theoreticism. This is not to say that Bakhtin disliked or did not attempt to attain systematic exposition; on the contrary, Bakhtin's early texts, especially 'Author and Hero' (despite its fragmentariness) and 'The Problem of Content, Material, and Form', are marked by a clearer and more persistent structure and argumentation than any of the young Lukács's preserved texts. Bakhtin's strong reservations against theoreticism are reservations about the very possibility of considering art or culture or any other dimension of human life solely in terms of their purity and autonomy, without reference to their ethical

²¹ It is essential to realize that Bakhtin's criticism of Bergson as one of the main representatives of philosophy-of-life (*TPA*, 13) cannot be taken at face value (as has very often been the case). Bakhtin's discontent stems from the insufficient radicalism of Bergson's project, not from its essence and direction. While Bakhtin undoubtedly approves of Bergson's endeavour 'to include the theoretical world within the unity of life-in-process-of-becoming', he disapproves of the fact that all Bergson's efforts amount to is 'a certain aesthetisation of life, and this masks to some degree the obvious incongruity of pure theoreticism'.

value and their impact on the formation of social judgement. Lukács, while remaining passionately committed to questions of ethics, was still hoping in his *Heidelberg Aesthetics* to reveal the essence of an autonomous aesthetic positing (*Setzung*). In his early writings, Bakhtin is often inclined to view art as instrumental in the fostering of participatory being through responsible acts. Even when the autonomy of art is elevated to an ideal (which is clearly the case in 'Author and Hero'), this still does not contradict the imperative of participatory being. The only truly metaphysical problem for Bakhtin is God, whose presence he deems to be of a nature distinct from that of the visible realm of culture. For that reason in his earliest published article, 'Art and Answerability', Bakhtin speaks of culture as comprising three domains: science, art, and life (AA, 1) without mentioning religion at all. God serves only as the 'highest level of authority that blesses a culture' (AH, 206).

Bakhtin's inclusion of life as part of culture in 'Art and Answerability' is only a disguised philosophy-of-life type of procedure; it demonstrates that though culture is different from life, it is also always saturated with life and by the same token dependent on it. Art and life clash in this short essay not because they are considered mutually exclusive but because the area in which they can meet—the person's responsible behaviour—has not firmly emerged yet.

In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* we already witness an alteration in Bakhtin's philosophizing tactics. Here the superiority of life over culture is emphasized not so much by pointing to the dependence of culture on life as one of its constituents, as by underscoring the gap between culture and life and the powerlessness of culture, including art, 'to take possession of that moment of being which is constituted by transitiveness and open event-ness' (TPA, 1*). Unlike Lukács, Bakhtin is doubtful in his early texts whether art should be deemed a privileged realm of culture. Like any other field of culture it, too, fails to restore unity between the product of human activity and the unique and fluid experiencing of life. The result of this failure is well known:

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

(TPA, 2)

We can see that what really worries Bakhtin is not the neo-Kantian split of fact and value but rather the impossibility of integrating the products of culture back into the flux of life. This is a recognizably Simmelian concern, and one that brings Bakhtin close to Lukács's uneasy acceptance of objectification and his outright rejection of reification. The desirability of this integration will stay with Bakhtin until his latest writings, when he will oppose the reification of human consciousness in his notes on the methodology of the human sciences.

It is precisely the threatening separation of the cultural object from the natural richness, vivacity, and inexhaustibility of life that seems to have motivated Bakhtin's attempt to revise the relations between author and hero in 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity'. The author, a condensed embodiment of the creative principle of culture, should open himself to the unpredictability and unruliness of life represented by the hero. While being the objectification of the creative power of the author, the hero remains the unconquered voice of life, an epitome of life's independence from the manipulative devices of art. In Bakhtin's early philosophical utopia the hero is destined to be the magical and ideal coincidence of artifact and life: the product of art which continues to inhabit the novel as an irrepressible life force; an alien trace in the tissue of the literary text that erodes the presumption of the autonomous and invincible nature of the aesthetic.

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

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

(*TPA*, 55*).

Bakhtin summarizes this result by evoking Simmel's distinction between subjective and objective culture: 'We have conjured up the ghost of objective culture, and now we do not know how to lay it to rest' (*TPA*, 55-6). The reunion of culture and life will be attempted in Bakhtin's later work (on Goethe and Rabelais) without reference to the uniqueness of the act in the open-eventness of being and without recourse to

the author–hero relationship or to any other ethical concerns. Like Lukács, Bakhtin's later works abandon the ethical ground in favour of a more intense (if not always direct) interest in social problems. A partial return to ethical problematics is visible only in the 1960s and the 1970s, but it is embroiled with generalizations addressing the methodology of the human sciences. In this context, it is not insignificant that as early as in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* Bakhtin speaks of historical materialism as a method which, albeit with a number of incongruities, succeeds in entering into 'the living world of the actually performed responsible deed' (*TPA*, 20*). Like Lukács, Bakhtin is vaguely grasping after alternative methods in social philosophy. Unlike Lukács, however, he never fully embraces Marxism, although over time he does become increasingly receptive to Hegel's methodology.

An essential and distinctive feature of Bakhtin's discourse on culture is his assumption that culture may have boundaries separating it from civilization, nature, or—in a more uncertain way—from life, but it possesses no 'inner territory'. Culture, Bakhtin argues in an enigmatic but none the less oft-quoted passage,

is located entirely upon boundaries, boundaries intersect it everywhere, passing through each of its constituent features. The systematic unity of culture passes into the atoms of cultural life—like the sun, it is reflected in every drop of this life. Every cultural act lives essentially on the boundaries, and it derives its seriousness and significance from this fact.

(PCMF, 274)

It seems to me that up to now Bakhtin scholarship has more often been helplessly fascinated with the boldness of this statement than prepared to subject it to an analysis revealing its background and meaning. There can be little doubt about the Simmelian origins of Bakhtin's idea. In his late work *Lebensanschauung* (1918), Simmel ascribes primary importance to the notion of boundary. Life, he submits, is the motion which 'in every single moment draws in something in order to transform it into a part of itself, into life'.²² In the spiritual sphere this is the process we observe in education; in the biological sphere the same process manifests itself in self-preservation, growth and conception. All these instances Simmel denotes as 'more-life' (*Mehr-Leben*), for they multiply life without changing it qualitatively. In culture, however, when life becomes 'creative' rather than merely reproductive, forms

²² G. Simmel, *Lebensanschauung. Vier metaphysische Kapitel*, Munich and Leipzig, 1918, p. 20. Further on page references will be given in brackets in the main text.

start to appear which have 'their own objective meaning, solidity, and inner logic' (22), and for this reason are 'more-than-life' (*Mehr-als-Leben*). Gradually, these forms may ossify and the products of culture will then become ready-made objects of consumption. Culture, then, is possible only in a process of constant redefinition of forms and exchange with life in which existing forms are appropriated and new ones are created. If we agree with Simmel that creative forms both separate and reunite culture and life in an unceasing dynamics of objectification and appropriation, we can better appreciate Bakhtin's anxiety to see culture not as a firmly delineated domain but rather as a constant negotiation over its own boundaries.

This notion of boundaries, however, is preceded in 'Author and Hero' by a belief that the distinctions between art and life, author and hero should be more firmly drawn. In 'Author and Hero' Bakhtin still thinks that art, as part of culture, should be deemed an autonomous realm with its own *specifica*. He regards the crisis of authorship in Russian literature from Dostoevsky to Belyi as a process that relativizes the boundaries of aesthetic culture (AH, 203) and makes the guaranteed position of outsideness no longer tenable. This could result, at best, in the dissolution of the aesthetic into the ethical: 'The position of outsideness becomes excruciatingly ethical (the insulted and injured as such become the heroes for the act of seeing—which is no longer purely artistic, of course)' (AH, 205). In the 1929 book on Dostoevsky Bakhtin revisits this change and tries to see in the new position of the author the basis for a new—and better—type of novel; as we shall see, he also attempts to provide a more elaborate sociological explanation for the crisis of authorship, but his tone and judgement are marked by strong ambiguity. It is only in his work in the 1930s (as will be shown in Chapter 5), in continuation of 'The Problem of Content, Material, and Form' and not without the influence of Voloshinov's ideas of life-ideology advanced in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, that Bakhtin fully asserts the permeable nature of the boundaries between life and culture, on the one hand, and official and popular culture, on the other. Thus in the 1930s Bakhtin proved a much more talented disciple of Simmel than Lukács, who never examined in such depth the problem of boundaries in relation to culture (despite the fact that he had a strong record of personal contacts and apprenticeship with Simmel, which Bakhtin lacked altogether).

A final remark on Bakhtin's concept of culture needs to be made at this point. For all his admiration of popular culture and the various

forms of life-ideology Bakhtin never abandons his reverence for a presumed canon of great art. Like Lukács, he retains his fidelity to those works of literature which stand the test of 'great time' and participate in the 'great experience' of humankind. Bakhtin's dualism of 'great' and 'small' time, of 'great' and 'small' experience, so clearly and passionately stated in his texts of the 1960s and 1970s, has its roots in the blend of three philosophical traditions. First, there is the neo-Kantian split between fact and value, along with the trust in the potential open-endedness of being, championed in the writings of Bakhtin's close friend Matvei Kagan;²³ second, there is the later Hegelian idea of totality, of culture as a world-historical and depersonalized unity, which provides the ground for each sense to touch on (and be touched by) other senses, thus entering an unlimited dialogue with them; third, there is the serious domestic tradition of Russian eschatologism, which supports the hopes that every meaning can enjoy a resurrection and that every word is hospitably awaited by a 'great time' in a second kingdom, where a new and 'great experience' will do justice to that which has been forgotten while 'small time' lasted. This powerful Christian utopia is one of the main sources of the ongoing magic and attraction of Bakhtin's texts: on the surface, it suggests that everything can be salvaged in the 'great time'; in reality, however, Bakhtin never deals with works worthy of admittance to 'the homecoming festival' (*SG*, 170) of meaning other than those already belonging to a presumed canon of great literature. The mechanisms of this utopian salvation help us answer the question of why Bakhtin's thought survived the challenges of post-structuralism and proved even—for a great many interpreters—compatible with it.

Meaning, in order to be admitted to the bosom of 'great time', has to be, as Bakhtin clearly demands (*SG*, 170), unstable and—to a considerable degree—depersonalized. Salvation cannot be hoped for before meaning sheds its stable identity and its status of being borne by an author who exercises control over it. Entering the dialogue of 'great

²³ See, above all, M. Kagan, 'Kak vozmozhna istoriia', *Zapiski Orlovskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, 1922, Vol. 1, pp. 137–92; on Kagan and Bakhtin, see B. Poole, 'Nazad k Kaganu', *DKH*, 1995, No. 1, pp. 38–48 and 'Rol' M. I. Kagana v stanovlenii filosofii M. M. Bakhtina (ot Germana Kogena k Maksu Sheleru)', *Bakhtinskii sbornik*, 1997, Vol. 3, pp. 162–81; Iu. Kagan, 'People Not of Our Time' [1992], in *The Contexts of Bakhtin*, ed. D. Shepherd, Amsterdam, 1998, pp. 3–16; R. Coates, 'Two of a Small Fraternity? Points of Contact and Departure in the Work of Bakhtin and Kagan up to 1924', *ibid.*, pp. 17–28. The idea of open-endedness in its relevance to aesthetics is discussed in M. Kagan, 'Two Aspirations in Art' [1922–3], trans. F. Goodwin, *Experiment*, 1997, Vol. 3, pp. 254–64.

time' is an act preceded by the relinquishing of authorial claims and the handing over of meaning—in all its changeability—into the care of Time. It is in this never-ending dialogue that a first or a last meaning can no longer exist. But what emerges along this chain of meanings is an unceasing rejuvenation through change, a salvation through inclusion into new contexts. Bakhtin, then, allows his fans to eat their cake without having to mourn its disappearance: the shaken stability of meaning and the humble withdrawal of the author are in fact only a means for purchasing the eternity and dynamic identity of meaning in 'great' time.

FORM

In discussing the problem of the relationship between culture and life, we have suggested at several points that for both Lukács and Bakhtin the exploration of this question implied serious consideration of form as the point where life, culture, and authorial activity intersect. It is therefore to the concept of form that our attention turns now. I examine Lukács's and Bakhtin's ideas of form in the context of *Lebensphilosophie* and neo-Kantianism and demonstrate that the preoccupation with aesthetics was central to both Lukács and Bakhtin before they embarked on genre criticism. It is important to stress this sequence, for it helps explain some of the features of Lukács's and Bakhtin's later theory of genre.

ESSENCE AND FORMS: LUKÁCS

It is not until his *Heidelberg Philosophy of Art* (1912–14) that Lukács attempts a more systematic exposition of his views on form.¹ The title of the collection of essays *Soul and Form* might prove misleading for anyone hoping to find definitive statements about form in this early book. *Soul and Form*, however, offers a good example of the variety of meanings attached to the concept of form in most of Lukács's early writings. Form is meant, first, in purely aesthetic terms as the form of the work of art (as, for example, in the dialogue on Sterne or in the essay on the

¹ The aesthetics of the young Lukács and his analysis of form have already attracted scholarly attention. Special mention should be made of G. Márkus, 'Lukács' "erste" Ästhetik: Zur Entwicklungsgeschichte der Philosophie des jungen Lukács', in *Die Seele und das Leben*, ed. A. Heller et al., Frankfurt am Main, 1977, pp. 192–240; W. Jung, *Wandlungen einer ästhetischen Theorie. Georg Lukács' Werke 1907–1923*, Cologne, 1981; E. Keller, *Der junge Lukács. Antibürger und wesentliches Leben. Literatur- und Kulturkritik 1902–1915*, Frankfurt am Main, 1984; N. Puhovski, 'Lukács in Heidelberg', in *Georg Lukács—ersehnte Totalität*, ed. G. Flego and W. Schmied-Kowarzik, Bochum, 1986, pp. 61–8; P. Bürger, 'Essayismus und Ironie beim frühen Lukács', *Prosa der Moderne*, Frankfurt am Main, 1988, pp. 412–21; U. Kruse-Fischer, *Verzehrte Romantik. Georg Lukács' Kunstphilosophie der essayistischen Periode (1908–1911)*, Stuttgart, 1991; E. Weisser, *Georg Lukács' Heidelberger Kunstphilosophie*, Bonn, 1992; C. Machado, 'Die Formen und das Leben', *Jahrbuch der internationalen Georg-Lukács-Gesellschaft*, 1996, ed. F. Benseler and W. Jung, Bern, 1997, pp. 51–77. My own analysis differs from these in its aims and structure and in the greater emphasis placed on Lukács's attempt to appropriate Hegel in the *Heidelberg Aesthetics*.

essay). Second, it is endowed with a metaphysical meaning: form as the expression of the highest unity between human beings and their destiny; form as the voice of fate (the essay on the essay; the essays on Rudolf Kassner and Paul Ernst). Close to this meaning is a third one which can be seen at work throughout the book: form, in a philosophy-of-life sense, emerges in the penetration of culture into life as a principle that shapes our life-experience but remains (sometimes tragically, so Lukács submits) subordinated to it (the Kierkegaard essay is perhaps the most remarkable example of this). This analysis of the various meanings of 'form' would be more accurate if we also recognize that the three meanings often merge into one another, and the semantic boundaries between them are extremely flexible and permeable.

The *Heidelberg Philosophy of Art* retains these three meanings but subjects them to a more systematic scrutiny.² The primary meaning ascribed to form is that of a 'means for the expression of experience' (*HPK*, 22). For Lukács, then, aesthetics ought to be the theory of the 'forms of communication of the reality of experiencing' (*Mitteilungsformen der Erlebniswirklichkeit*). Thus Lukács arrives at a distinction between 'forms of experiencing' and 'forms of the work [of art]' (*Erlebnisformen und Werkformen*). He further introduces the categories of 'creative' and 'receptive' behaviour (*Verhalten*), to which he takes a phenomenological approach free of any elements of social analysis.

The recipient, Lukács insists, plays a crucial role in the consciousness of the creator (*der Schaffende*) who always has to keep in mind the image of a preferred audience and to consider the most appropriate ways of targeting it. In the encounter between creator and recipient, Lukács concludes, it is the latter who enjoys real importance. It is logical then to assume that the relevance of form will be determined from the point of view of the recipient rather than that of the producer. The recipient, so Lukács tells us, yearns for 'the miracle' of artistic experience which occurs when the artistic form is no longer consciously perceptible. In order to 'forget' the artistic form the recipient has to be exposed to an artefact in which the forms of experience and the forms of the work of art have reached the point of full mutual adjustment. The harmony of the two produces the desired effect whereby the work of art replaces reality. Any particular attention to artistic form on the

² There are preparatory materials for the *Heidelberg Philosophy of Art* dating from 1910–11. The notebooks, which come from the magically inexhaustible Heidelberg suitcase, are soon to be published by the Lukács Archive in Budapest as *Die Heidelberger Hefte* (cf. C. Machado, 'Die Formen und das Leben', p. 64, n. 25).

part of the author is bound to destroy the magic effect of this substitution (HPK, 73). Artistic form, Lukács warns, should be visible only as the result of a deliberate analysis on the part of the recipient. Once again we are faced here with the early origins of Lukács's celebration of realism and his suspicious treatment of any special attention to form and formal innovation.

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

Lukács's recourse to the exceptional power of the genius furnishes serious evidence that his early philosophy of form remains very remote from the social and historical dimensions of art. His phenomenological approach brooks no attention to history, and when he tries to argue the case for a synthesis of historicity and timelessness (*Geschichtlichkeit und Zeitlosigkeit*) in the work of art, he seeks support in Schelling's notion of myth. Like myth, the work of art possesses an 'historical eternity'; it may have grown from history and be destined to wane, but it is nevertheless 'thought of as abiding on the far side of the ordinary flow of time' (HPK, 208). Needless to say, what Lukács has in mind here is only the great work of art. Half a century after him Gadamer, drawing on Hegel in *Truth and Method*, will revive the same oxymoron (historical timelessness) to describe the *modus vivendi* of the classic. Form is the crucial element in this overcoming of time and social contingency. 'Every form', Lukács echoes his earlier essay on Paul Ernst from *Soul and Form*, 'is a theodicy'; it brings salvation 'by leading all things to the being which is fully consistent with their own idea' (HPK, 213).

The idea of form as theodicy can also be found a few years later in the *Heidelberg Aesthetics*, and this should suggest that despite the evolution

in his philosophical orientation from a blend of *Lebensphilosophie* and neo-Kantianism to neo-Kantianism and Hegelianism, Lukács did not abandon his belief in the absoluteness of form. Desperately defending the autonomy of the aesthetic positing (*Setzung*), he insists that art can purify the experience of life of all accidental elements. In art, our experience of the world attains its true sense by freeing itself from the twofold attachment to the object and, more importantly but less likely, to the experiencing self (*HA*, 56–7). In a statement that documents the tension between the Hegelian postulate of the unity of content and form and the neo-Kantian prejudice that only form can upgrade content to essentiality, Lukács claims that through its inseparability from content, and through the elevation of content to pure validity (*Geltung*), aesthetic form removes the distance between value and the materialization of value (*Wertrealisation*), which obtains in all other spheres of validity (*Geltungssphären*) (*HA*, 60; 76).

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

In addition to this place in the *Heidelberg Aesthetics*, Lukács also attempts to change the perspective from which form is discussed in his 1910 article 'On the Theory of Literary History'. Written under the strong, if eclectic, influences of Simmel, Bergson, and Dilthey (whom Lukács criticizes rather inconsistently), this remains one of the most important texts in Lukács's early intellectual career. Here Lukács is willing to regard form as 'the true social [element] in literature'.³ At the same time, however, he insists that form, being an aesthetic category, is neither historical, nor sociological, but timeless (31). In addition, Lukács introduces the notion of the extraordinary work of art (cognate with his contemplation of the genius in the *Heidelberg Philosophy of Art*), from which he derives 'pure and great form' as that which 'dissociates

³ G. Lukács, 'Zur Theorie der Literaturgeschichte', *Text + Kritik*, 1973, No. 39/40, p. 29. Further page references are given in brackets in the main body of the text.

from all communities, and becomes [...] timeless, ahistorical and asocial' (45). These hesitations in the understanding of form recur in a letter to Paul Ernst of 1912, where Lukács seemingly tries to redress the balance in favour of history: 'Regardless of how general and unclear our formulation of the concept of form may be, history cannot be excluded from it.' But while prudently accepting this conclusion, Lukács reacts to its inevitability in a revealingly negative way. Abrogating the spirit of modernity, he equates the acceptance of history in form with 'giving up the idea of meaning or of Eternal Form', an act he ascribes to the 'stupid Modernists' (*SC*, 195–6).

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

FORMS AND BOUNDARIES: BAKHTIN

Aesthetic form did not begin to occupy a central position in Bakhtin's philosophy of art until he started work on his undated 'Author and Hero'.⁴ Like Lukács, the early Bakhtin takes a phenomenological approach to art. It is remarkable that in their attempts to formulate a coherent aesthetics of form both Lukács and Bakhtin put the powers of the author to the test. In Lukács's writings, the counterpart of the

⁴ The question of the precise dating of 'Author and Hero' and *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* remains open. N. Nikolaev locates them somewhere between Summer 1922 and Spring 1924 (N. Nikolaev, 'Izdanie nasledija M. M. Bakhtina kak filologicheskaja problema', *DKH*, 1998, No. 3, p. 120). In support of this dating he claims a close textological connection between AH and PCMF, which was allegedly completed in 1924 (see N. Nikolaev's notes to Bakhtin's lectures of 1924–1925, in *M. M. Bakhtin kak filosof*, ed. L. A. Gogotishvili and P. S. Gurevich, Moscow, 1992, pp. 247–8, n. 6). B. Poole, on the other hand, suggests 1926 as the year in which the texts of both *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* and 'Author and Hero' were still being revised by Bakhtin (B. Poole, 'Bakhtin's Phenomenology of Discourse', unpublished paper at the Eighth International Conference on Mikhail Bakhtin, Calgary, 1997, p. 2). The problem is aggravated by the impossibility to date PCMF with absolute precision as the two preserved typescripts seem to contain only internal clues in support of the year 1924; the first to question the received dating of this text was L. Matejka, who suggested that, more likely than not, PCMF assumed its final form later (cf. L. Matejka, 'Deconstructing Bakhtin', in *Fiction Updated*, ed. C. Mihailescu and W. Harnarneh, Toronto, 1996, p. 257).

author is, as we have seen, the recipient, whose presence in the consciousness of the author is declared more significant than that of the creator in the consciousness of the recipient. Indeed, Lukács needs to refer to the exceptionality of the genius to restore confidence in the power of the author. In Bakhtin, whose statements about the role of the recipient remain more oblique and far less systematic throughout his career,⁵ the author is correlated principally with the hero. This viewpoint is comparable with Lukács's interest in the subject-object relation, which, as Lukács claims, obtains only in art (*HA*, 92–5).

Bakhtin's 'Author and Hero', as we have shown in the previous chapter, presents the Simmelian contradiction of life and form with rare lucidity. Bakhtin's criticism of 'expressive aesthetics' arrives at an unmistakably Simmelian conclusion: 'From within itself, life cannot give birth to an aesthetically valid form without going beyond its own bounds, without, in other words, ceasing to be what it is in itself' (*AH*, 69).⁶ Form is, then, a transcendence of life which involves the activity of an agent placed as if outside of life. In 'Author and Hero' and in 'The Problem of Content, Material, and Form', as well as in Lukács's essays, it is the author who is endowed with this unique position: '*The creating author is a constitutive aspect of artistic form*' (PCMF).⁷ We may even say that the very concept of author can thrive only as long as life and form remain split and opposed to one another. As soon as they are thought to be in harmony, the necessity for form to be generated by an external agent disappears.

Keeping this in mind, we can now better understand why Bakhtin insists that culture, and in particular aesthetic culture, always implies a boundary and why the cultural act always takes place at a borderline. Form, being that which life is incapable of producing itself without altering its own identity, is the boundary separating life and (aesthetic) culture. In a sentence evoking in a recognizable way Simmel's sociology of space and boundary, Bakhtin concludes: '*Form is a boundary* that

⁵ On Bakhtin's work in the light of reader-response criticism see D. Shepherd, 'Bakhtin and the Reader', in *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, ed. K. Hirschkop and D. Shepherd, Manchester, 1989, pp. 91–108.

⁶ On other aspects of Simmel's impact on Bakhtin's understanding of form see N. Bonetskaia, 'Estetika M. Bakhtina kak logika formy', in *Bakhtinologia*, ed. K. Isupov, St Petersburg, 1995, pp. 51–60. Bonetskaia's article, for all its flaws, some of which we will point to later, remains the most serious study of the category of form in Bakhtin's works.

⁷ 'Avtor-tvoret's—konstitutivnyi moment khudozhestvennoi formy' (M. Bakhtin, *Raboty 1920-kh godov*, Kiev, 1994, p. 306; this sentence, whose importance Bakhtin has signalled by italicizing it, is omitted in the standard English translation).

has been given an aesthetic treatment' (AH, 90*).⁸ The hero, too, being a metaphor for the richness of life, has to be approached from outside. His boundaries are vulnerably exposed to the aesthetic activity of the author: 'We open the boundaries when we "identify" ourselves with the hero and experience his life from within; and we close them again when we consummate him aesthetically from without' (AH, 91). Bakhtin's reference to the 'feminine' passivity of being (AH, 125; 136), while highly problematic for its patriarchal genderedness (the roots of which lie in the long tradition of Russian theological discourse), does nevertheless successfully make the point that the only active principle in art is that of form. Form, as can be read in numerous places in 'Author and Hero' and at the end of 'The Problem of Content, Material, and Form', should descend as a gift upon the represented content of life (PCMF, 315). The semantic field of heartfelt giving, of caressing rediscovery, loving bestowing of shape, and a tender appropriation of the hero's otherness by the author reactivates the deep ethical layer in Bakhtin's aesthetics. No one should undertake an evaluation or a depiction of the other (the hero) from outside, without first anchoring himself in the unique point of his own non-alibi in being. The daring act of shaping the hero is possible only after providing a moral guarantee that this act is based on commitment and on the valour of taking up one's insecure and unrepeatable position in the openness of being. Aesthetic activity is a supreme manifestation of this courage. It rests on the outsideness of the author in respect to any of the heroes to be depicted, and this means that it is predicated on the responsibility of occupying and holding onto a position that is no one else's. The work of art is the aesthetic counterpart of the deed (*Tat*), which is never subsumable under the general principles of formal

⁸ The Russian text reads: '*Forma est' granitsa, obrabotannaia esteticheski*' (M. Bakhtin, *Raboty 1920-kh godov*, p. 160). Liapunov's translation, '*Form is a boundary* that has been wrought aesthetically', is very good indeed, but owing to the ambiguity of 'wrought' it stresses too much an element of evaluation, which, I feel, is only latent in Bakhtin's text. 'Wrought' could imply that form is materialized only in those works of art in which it is foregrounded and which display skilfulness and craftsmanship; while this assumption is not entirely at variance with Bakhtin's canonical view of art, it does not do justice to Bakhtin's use of the far more neutral '*obrabotannaia*' and to the particular context of this use, in which there is no mention at all of talent, skills, or degrees of craftsmanship. But we should not forget that form is after all only a specific type of boundary. Bakhtin's idea is that the existence of form as a boundary is inherent in the human interaction with the world, but is brought to the surface and made visible only in the meeting between life and art, i. e. after receiving an 'aesthetic treatment'. On this interpretation, art does not generate the boundary; it only expresses it. This understanding of form is strongly reminiscent of Simmel's statement: 'a boundary is not a spatial fact; it is a sociological fact that has been given a spatial expression'.

ethics.⁹ Bakhtin himself refers to aesthetic activity as 'an actually performed act or deed, both from within its product and from the standpoint of the author as answerable participant' (*TPA*, 54). In this respect, Bakhtin's and Lukács's early discourses share the same inseparability of aesthetic and ethical concerns. For both, form is saturated with ethical overtones and yet remains on the far side of life, more an outer boundary than an inalienable essence of it, a 'gift' from outside (Bakhtin's 'Author and Hero') or a 'supreme judge' from above (Lukács's essay 'Metaphysik der Tragödie: Paul Ernst').

Having said this, one still needs to concede that 'The Problem of Content, Material, and Form', for all its similarities with 'Author and Hero', introduces a sharp dualism (of a neo-Kantian and phenomenological brand) into Bakhtin's ideas about form, which cannot be found in the more integrated and ethical approach to form in 'Author and Hero'.¹⁰ This dualism is predicated on a differentiation between aesthetic activity as such and the work of art. The essence of aesthetic activity is contemplation 'directed toward a work' (PCMF, 267). The work of art, then, is only an external materialization of the intentionality of aesthetic contemplation. Process and result are thus divorced from one another, and the work of art is implicitly inferior to the activity which generates it. The division is reinforced by the use of two different terms ('architectonics' and 'composition'), of which the first denotes the structure of the content of aesthetic activity *per se*, whereas the second serves to address the structure of the work of art as the actualization of aesthetic activity (PCMF, 267). Hence Bakhtin's discontent with 'material aesthetics':

There is in the works of material aesthetics an inescapable and constant confusion of architectonic and compositional forms, so that the former are never clarified in principle or defined with precision, and are undervalued.

(PCMF, 268*)¹¹

⁹ Stressing the singularity of the deed, H. Cohen, one of Kagan's (and through Kagan also Bakhtin's) main teachers in philosophy, regarded it as the principal problem of ethics (see H. Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, Berlin, 1904, p. 68). The interpenetration of the aesthetic and the ethical can often be seen in Cohen's work.

¹⁰ Commentators on Bakhtin's early works, fascinated as most of them are with Bakhtin's 'architectonics of responsibility', remain untroubled by this dualism. As a rule, they fail to discriminate between the ethical meaning of 'architectonics' in 'Author and Hero' and the neutrally phenomenological meaning of the term in 'The Problem of Content, Material, and Form'. Bonetskaia's article (cf. n. 6 to this chapter) furnishes one of the many confirmations.

¹¹ The English translation weakens and unduly qualifies Bakhtin's criticism by adding a non-existing 'thus' before the last word of the sentence; cf. also pp. 270–1 where Bakhtin

The outcome of this division is surprising for those wont to see in Bakhtin the great theoretician of genre and the novel. Genre is reduced to an external compositional form (PCMF, 269). Unlike architectonic forms, which are 'forms of the inner and bodily value of aesthetic man', compositional forms have an 'implemental' character and are 'subject to a purely technical evaluation: to what extent have they adequately fulfilled their architectonic task?' (PCMF, 270). Drama, for example, is a compositional form, while the forms of aesthetic consummation are the tragic and comic (PCMF, 269). The novel does not enjoy a higher status either:

The *novel* is a purely compositional form of the organization of verbal masses; through it, the architectonic form of the artistic consummation of a historical or social event is realized. It is a variety of the form of epic consummation.

(PCMF, 269)

We can observe in this passage a dramatic devaluation of genre, and, consequently, a refusal to draw a clear line of demarcation between the novel and the epic.¹² Like Lukács, who in his *Theory of the Novel* considers the novel a generically distinct but weak link in the great chain of the epic tradition, Bakhtin seeks to accommodate the novelistic within the epic. Following his dismissal of genre as a secondary compositional form, he goes even further than Lukács in this direction by demonstrating a complete lack of interest in the generic *specifica* of the novel.¹³

Thus the analysis of Lukács's and Bakhtin's early writings leads us to recognize two grave problems inherent in their treatment of form. Since they both (Lukács more resolutely than Bakhtin) adhere to the postulate of the autonomy of art, the discourses on form and life fail to reach a point of real synthesis. Life remains a passive field for the application of form. Granted the status of an external agent, form is the principle which elevates life to its authenticity and depth. The discourses on life and form meet only on the ground of ethics which castigates the tendency of Russian Formalism to 'dissolve architectonic forms' into compositional ones.

¹² The same phenomenon can be observed in 'Author and Hero', where the novel is just an example of the epic: 'In the epic, this degree of visual actualization is higher: the description of the hero's exterior in the novel, for example, must necessarily be recreated visually, even if the image [...] will be visually subjective with different readers' (AH, 95*). The English translation unfortunately translates the Russian 'V epose' with 'In narrative literature'.

¹³ This attitude will resurface in Bakhtin's essay on the *Bildungsroman*, to which we will return in Chapter 8.

proves, however, insufficient for their thorough and organic interpenetration. The close treatment of form as a principle distinct from and higher than life is beset with a deep dualism, which impedes the study of literature in the unity of its social and artistic dimensions, and reduces the variety of historically conditioned literary forms to the subservient function of materializing eternal architectonic categories. Confined to the perspective of general aesthetics, Lukács's and Bakhtin's understanding of form remains—despite all attempts, especially by Lukács, to overcome the limitations of this approach—impervious to the historical dynamics of art.

It is only when Lukács and Bakhtin turn to genre that the margin between the social and the artistic, between form and life gradually starts to fade. Following their attempts in the field of the philosophy of art, the commitment to a genre-focused criticism is the hallmark of their subsequent careers.

GENRE

Having discussed the concepts of culture and form, we now turn to the category of genre which is central to both Lukács's and Bakhtin's theoretical enterprise and to the argument of this book. Over the last two decades the category of genre has seen a rapid decline into disrepute, mainly because of the essentialist connection it promotes between artistic form and worldviews.¹ In the earlier stages of twentieth-century critical discourse, however, and especially in the late 1910s to 1930s, genre enjoyed a good reputation as a tool of literary and cultural history, and as a means of conceptualizing the variety of literary forms. The numerous histories of particular genres in German *Geistesgeschichte* as well as the writings of the Russian Formalists furnish ample evidence of this. With Lukács and Bakhtin, genre receives the added function of opening up the discourse on literature towards the social aspects of form in the broader context of culture. But as we have seen in the two previous chapters, their drive towards historicism was constantly held in check by immanentist ideas about the timeless nature of form. The category of genre, then, bears the birth-marks of the discourse on form. In both Lukács's and Bakhtin's writings historicism and essentialism remain closely interwoven as an articulation of the only possible way of theorizing literature from the perspective of modernity: as a time-conditioned phenomenon which nevertheless proves to be representative of the pure, autonomous, and intransient essence of art.

DRAMA, EPIC, NOVEL: FROM THE PREHISTORY OF LUKÁCS'S
AND BAKHTIN'S DISCOURSE ON GENRE

The history of Lukács's and Bakhtin's ideas about genre begins earlier than their well-known *Theory of the Novel* and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*. These two books and the works which follow them cannot be grasped in depth without tracing their roots in the earlier writings.

¹ One of the most powerful critiques of the essentialist understanding of genre has come from J. Derrida's 'The Law of Genre', *Glyph*, 1980, Vol. 7, pp. 176-232.

By the time Lukács attempted a systematic analysis of form from the perspective of philosophy of art, he had already been actively engaged in genre criticism. An early testimony to this commitment can be found in his 1911 *History of the Development of Modern Drama* (an important part of which Bakhtin must have known, as I have written in the introduction, through his friend Lev Pumpianskii). We can thus see that Lukács's eagerness to explore the metaphysics of form in *Soul and Form* overlaps in time with an interest in a specific genre and its sociology.

Lukács places at the core of his study the belief that form is a social phenomenon. Remarkably, he uses the very same words that we have already encountered in his article on the theory of literary history: 'The really social [element] in literature is form' (*EG*, 10). In the drama book, however, this statement is not attenuated or diluted through qualification, nor is it overturned by later arguments. Admittedly, the book rests largely on *Zeitgeist* grounds: 'between particular epochs', Lukács asserts, 'the separating differences are deeper than those between individuals of the same epoch' (*EG*, 10). This approach, however, does not cancel Lukács's sociological orientation. Good evidence for the compromise between the two paradigms, with the eventual preponderance of the sociological, can be seen in Lukács's grasp of drama as a genre which can 'express the struggles arising out of metaphysical reasons only in sociological form' (*EG*, 25).

More concretely, genre in Lukács's sociological scheme is predicated on the effect of economic and cultural conditions and mediated by a worldview based on them: at any one time in history, only particular worldviews are possible, which, in turn, enable particular literary genres (*EG*, 12–13). This scheme, as we will shortly demonstrate, remains unaltered in Lukács's Marxist genre theory.

Lukács's book is an investigation into the destiny of drama in modernity. Even in this early study, his sociology bears the imprint of an elitist criticism of modernity. With the rise of mass society, the significance of drama increases, for the masses can 'think only in images'. Drama is thus compared by Lukács to religion; both act upon large segments of the public not through any intellectual content, but by mobilizing emotion and will (*EG*, 18). This rather primitive view is refined by reference to the natural predilection of drama for symbolism. The symbol, Lukács suggests, is a unique means of conveying even the most abstract ideas. Owing to its use of symbols, drama, although it brings to expression 'more primitive and less refined and

complex feelings than the other genres is nevertheless the most abstract and the closest to philosophy of them all' (*EG*, 33).

It is very important to appreciate Lukács's decision to ground the history of modern drama in the larger context of a comparison with other genres. This strategy is even more significant when set against the background of Lukács's obdurate reduction of the inner variety of drama to the genre of tragedy. In a sentence reminiscent of his attempts in *Soul and Form* to establish tragedy as the only dramatic form with a metaphysical depth of its own, Lukács writes in the drama book: 'Drama reaches its peak always in tragedy; a perfect drama can only be tragedy' (*EG*, 25).

The scope of comparison within which drama is analysed is not very wide, but the main choice of foil is quite significant. Lukács contrasts drama to epic in order to claim that drama 'can express the totality and richness of life only in a purely formal way' (*EG*, 29). He goes on in tones which anticipate his later *Theory of the Novel*: '[T]herefore, the totality of content has to be replaced with a totality of form, extensive totality with an intensive one. . .' (*EG*, 30). Compare this judgement of drama to the following passage from *Theory of the Novel*: 'The novel is the epic of an age in which the extensive totality of life is no longer directly given, in which the immanence of meaning in life has become a problem, yet which still thinks in terms of totality' (*TN*, 56). As is evident from this statement, it is precisely from the correlation between epic and drama that the central juxtaposition of epic and novel is born in Lukács's theory.² The fact that the novel takes the place of drama in the later version of this opposition may be explained by the novel's ability to depict the becoming of man, which drama—as Lukács himself points out (*EG*, 41)—usually cannot do. The complex interplay between man and things, the efforts to escape the power of things in a world of consciousness, all suggest that life itself 'has become more novelistic (*romanhaft*) than ever' (*EG*, 100). As a response to modernity, the novel proves to be problematic for Lukács when the depiction of totality is at stake, but much more successful when a dynamic representation of change and development is demanded. That drama and novel are differently positioned in the social landscape of modernity is

² A mirror image of the juxtaposition of epic and drama, the contrast between epic and novel occupies most stages of Lukács's subsequent career. Characteristically, when in 1934–5 he failed to produce a broader framework for the analysis of the novel, he was reminded by other participants in the discussion that the novel should be compared with drama (see Chapter 6). In the articles on the historical novel two years later he took this remark into account.

suggested by the dissimilar conditions for their success. Drama is associated by Lukács with the decline of a (ruling) class, the moment when its worldview no longer goes unquestioned, and tragic defeat is near. The novel, in contrast, is the form of expression of the ascendant bourgeoisie, which has no doubts about the rightness of its ideas and about the significance of its projects (*EG*, 48–9). Lukács's example (in 1906–8) is eighteenth-century England, and it will be repeated and endorsed, with variations, fifty years later in Ian Watt's classic *The Rise of the Novel* (1957).

Bakhtin's theory of genre also moved within this tripartite framework, with the addition of episodic interest in the lyric in his early work. This common ground suggests more than a mere accident. In fact, it refers to shared intellectual roots. While the interest in the novel clearly stems from Lukács's and Bakhtin's acquaintance with the German Romantics and Hegel,³ the relevance of epic and its relationship to drama leads back to Goethe, an affiliation which Bakhtin readily admits (*EN*, 13). The text in question is 'Über epische und dramatische Dichtung', co-signed by Goethe and Schiller, but perhaps written solely by the former in 1797. It defines the epic as the genre which articulates action as *vollkommen vergangen* ('absolutely past'), while in drama action is *vollkommen gegenwärtig* ('completely present'). We may say, then, that the opposition between epic and novel is the result of both Lukács's and Bakhtin's substitution of the novel for drama in the original (Goethe's) opposition between epic and drama.

With Bakhtin, this substitution is implied at a very early stage in his intellectual career in 'Author and Hero'. As we saw in the last chapter, this text does not draw a distinction between epic and novel in poetological terms: the novel is vaguely subsumed (in a Lukácsian fashion)⁴ in the great epic tradition. But in terms of broader attitudes and outlooks, I am inclined to think that the roots of the novel's adaptability to a world in becoming, a non-finalized world as opposed to the epic stability of the past, can be found in 'Author and Hero'. A case in point is Bakhtin's association between past, memory, and value which will later underwrite his judgement of the epic:

³ I have discussed Lukács's and Bakhtin's debt to German Romanticism in greater detail in 'Bakhtin, Lukács and German Romanticism: The Case of Epic and Irony', in *Face to Face: Bakhtin in Russia and in the West*, ed. C. Adiam et al., Sheffield, 1997, pp. 273–98.

⁴ I use 'Lukácsian', for we cannot be sure whether this was the direct result of Bakhtin reading at that point *The Theory of the Novel*. If Brian Poole's dating of 'Author and Hero' (1926) proves irrefutable, it will be possible to speculate with more certainty that this was indeed the case.

Memory is an approach from the standpoint of axiological consummatedness. In a certain sense, memory is hopeless; but on the other hand, only memory knows how to value—independently of purpose and meaning—an already finished life, a life that is totally present-to-hand.

(AH, 107*)⁵

The hypothesis of an intimate connection between 'Author and Hero' and Bakhtin's later genre theory finds further corroboration in Bakhtin's differentiation between purview (*krugozor*) and environment (AH, 98). It is precisely the world as drawn in our purview as a task for the future—and not as mere surroundings—that constitutes the ground for a narrative which will later be identified as the novel:

The centre of gravity in this world is located in the future,⁶ in what is desired, in what ought to be, and *not* in the self-sufficient givenness of an object, in its being-on-hand, *not* in its present (*v ego nastoiashchem*), its wholeness, its being-already realised.

(AH, 98)

This neo-Kantian dualism of givenness and positedness, on which the ethical open-endedness of being rests, is the distant origin of Bakhtin's discourse on the novel. We may argue that in the 1930s his theory of the novel does no more than transcend this dualism in the Hegelian concept of becoming, of which the novel is declared to be the supreme and most authentic embodiment. But the passage quoted above helps us to understand one more important moment in the formation of Bakhtin's genre theory. We can see why he substitutes the novel for drama and thus transforms Goethe's initial pairing. Drama, we should remember, exemplifies the absolute present: the hero is there in his/her complete nakedness, at the point where, as Lukács complains, no further development is possible. Although he opposes the absolute past represented by the epic, Bakhtin is not inclined to replace it with an equally absolute and static present. The novel, which is said never to rest in an absolute present and consummatedness, asserts itself as the only alternative. The spirit of becoming gains the upper hand not only over the aloof epic past but also over the absolute present of drama.

⁵ Cf. a passage from 'Epic and Novel': 'In ancient literature it is memory, and not knowledge, that serves as the source and power for the creative impulse. That is how it was, it is impossible to change it: the tradition of the past is sacred' (EN, 15), and another sentence from 'Author and Hero': '[T]he past of the Classical hero is the *eternal* past of man' (AH, 177). Compare also the significance ascribed to kin-relationship (AH, 178–9) with the role of 'fathers' in the epic (EN, 15).

⁶ Cf. Bakhtin's later statements: 'The novel, by contrast, is determined by experience, knowledge and practice (the future)' (EN, 15); '[In the novel] That centre of activity that ponders and justifies the past is transferred to the future' (EN, 31).

After the early writings, Bakhtin's elaboration of a theory of the novel proceeds through his interest in Dostoevsky's novels (the 1929 book on Dostoevsky is indeed the first serious point of Bakhtin's turn to the novel as genre⁷), his acquaintance with and critique of various trends in Russian literary and cultural theory of the 1920s and 1930s, his reading of Lukács, and, in the 1930s, of Georg Misch's history of autobiography. Alongside the Russian tradition (which I analyse in Chapter 6) and Lukács, Misch is an important source for understanding Bakhtin's replacement of drama by the novel in Goethe's scheme. Bakhtin's unhappiness with drama lies not only in its predilection for that which is already finalized in its presence or in drama's alleged monologism (for which Bakhtin never really managed to furnish sufficient proof⁸). His objections are focused perhaps even more acutely on the relative generic stability of drama, which does not meet Bakhtin's requirements of Protean versatility. Turning away from drama towards the novel allowed Bakhtin to find a more adequate way of doing justice to the volatile social and artistic experience of modernity. Misch's credit is to have made Bakhtin alert to the generic freedom of prose and to the fact that neither epic nor drama enjoy this freedom:

Autobiography is not a genre like all others. Its boundaries are more fluid and cannot be fixed from outside or defined according to the form as is the case with epic and drama . . . [Autobiography] is an expression of life which is not fastened onto any definite form. . . . And almost no form is alien to it.⁹

Misch's list of the forms which autobiography can assume is very long indeed, and it includes the lyric, the novel, and even epic and drama considered not in their own terms but rather as pliable forms serving to express the fluidity of autobiography. Reading Misch, Bakhtin must have been fascinated with the dual status of autobiography. It is a literary genre and at the same time it is not, for it can identify with all

⁷ Bonetskaia's article 'Estetika M. Bakhtina kak logika formy' (see Chapter 2, n. 6) is flawed precisely because it does not take into account that Bakhtin's analytical perspective changes at the juncture from 'Author and Hero' and 'The Problem of Content, Material, and Form' to *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*: from a discourse on form as a problem of aesthetics to a discourse on literary genre in a more concrete social and historical sense. Bakhtin's understanding of form does not 'advance' in the Dostoevsky book; it is simply suppressed in favour of a study centred on genre.

⁸ On Bakhtin and drama see J. Wise, 'Marginalising Drama: Bakhtin's Theory of Genre', *Essays in Theatre*, 1989, No. 1, pp. 15–22; I. Joki, *Mamet, Bakhtin, and the Dramatic: The Demotic as a Variable of Addressivity*, Abo, 1993 (Chapter 3); see also Robert Cunliffe's excellent review of Joki's book in *Le Bulletin Bakhtine / The Bakhtin Newsletter*, 1996, No. 5, pp. 237–52.

⁹ Georg Misch, *Geschichte der Autobiographie*, Vol. 1 [1907], Leipzig and Berlin, 1931, p. 3. In the Bakhtin archive, there are excerpts based on this edition of the book.

possible genres. Bakhtin's notion of the novel preserves this ambiguity by assuming that the novel can be the source of a 'colonizing' process in which all genres are novelized. However, Bakhtin does not go as far as Misch: he preserves the immediate opposition between the novel and the epic. Having provided the principle of fluidity and suppleness, autobiography is then abandoned as a model, for it is too fluid (even by Bakhtin's standards) to serve as the core of a theory of genre, and because of its undesirable overtones of monologism.

Thus we can cautiously reassemble the puzzle of the rise of Bakhtin's theory of the novel: from his early writings and his immersion in the powerful tradition of Russian discourse on genre from Veselovskii to Grifitsov, via Goethe, the Romantics, Lukács, and Misch to a theory of his own, which is unthinkable outside these fields of thought and yet irreducible to them. Lukács, too, as we have seen, had sown the seeds of his theory of genre long before he wrote *The Theory of the Novel*. After a period of intense interest in aesthetics (and form), during which ideas of genre were discussed mainly in an oblique fashion, Lukács and Bakhtin remained aware of and concerned with the problem of genre throughout their mature lives. In the next section I examine some of their more important ideas about genre with particular reference to the novel and to the opportunities and limits their discourses were setting to an analysis of culture and society in an historical perspective.

LUKÁCS, BAKHTIN, AND GENRE: A COMPARATIVE VIEW

The ways in which Bakhtin and Lukács think about literary genre in their writings devoted specifically to this subject reveal an unmistakable proximity on one major point: literary genre does not change quickly nor easily because it serves to express ideas about the world which themselves only change slowly. Literary genre, for both Bakhtin and Lukács, is a concept one needs in order to approach the work of art as the expression of a particular outlook. Genre models the content of this outlook and selects those elements which can be translated into the language of the work of art. Crucial transformations within genres can occur only when and if people's basic outlooks are transformed. Both Bakhtin and Lukács draw on an Aristotelian-Hegelian approach to describe the development of genres. For Bakhtin, the novel has its pre-history during which its features gradually mature. One of Bakhtin's

principal texts, 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse', is quite explicit about the different phases a genre must go through. The whole pre-Renaissance period is considered by Bakhtin to be merely a stage in the preparation for the emergence of novelistic discourse. Genre, consequently, has its own internal entelechy which governs its development. As we shall see in Chapter 7, Lukács is less concerned than Bakhtin to establish an unbroken line in the evolution of the novel, but he, too, identifies the stages of its birth in bourgeois modernity and its gradual dissolution in the socialist epic.

Since Bakhtin and Lukács begin with the notion that literary genres convey certain outlooks, they both remain split between an historicist and an essentialist-mentalistic view of genre. This contradiction takes on different manifestations. With Bakhtin, we can observe a classic attempt to ascribe to the otherwise historically conceived genre of the novel a permanent and ahistorical meaning:¹⁰ the novel embodies the dialogical aspects of human thought and existence which are rooted in the essence of the human being; different historical periods act only to impede or stimulate their representation. With Lukács, on the other hand, the genre of the novel is deemed to be part of a grand narrative relating the story of the world from the standpoint of a particular philosophy of history. The novel appears as a late-comer in this history and must soon disappear, to be replaced once again by the epic.¹¹ This law of repetition in history, masked as progress by the formula 'negation of the negation', on loan from Hegel, underlies Lukács' idea that literary genre, be it the epic or the novel, stands for human outlooks representative not so much of different historical periods or even stages but rather of different types of civilization and social organization which can recur in mankind's history in an allegedly perfected form. In their different ways Bakhtin and Lukács are each torn between identical temptations: to remain faithful to the spirit of remorseless historicism,

¹⁰ A similar point had already been made by Tz. Todorov in his *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, trans. Wlad Godzich, Manchester, 1984, pp. 88-9, and, after him, by Evelyn Cobley in her 'Mikhail Bakhtin's Place in Genre Theory', *Genre*, 1988, Vol. 21, pp. 321-37, esp. p. 326. On Bakhtin and genre see also C. Thomson, 'Bakhtin's "theory" of genre', *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature*, 1984, No. 1, pp. 29-40, and R. Shlaifer, 'Obobshchaiushchaia poetika zhanra: Bakhtin, Jakobson, Ben'iamin', *Voprosy literatury*, 1997, No. 2, pp. 76-100.

¹¹ This idea is sustained unambiguously not only in *The Theory of the Novel* but also in *The Historical Novel*, this time dressed in poetological terms: 'deep-going changes will have to take place in a formal-artistic respect as well, in the novel in general, and thus, in the historical novel, too. Very generally this tendency may be described as a *tendency towards epic*' (HN, 420).

on the one hand, and on the other, to transcend it in order to promote hypotheses about human civilization and nature in general.

For Lukács, literary genre is directly open to the outlooks it has to organize and channel. This process does not entail any mediation. Genre exists only so long as it can guarantee the *reflection* of a specific content. Each genre should be assigned the role of reflector of certain unique moments of reality. Genuine literature perceives and grasps these moments with the ease of a mirror, for it has at its disposal the guiding light of a system of true views or, sometimes, the unfailing instincts of the writer, suggesting to him which would be the adequate depiction of life. I shall not address the difficulties for Lukács's own aesthetics, ensuing from the equalizing of the conscious and the instinctive behaviour of the writer (the earlier roots of which we have seen in the previous chapter).¹² For my present purposes, what matters is his firm belief that under certain conditions each genre inevitably reflects the specific aspects of life assigned to it.

To be sure, Lukács's approach to literary genre is anything but thematic. By specific aspects of life and specific content, he does not mean simply specific topics, but rather specific attitudes to the world. His book *The Historical Novel*, written in Moscow during the winter of 1936–7 (published in 1937–8 as a series of articles in *LK*, and only later, in 1955, as a book, first in German), is a perfect illustration of this view. In his analysis of the historical novel, Lukács persistently refuses to recognize it as a separate genre, for it is not the compass of facts depicted that determines a given genre. 'A specific form, a genre', Lukács states, 'must be based upon a specific truth of life' (*HN*, 289). For Lukács, the decisive criterion for a group of texts to be singled out as a genre on its own is epistemological: not simply different content and different form but, in the first place, a different vantage point and, therefore, different knowledge of the world. This logic of discrimination is carried out throughout Lukács's book, in which the second chapter (a comparison between novel and drama) offers the most original and persuasive arguments on the subject. It ruthlessly rejects any approach to literary genre based only on thematic features and exposes traditional generic distinctions as primitive and barren:

The genre theory of later bourgeois aesthetics which splits up the novel into various 'sub-genres'—adventure novel, detective novel, psychological novel,

¹² For a recent criticism of this contradiction see Stuart Sim's book *Georg Lukács*, New York and London, 1994, p. 56.

peasant novel, historical novel etc., and which vulgar sociology has taken over as an 'achievement'—has nothing to offer scientifically.

(*HN*, 287–8)

One might be tempted to interpret Bakhtin's 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel' (1937–8) as an indirect involvement with Lukács's text, all the more so since we possess evidence that Bakhtin knew Lukács's articles on the historical novel. At first sight, according to Bakhtin, the realm of the novel seems to abound in sub-genres, among which the adventure novel, also mentioned by Lukács, is accorded an important place. However, for Bakhtin, no less than for Lukács, the various forms of the novel nevertheless remain bound to a single overarching genre. Within the novel he prefers to distinguish not different sub-genres, but different types based on different *chronotopes* instead: 'As early as antiquity, three essential types of novelistic unity were established, and with them, three corresponding methods for the artistic appropriation of time and space in the novel—in short, three novelistic chronotopes' (FTCN, 86*). The chronotope, itself a notion of recognizably Kantian origin,¹³ serves here as a core of 'novelistic unity' (*romannogo edinstva*) which can be achieved in different ways and cast in different forms without ever ceasing to be *novelistic* by its nature.

Thus Bakhtin and Lukács, unexpected as this might be, agree that it is difficult to divide the novel into different subgroups. The main reason for this is that they both share a view of genre as possessing an essence that permeates all members of the group. Each member can realize this essence to a different extent, but what it realizes will ultimately be the same unalterable and indivisible essence underlying the unity of the genre. On the other hand, it becomes evident that both Lukács's and, to an even greater extent, Bakhtin's generic discourses experience a deep crisis of denomination. It is very difficult to discriminate between and attach an unambiguous meaning to the several similar notions they use (type, class, group, sub-genre), and this difficulty reflects the contradictory nature of their theoretical project: to remain faithful to the internal historical morphology of the novel without abandoning the essentialist idea of its timeless unity as a genre. This predicament of genre theory in modernity can be found brilliantly formulated, on a meta-theoretical level, in Friedrich Schlegel's much

¹³ On Bakhtin's use of Kant in the theory of the chronotope, see, above all, B. Scholz, 'Bakhtin's Concept of "Chronotope": The Kantian Connection', in *The Contexts of Bakhtin*, ed. D. Shepherd, Amsterdam, 1998, pp. 141–72.

earlier *Athenäum*-Fragment No. 116, which claims that it is equally legitimate to contend that there are infinitely many literary genres and that there is only one.

Aside from these substantial similarities, no attentive reader could overlook one substantial difference. For Lukács, as we have argued, literary genres are entities which reflect the world, each of them from a unique point of view, in an unmediated fashion. They can impart reliable knowledge accessible from this single vantage point. Bakhtin's account of the way genre conveys specific knowledge about the world is far less straightforward. In the Bakhtin Circle, the notion of genre, too, involves epistemological dispositions toward reality. In a passage apparently very close to Lukács's contention that literary genres should express 'specific truths' about the world, we find the following conclusion:

Each genre is only able to control certain definite aspects of reality. Each genre possesses definite principles of selection, definite forms for seeing and conceptualising reality, and a definite scope and depth of penetration.

(*FM*, 131)¹⁴

This contention presupposes a much more active function for genre. The attempt to break through the constraints of the classical Marxist doctrine of art, which assigns to literature and literary genres the passivity of a superstructural element, is implied in the function of *control* that genres are able to exercise over certain aspects of reality. Genres no longer *reflect* the world, rather, they *represent* and model it. This idea of the active nature of literary genre is based on a new understanding of language. For Lukács, language is completely neutral to the process of reflection; it does not influence the latter, for language is no more than a pliable instrument in the hands of the writer. For Bakhtin, on the other hand, language is inseparable from the very idea of human existence: we only come to know the world by articulating it, and the words we use to do so are not entirely ours; they have already been in someone else's mouth, thus prone to behave in an unruly fashion.

This vital shift of attention to language has its roots, beyond any doubt, in the lessons of the Russian Formalists. By concentrating on language and even seeking to identify a unique inherently *literary*

¹⁴ This statement is further corroborated by a succinct generalization, preceding a distinction between anecdote and novel and strongly resembling Lukács's conclusion on differentiating between drama and novel: 'every genre has its methods and means of seeing and conceptualising reality, which are accessible to it alone' (*FM*, 133).

language, the Formalists significantly changed the climate of literary theory in the 1920s and 1930s. *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* and Bakhtin's writings of the 1930s constitute an attempt not so much to dismiss but rather to re-evaluate and re-accentuate the importance of language by supplementing the Formalists' discoveries with, and interpreting them from, the point of view of Hegelian-Marxist social analysis. Indeed, genre becomes so important to Medvedev and Bakhtin precisely because it is in a position to mediate between language and social reality. The dissatisfaction with Formalism stems not from the fact that it assigned such great value and importance to language, but from the fact that it seemed not to have allotted the same attention to genre: 'The last problem the formalists encountered was that of genre. This problem was inevitably last because their first problem was poetic language' (*FM*, 129). Without averting their eyes from language, Bakhtin and his anti-formalist fellows deemed it necessary to focus their attention on genre because they saw in it the essential mechanism which activates language and renders it far more concrete and socially oriented. Genre is thought of as the vehicle which transforms language into *utterance*. Literary genres, being specific and, in this sense only, also concrete knowledge about the world, and utterances, being concretizations of language, prove to be inherently connected and dependent on each other: 'For genre is the typical form of the whole work, the whole utterance' (*FM*, 129). It is this linguistic strain in Bakhtin's understanding of genre that largely accounts for his unprecedented and original approach to the novel.¹⁵

A brief summation seems to be in place at this point. As we have seen, both Bakhtin and Lukács in their views on literary genre were simultaneously receptive to, and vacillating between, historicism and essentialism. Genre was to them a vehicle of access to specific knowledge about reality, more readily (and automatically) open, according to Lukács, and needing the co-operation and 'licence' of language, according to Bakhtin. In considering the genre of the novel both Bakhtin and Lukács were seeking to go further. In their discussion of the novel, they were registering and responding to the challenges of modern cultural developments. Lukács was tempted to theorize genre (and the novel) from the point of view of philosophy of history, whereas

¹⁵ The reader should not be misled into thinking that Bakhtin had held this view all along. 'Author and Hero' still tends to consider language a neutral instrument of cognition: 'Language *per se* is axiologically indifferent: it is always a servant, it is never a goal; it *serves* cognition, art, practical communication, etc.' (*AH*, 193).

Bakhtin approached it as a philosophical anthropologist and, only because of this, as a philosopher of language.

The scope of Lukács's and Bakhtin's genre theory and their shared belief that genres convey worldviews shaped as the result of cultural and social processes would seem to justify our proposal to interpret their theorization of the novel as a form of social and cultural philosophy. In the next three chapters I will demonstrate how Lukács's and Bakhtin's discourses of culture, form, and genre shaped various facets of their understanding of the novel and will trace the process of transfiguration of these three categories in the 1920s and 1930s, in which they were brought to bear on socially relevant issues.

II TRANSFIGURATIONS

After examining the formation of the concepts of culture, form, and genre in Lukács's and Bakhtin's early writings, in this part of the book I turn to the way in which these concepts function to address vital social problems in their work of the 1920s and 1930s. The three concepts—culture, form, and genre—operate in close connection with one another in a discourse that attends to the key problems of reification, ideology, and language, thus subjecting the analysis of culture to the necessity of confronting and responding to social phenomena specific to modernity.

REIFICATION AND DIALOGUE

I start by analysing reification and dialogue, two notions that gradually became central to Lukács's and Bakhtin's views of literature and culture. Formulated at about the same time in the 1920s, they were never abandoned, but only modified to meet the changing demands of their theoretical agendas.

Here I confine myself to a comparative reading of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923) and a selection of Bakhtin's writings from the late 1920s to the mid-1930s. Earlier and later texts will also be drawn upon to interpret variations in Bakhtin's and Lukács's ideas of reification and dialogue. I first try to argue that Lukács's and Bakhtin's texts, deemed to be so remote from each other, nevertheless rest on common premises and reveal a shared nature. Then, to support the comparison, I examine the way, in which Bakhtin's and Lukács's discourses are structured, and show that they are predicated on the categories of genre and class which function in a comparable fashion. In the last part I comment on Bakhtin's views on dialogue in its relation to reification. My comments are concerned to reveal the complex transfigurations of the category of genre in relation to class as well as the potential social significance of the novelistic.

EMANCIPATORY DISCOURSES

Both Lukács's and Bakhtin's writings are exemplary texts of modernity in so far as they can be defined as emancipatory discourses. They envisage history as a process, from which the proletariat, in Lukács's case, and the novel, in Bakhtin's, emerge as victors. The two enjoy a twofold, contradictory status, being split between a tangible historical presence, confined in time and hence in import, and the perennialism of an ahistorical existence. This is not to say that the proletariat and the novel have always been there. They *are* historical products, but Lukács and Bakhtin see their historical being, their birth from the spirit of the past, as a preliminary stage to be followed by a permanent condition of perfection. History is assumed to stop after the arrival and—what is more

important—the victory of the proletariat and the novel. Lukács, in a truly Marxist fashion, conceives of history as the battle-field of the oppressed. There have always been classes dominated by others and therefore dissatisfied with their lot. But it is only the proletariat, emerging from the reforms of capitalist modernity, that is capable of piercing the veil of illusions and reaching the truth about its own and the whole of mankind's existence and liberation. The novel, too, has its roots in a rich tradition of fictional discourse dating from antiquity. However, all these forms, thoroughly studied by Bakhtin in 'Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse' and 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', are considered only tentative and immature and so are labelled, as we saw in the last chapter, 'preparation' to the genuine novel, whose embodiment Bakhtin, again, tends to seek in the modern bourgeois world. Rabelais is for him a case in point in so far as he is the incarnator of the novelistic at the decisive point of transition from the Middle Ages to modernity.

The ascent of the proletariat in history, no less than the arrival of the novel in literature, should serve to bring to fruition the best and most sacred aspects of human nature. Before this happens, however, there are hurdles to be overcome. Emancipatory discourses are premised on the image of a glorious and yet thorny road to victory, along which enemies have to be confronted. The foe of the proletariat is not to be identified with the immediate activities of the bourgeoisie alone. It goes beyond them and makes itself felt in the ubiquitous spirit of reification. With Lukács the notion of reification emerges in a broad context of received ideas undermining confidence in the power of intellect and scientific knowledge.¹ The immediate sources of Lukács's considerations are to be sought in the German tradition of post-Romantic and neo-Kantian thought, reshaped by *Lebensphilosophie*, but also in Hegel and Max Weber. The strongest impetus came from Georg Simmel, whom Lukács knew personally and whose lectures he attended in Berlin in 1909–10. As early as 1908, while writing his *The History of Development of Modern Drama*, Lukács referred to Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* and he still regarded this as Simmel's greatest work when he wrote *History and Class Consciousness* in the late 1910s and the early 1920s. By that time Lukács was already aware of Simmel's ideas of the tragic contradictions of modern culture, which Simmel set forth

¹ For a masterly study of this context see Lucio Colletti's 'From Bergson to Lukács' in his *Marxism and Hegel*, London, 1979, pp. 157–98.

in his later writings.² Lukács inherits from Simmel the problematic of alienation and the sharpened sensitivity for cultural changes issuing in what Simmel is keen to term the 'tragedy of culture'. For Simmel, this is a permanently reproducible condition based on the 'tragic necessity' for cultural forms to be strengthened by way of objectification (*Vergegenständlichung*) and, eventually, rigid solidification. Simmel works within the framework of the Hegelian identification of alienation and objectification: any objectification is at the same time the manifestation of alienation. In Hegel, however, this tension is only apparent, for alienation itself is only a stage in the self-development of Spirit. For Simmel, who tends to rewrite Hegel's concepts in the neo-Kantian direction of collision between culture and civilization, alienation is already an evil because it impinges on the realm of culture to extend the conquests of civilization. He terms this state of affairs 'tragedy', for culture itself produces this misfortune. Human beings, as a result of having constantly to objectify their thoughts and creative impulses, are increasingly immersed in a space of autonomous objects and phenomena, which cease to belong to subjective culture, i.e. to the aspects of life anchored in free personal development, and come to reinforce civilization, the world of things which are no longer means for one's inward independence and growth but rather ends in themselves. The reader of *History and Class Consciousness* cannot fail to identify the proximity of Simmel's and Lukács's views, especially the identification of objectification and alienation.³ On the other hand, Lukács distances himself from Simmel in that he is less inclined to ontologize the processes of alienation and reification by granting them the status of an atemporal 'tragedy of culture'.⁴ He seeks instead to historicize them

² In the Winter term of 1909–10, Simmel held lectures and seminars on 'problems of modern culture' (see K. Gassen, 'Georg—Simmel—Bibliographic', in *Buch des Dankes an Georg Simmel*, ed. K. Gassen and M. Landmann, Berlin, 1958, p. 348); his 'Der Begriff und die Tragödie der Kultur' was first made available in a book edition in 1911 as part of his *Philosophische Kultur* (Leipzig, 1911).

³ Lukács himself was aware of the Hegelian provenance of this identification and rejected it in the 1967 preface to the new edition of his book (*HCC*, xxiii–xxiv). He readily acknowledged and critically assessed his debt to Hegel's ideas of a self-propelled consciousness which is the principal and indeed the one hero of history. Further traces of Hegel's impact on the concept of reification can be detected in a passage from *The Phenomenology of Mind*, where Hegel speaks of the master/slave couple as an illustration of different forms of self-consciousness. In this relationship the slave becomes a mere thing and he is accorded by Hegel 'consciousness in the shape of thing-hood' (*PhM*, 234–5); on Hegel's presence in Lukács's book see also Andrew Arato, 'Lukács's Theory of Reification', *Telos*, 1972, No. 11, pp. 25–66.

⁴ That at the same time an opposite trend towards the ontologization of reification is at work in Lukács is evident in his interpretation of Marx's views of commodity and

and to stress that they are the exemplary corollary of capitalist modernity. Hence his complex relationship to Simmel's work which he calls 'perceptive [. . .] in matters of detail' but still charges with using a 'timeless model of human relations in general' (*HCC*, 95).

The other principal impulse for the formulation of the concept of reification came from Max Weber whom, again, Lukács knew personally and to whose private circle he belonged during his Heidelberg years. Max Weber's notion of 'formal rationality' is largely responsible for Lukács's understanding of reification as an all-embracing process predicated on mechanization and supremacy of the 'disenchanted' contents of the world.⁵

It is already evident that Lukács's notion of reification is organically embedded in several diverse traditions of thought. Nevertheless, the most crucial in his case is the Marxist colouration of the concept. In *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* and also in *Capital* Marx analyses reification as exemplified in the phenomenon of commodity fetishism. Lukács, following Marx, points out that reification takes place any time 'a relation between people takes on the character of a thing and thus acquires a "phantom objectivity", an autonomy that seems so strictly rational and all-embracing as to conceal every trace of its fundamental nature: the relation between people' (*HCC*, 83). At the same time Lukács also seems to diverge from Marx's line of reasoning. To Marx, reification is a particular and especially revealing case of alienation affecting the way people think of the world under capitalism.⁶ Marx first uncovers and considers the reality of alienation in his

commodity production in the spirit of Simmel. For a discussion of these aspects of Lukács's indebtedness to Simmel's texts see R. Dannemann, *Das Prinzip Verdinglichung. Studie zur Philosophie Georg Lukács*, Frankfurt am Main, 1987, pp. 61–82. Like Simmel, Lukács is less interested in distinguishing between the simple exchange of commodities and the circulation of capital (as Marx does, seeing a source of reification only in the latter), but prefers rather to collapse the differences between these two processes and to assume that any exchange creates the sufficient prerequisite for reification.

⁵ On Lukács and Weber see, among others, K. Maretsky, 'Industrialisierung und Kapitalismus—Probleme der Marxrezeption in Georg Lukács' "Geschichte und Klassenbewußtsein"', *Das Argument*, 1971, Vol. 65, pp. 289–312; R. Dannemann, *Das Prinzip Verdinglichung*, pp. 83–96; Z. Tar and J. Marcus, 'The Weber-Lukács Encounter', in *Max Weber's Political Sociology*, ed. R. Glassman and V. Murvar, Westport, Conn. and London, 1984, pp. 109–35; K. Beirsdörfer, *Max Weber und Georg Lukács. Über die Beziehung von Verstehender Soziologie und Westlichem Marxismus*, Frankfurt am Main and New York, 1985; A. Kadarkay, 'The Demonic Self: Max Weber and Georg Lukács', *Hungarian Studies*, 1994, No. 1–2, pp. 77–102; J. McCormick, 'Transcending Weber's Categories of Modernity? The Early Lukács and Schmitt on the Rationalization Thesis', *New German Critique*, 1998, No. 75, pp. 133–77.

⁶ 'Particular' might be taken to mean even 'partial' on an interpretation construing Marx's writings as split between an early phase predominantly oriented towards problems of

Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts, and only afterwards formulates the concept of commodity fetishism and reification. In Lukács, who did not know the *Manuscripts* at the time he wrote the essays to be included in *History and Class Consciousness*, the order is reversed: he posits reification and fetishism as immediate realities and deduces from these alienation in labour and human relations.⁷ For Lukács, it is reification that is the all-encompassing phenomenon: it seizes both the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, but only the latter realizes the danger stemming from it and the necessity of surmounting it.

Lukács considers reification to be the historically generated incapacity of consciousness to see the *totality* of social life. Instead, the mind gets lost in the realm of the concrete, the particular, the reified. The world does not present itself as a whole to this damaged consciousness, nor as the product of human activities. It reveals itself only in the form of isolated items, i.e. in the form of things which stand out against the individual. With Bakhtin, the place of reification is taken by monologism, which prevents literature from doing justice to the multiplicity of human experience and to otherness. Monologism, according to Bakhtin, also works, albeit more subtly, toward diminishing the integrity of the knowledge we have about the world: by letting one voice prevail, it silences other points of view and in this way sacrifices the multifacetedness of truth. Moreover, both reification and monologism seem to depend on the imposition of views maintained by different types of authoritarian force. In the monological regime, the author

philosophy and anthropology and a later phase concentrated on political economy. Thus J. Israel describes reification as a 'partial process in the general process of alienation' (J. Israel, *Alienation from Marx to Modern Sociology*, Hassocks, 1979, p. 61; see also p. 269 for a similar contention). On this account, within the opposition philosophical/scientific, reification represents the scientifically (sociologically) approachable aspects of alienation. Such a distinction might be said to be the result of an Althusserian re-reading of Marx, were it not for a very early testimony to the practice of dividing Marx's writings. As early as the 1920s, I. Rubin wrote: 'In order to transform the theory of "alienation" of human relations into a theory of "reification" of social relations (i.e. into the theory of commodity fetishism), Marx had to create a path from utopian to scientific socialism, from negating reality in the name of an ideal to seeking within reality itself the forces for further development and motion' (I. Rubin, *Očerki po teorii sostoimosti Marksa*, Moscow, 3rd edn., 1928, p. 69). On the other hand, those who tend to see Marx's thought as an organic whole dissolve the difference between alienation and reification. This results in an even more distinct insistence on alienation being the only pervasive reality for Marx. The best examples of this tradition of interpretation are Bertell Ollman's *Alienation. Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*, Cambridge, 1976, esp. pp. 193 ff., and István Mészáros's *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, London, 1975, esp. pp. 217–32.

⁷ For further discussion of Lukács's distinction between 'reification' and 'alienation' see A. Arato and P. Breines, *The Young Lukács and the Origins of Western Marxism*, New York, 1979, pp. 115–16.

creates his heroes without ever abandoning his sanctified position as the single knower of truth who is always capable of determining limits to the hero's independence. In a comparable way, Lukács sees in the bourgeoisie a political and economic power which—according to the logic of the capitalist mode of production—has given birth to the proletariat, but tries at the same time to set limits to its freedom. Reification and, in Bakhtin's case, monologism, as the 1929 Dostoevsky book implies, can both be shared indiscriminately by all members of society who, being exposed to them, suffer the same unavoidably negative effect in equal measure.

Given the Hegelian background to the notion of reification, however, it is not surprising that for Lukács the struggle between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, magnified to epic dimensions, permeates the domain of consciousness and is, above all, a struggle of the proletariat with itself, with the imposed norms of the reified consciousness, 'against the devastating and degrading effects of the capitalist system upon its class consciousness'. The proletariat, Lukács believes, 'will only have won the real victory when it has overcome these effects within itself' (*HCC*, 80).⁸

Bakhtin's enemy of the genuine novel, too, lies in monologism as a specific way in which human consciousness approaches the world and other consciousnesses. For Bakhtin, the battle between the novel and other genres cannot be won unless the novel imposes dialogue and heteroglossia as principles of our imagining of the world. A significant feature of both Lukács's and Bakhtin's emancipatory discourses, then, is the centrality and primacy of the inward, ethical liberation of their 'heroes', which needs to occur before these heroes' strategic goals can be achieved: the enslaved have first to combat the illusions and fears which are within them, in much the same way as the novel needs to work against the danger of relapsing into authoritarian monological discourse. The early Bakhtin's idea that the liberation from the

⁸ Lukács's hope that the proletariat can free its consciousness from the devastating effects of reification has elicited two different responses in subsequent philosophical debates. Lukács's close acquaintance Karl Mannheim in an indirect polemic in *Ideology and Utopia* (1929) assumed that Lukács wanted to privilege the proletariat as the sole bearer of 'true consciousness' and promoted instead the view that the two opposing classes are each committed to different types of illusions: ideology in the case of bourgeoisie and utopia in the case of proletariat. Unlike him, Merleau-Ponty claimed that 'Lukács rehabilitated consciousness beyond ideologies, but at the same time refused it an *a priori* possession of the totality', which was thought of as impossible under capitalism (M. Merleau-Ponty, 'Western Marxism', *Telos*, 1970, No. 6, pp. 140–61, p. 150). Merleau-Ponty seems to have a better sense of Lukács's Hegelian confidence in the potential power of consciousness to perfect itself progressively.

monological ought to be left entirely to the self-consciousness (or even conscience) of the author and can take place only at his discretion is paralleled by Lukács's belief in the proletariat's capacity to carry out its own deliverance simply by living up to the ethical imperatives of the revolutionary project. This aspect of Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* has often been charged by orthodox Marxism with overrating the role of the subjective factor and reducing the revolutionary process to the premises of a self-centred proletarian consciousness: 'the fate of the revolution (and with it the fate of mankind) will depend on the ideological maturity of the proletariat, i.e. on its class consciousness' (HCC, 70). Lukács's stance can be described as an overconfidence in the proletariat's power to author its own liberation regardless of objective historical conditions.⁹ Undoubtedly, the idea of liberation as a process of self-begetting and self-authoring is strongly influenced by Kantian and neo-Kantian moral thought, in which the autonomy of the individual moral act is an essential aspect of being human and a proven way of endowing the person, in one move, with dignity and elevated moral duty alike. The autonomous nature of this liberating process is somewhat overshadowed by the active interference of the Party regarded as an indispensable leader and, compromisingly, as a natural expression (*Ausdruck*) of the class ('The Moral Vocation of The Communist Party', 1920). Lukács's views on this point reflect his mediating position between two contesting ideas of the destiny of the proletariat: the one stressing its spontaneous maturation for the struggles to come (R. Luxemburg), the other accentuating the crucial role of the communist party as an external body needed to instil proper class consciousness (Lenin).¹⁰

The contradictions we have outlined so far entail the recognition of the fact that Lukács's and Bakhtin's emancipatory discourses tend to view the nature of the liberating process as deeply ambivalent. The proletariat and the novelist are meant to be its authors and yet, at the same time, they are expected to act as instruments of a necessity of some higher (historical, moral or very often both) order. Once the process is accomplished, they tend to withdraw off-stage (in Lukács

⁹ The accusations against this voluntaristic trend in Lukács's thought hinge on the impossibility of separating consciousness from the labour which creates it. Given the alienated nature of labour, consciousness cannot be any different (see P. Piccone, 'Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* half a century later', *Telos*, 1969, No. 4, p. 108).

¹⁰ On the history of these two major doctrines see A. Przeworski, 'Proletariat into a Class: The Process of Class Formation from Karl Kautsky's *The Class Struggle* to Recent Controversies', *Politics and Society*, 1977, No. 4, pp. 342-401.

even more dramatically than in Bakhtin) and willingly give up their exclusive power and status. The romantic idea of a revolution carried out by the proletariat not only against the bourgeoisie but also against the proletariat itself is faithfully sustained in Lukács: the proletariat follows the path leading logically to a liberation of the whole of mankind and eternal class peace by means of abolishing all classes, i.e. by its self-destruction as an historical subject. This sublime myth of heroic self-destruction is echoed in Bakhtin's idea of the ideal novel: the novelist (his principal example in 1929 is Dostoevsky) is expected to choose to restrict his power voluntarily and, without resigning it fully, to share it with the characters.

CLASS AND GENRE

Beyond their shared nature as emancipatory discourses, Lukács's and Bakhtin's narratives display further proximity, which is underpinned by deeper structural similarities. Both Bakhtin and Lukács envisage the heroes of their discourses not as solitary entities but rather as necessarily collective sets of participants. Lukács's liberating discourse hinges on the notion of *class* whereas Bakhtin's is propelled by the concept of *genre*. The isomorphism of these categories is not immediately obvious. To start with, they both enable the modification of the features of individual members and posit new collective sets which cannot be reduced to the sum of their elements. At several points in *History and Class Consciousness* Lukács allots priority to class and class consciousness over the individual and makes a strong case for the incommensurably greater potential of the former for understanding the totality of social life (*HCC*, 28; 53; 193).¹¹ Only a few years later, in 1927, Voloshinov, in one of the early works to come out of Bakhtin's circle, expresses resolute commitment to similar ideas: '*Only as a part of a social whole, only in and through a social class, does the human person become historically real and*

¹¹ In the idea of the class's domination over the individual, Lukács follows Marx closely: 'the class [...] achieves an independent existence over against the individuals, so that the latter find their conditions of existence predestined, and hence have their position in life and their personal development assigned to them by their class, become subsumed under it' (Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, quoted after K. Marx, *Pre-capitalist Economic Formations*, ed. E. J. Hobsbawm, trans. J. Cohen, London, 1964, p. 132). The origins of the Marxist idea of the beneficial role of class for the life of the individual are Hegelian. Hegel requires that all individuals be considered as belonging to a particular estate (*Stand*): 'A human being with no estate is merely a private person and does not possess actual universality' (G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. A. Wood, trans. H. Nisbet, Cambridge, 1991, p. 239).

culturally productive' (F, 15).¹² These lines are the corrected version of an earlier passage from Voloshinov's article 'Beyond the Social' published in 1925: 'The isolated person [. . .] cannot partake of history at all. Only as a part of a social whole, in and through a class does he become historically real and productive.'¹³ As it is easy to observe, the only—and yet sufficiently important—difference is the accent on cultural productivity in the later version. This interest in the social mechanisms which enable the actualization of the creative potential of the individual is the mediating link between Lukács's theory of class and Bakhtin's understanding of genre. Bakhtin was preoccupied throughout his life with the relationship between the single work/utterance and the relevant literary/speech genre. No work conceived on its own, and no particular utterance, can convey its complex messages without the mediation of genre. By insisting that 'we speak only in definite speech genres' (SG, 78), Bakhtin rules out all other ways for the materialization of human discourse. What is really significant is that genre is not considered an individual achievement, but an element of social reality. Genres exist only as long as they can serve the social groups to which writers inevitably belong (and not the particular writer on his/her own). In this sense, genre is 'the aggregate of the means of *collective* orientation in reality' (FM, 134). That is why writing literature, being a social act, becomes inseparable from learning 'to see reality with the eyes of the genre' (FM, 134). It is hardly by chance that both Voloshinov and Medvedev make use of the same metaphor: the eyes of genre and the eyes of class are equally indispensable, because they provide (in)sight which the individual person needs in order to enter the realm of history and art as an active participant. Individuals and particular utterances, by becoming part of the larger unity of class or genre, inevitably change their identity and their orientation toward the world. For Bakhtin, genre can function as a repository of ideas and world views: 'Genres (of literature and speech) throughout the centuries of their life accumulate forms of seeing and interpreting particular aspects of the world' (SG, 5). The utterance communicates its own semantic charge by drawing on this wide range of meanings previously

¹² Further on in the book Voloshinov makes an even stronger case for the role class has to play in the life of the individual. It is only through the 'eyes of the class' that a particular person can acquire self-consciousness: 'In becoming aware of myself, I attempt to look at myself, as it were, through the eyes of another person, another representative of my social group, my class. Thus, *self-consciousness*, in the final analysis, always leads us to *class consciousness*, the reflection and specification of which it is in all its fundamental and essential respects' (F, 87).

¹³ V. Voloshinov, 'Po tu storonu sotsial'nogo', *Zvezda*, 1925, No. 3, p. 187 (my translation).

stored in the same type of utterances (genres); similarly, in Lukács, the worker profits from belonging to his class, in that he enjoys the privilege of a structurally different vantage point and historical experience, which facilitate the process of exchanging old illusions for new, otherwise inaccessible knowledge. Thus both the worker and the literary text acquire their strength and identity through their participation in a class or a genre.

The structural equivalence of the concepts of class and genre as used by Lukács and Bakhtin can be identified on yet another, less immediate but no less significant level. The ontological mode of the sets posited by the notions of class and genre is essentially relational. Neither class nor genre can be constituted without a frame of reference describing them as opposed to other groupings. Without theorizing the notion of class itself, Lukács shares the established Marxist tradition of viewing classes as possible only because of the distinct place each of them takes on in the system of production. In analysing class and the division of labour Marx stipulates that 'we may designate the separation of social production into its main divisions of *genera*—viz., agriculture, industries, etc., as division of labour in general.'¹⁴ The etymological proximity of *genus* and *genre* suggests more than a tenuous connection by association, for the notion of genre, too, relies on the idea of division of labour within literary production and human discourse.¹⁵ As we saw in the previous chapter, the notion of genre exists as an embodiment of the idea that different aspects of reality can be approached and expressed only from differently positioned points of view informing different outlooks. The category of genre, consequently, rests on the assumption of mutual exclusiveness: what a given genre can do, no other genre can do in the same way and with the same effect. In relation to speech genres this idea is clearly promoted in Voloshinov's *Marxism and Philosophy of Language*: 'Each set of cognate forms, i.e. each life speech genre, has its own corresponding set of themes' (*MPL*, 20*).¹⁶ In art, too, 'a particular aspect of reality can only be understood in connection with the particular means of representing

¹⁴ K. Marx, *Capital*, Moscow, 1961, Vol. 1, p. 351.

¹⁵ Bakhtin unreservedly sees speech genres as having their origins precisely in the differentiated spheres of social labour and communication: 'A particular function (scientific, technical, commentarial, business, everyday) and the particular conditions of speech communication specific for each sphere give rise to particular genres' (*SG*, 64).

¹⁶ The rendition of 'zhiznennyi rechevoi zhanr', i.e. a genre originating in and sharing the changes of life, in the published English translation as 'behavioural speech genre' unfortunately obscures Voloshinov's debt to *Lebensphilosophie* (on this see more in the next chapter).

it' because 'each genre is only able to control certain definite aspects of reality. Each genre possesses definite principles of selection, definite forms for seeing and conceptualizing reality, and a definite scope and depth of penetration' (*FM*, 134; 131). In addition, literary genres 'offer different possibilities for expressing [. . .] various aspects of individuality' (*SG*, 63). Thus the field of 'competence' of each particular genre is delineated only in relation to and in competition with other genres. The novel, Bakhtin contends, 'gets on poorly with other genres' (*EN*, 5). Its life is the life of an unceasing participation in the 'historical struggle of genres', in which it has an increasingly significant role to play.

The notion of class depends on the same premises: 'The separate individuals form a class only in so far as they have to carry on a common battle against another class; otherwise they are on hostile terms with each other as competitors.'¹⁷ One should note that in both Lukács and Bakhtin the relational picture of classes and genres tends to rest on irreconcilable conflicts between two major participants. Lukács works with Marx's inherited belief that 'bourgeoisie and proletariat are the only pure classes in bourgeois society' (*HCC*, 59), whereas Bakhtin's vision of literary history is primarily concentrated on the struggle of the novel (prose) against poetry. (And he regarded the epic precisely as an example of poetic monologism.) We know the outcome of this rivalry: in 'The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art', a piece significantly shaped by his polemic with the Formalists, Bakhtin still contends that '[l]anguage reveals all of its possibilities only in poetry' (*PCMF*, 294). Subsequently, however, he assigned priority to prose. This obvious binomial reductionism could not be explained away by simple recourse to the residual effect of the positivistic methodology that still prevailed at the time. The rigidity of the confrontational model we encounter in both Lukács and Bakhtin bears witness to the extraordinary emphasis they put on the antagonistic mechanisms constituting and propelling class and genre. They interpreted antagonism as the logical and legitimate intensification of the principle of relationality, as the only pure manifestation of its essence.

So far we have managed to establish two vital similarities in the way the concepts of genre and class are *constructed* in Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* and in Bakhtin's essays of the mid-1930s. The analysis would be marred by a serious omission if we failed to demonstrate that these two categories display a crucial equivalence also as regards

¹⁷ K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology*, quoted after K. Marx, *Pre-capitalist Economic Formations*, ed. E. J. Hobsbawm, trans. J. Cohen, London, 1964, p. 132.

the way they *function*. As we have seen, it is not the particular proletarian nor the particular novel, but only the class of the proletariat and the genre of the novel that are the heroes of Lukács's and Bakhtin's narratives. They are the only entities capable of contemplating their past and present, and it is to them that Lukács and Bakhtin ascribe the power of reasoning. In Bakhtin's essays of the 1930s one can observe a dramatic shift from a discourse centred around the role of the author towards a discourse predicated on the idea that literature, and especially the novel, develops according to an immanent logic, whose implementation does not require the active presence of the author. In Lukács's case, again, the individual person seems to be entirely absent from his account of the revolutionary process. All that matters is the capacity of genre and class to represent and realize an abstract power that is independent of the particular participants. This would not amount to much more than simply a predictable feature of any theoretical discourse working with concepts necessarily removed from the empirical, were it not for the rigorous defence Lukács and Bakhtin provide for the autonomy of consciousness. At a certain level in the history of mankind—Bakhtin argues—human consciousness reaches a new maturity, mastering the virtues of heteroglossia, dialogism, and the pluralism of world views. The germs of the novel, having been prepared long before, emerge in Renaissance culture to foster and give form to this historical process. The genre of the novel is thus conceived as having an instrumental nature: it appears to serve as the embodiment of an inevitable change, disconnected from and placed above individual action.

This disconnection means that the *modus operandi* of class and genre as categories puts them in danger of once again evoking the ghost of reification. We should, however, not be surprised that this is the case. For the very choice of constructing a liberating discourse bound to the concepts of genre and class already carries this risk within itself. Marx himself occasionally points to the notion of class being fraught with the implications of reified thinking. *The German Ideology* promotes the idea that 'the distinction between the personal and the class individual [. . .] appears only with the emergence of class, which itself is a product of the *bourgeoisie*'. Notably, class is thought of here not only as the result of capitalist relations of production but rather as the effect of a broader range of mental dispositions and attitudes characteristic of the bourgeoisie. 'Class' from Marx's praxological point of view is a reified concept, because it is the consequence of a positivistic

picture of the social world according to which society is divided in an atomistic way into groups of people whose inequality is deemed natural. Bertell Ollman, an astute commentator on Marx, has noticed that being the product of reified social relations and reified thinking, the concepts of 'class and commodity are brothers under the skin',¹⁸ and this comparison effectively denounces class as another potential fetish.

That the notions of class and genre have been riddled with contradictions may be inferred from the way they have been employed to denote divisions within society/literature. The difficulties with this taxonomic application run in two directions. First, from a sociological point of view, 'class' often lacked a clearly specified meaning and merged with notions such as 'group', 'layer', 'faction', 'stratum'. Such interchangeability is one of the characteristics of Marx's use of 'class',¹⁹ although he is in no way an exception in this respect. The fact that it is hard to attach an indisputable meaning to 'class' correlates with the crisis of taxonomy in genre theory. Already in the 1940s Emil Staiger in his *Grundbegriffe der Poetik* indicates the problem of one and the same text belonging to several literary genres simultaneously. Indeed, the most significant change in genre theory in this century has been the gradual abandoning of the taxonomic function of the concept of genre and its replacement, at best, by a pragmatically understood interpretative function. Staiger's still rather mild objections against the 'purity' of genre are later translated by Derrida into a radical scepticism culminating in the thesis that texts can never quite belong to, but rather only participate in, genre.²⁰

Thus the first shortcoming of taxonomy is its inefficiency when applied to the description of complex and multi-layered phenomena. The second major drawback of taxonomy as a reifying approach consists in the fact that classifications put the stress on the parts and not on the whole; they fail to recognize that the parts are in constant interaction. By implicitly emphasizing identity and synchrony over diachrony and development, taxonomy compromises the idea that classes/genres are committed to interaction at every moment of their existence. Thus,

¹⁸ B. Ollman, *Alienation. Marx's Conception of Man in Capitalist Society*, Cambridge, 1976, p. 205.

¹⁹ Ollman analyses Marx's texts thoroughly to find that 'for a variety of purposes, Marx divides society up in as many different ways, speaking of the parts in each case as "classes"' (B. Ollman, 'Marx's Use of "Classes"', *American Journal of Sociology*, March 1968, pp. 573-80, p. 576).

²⁰ See J. Derrida, 'The Law of Genre', *Glyph*, 1980, No. 7, p. 206.

the very notions of class and genre are not immune to the danger of re-inforcing reification.

THE BIRTH OF DIALOGUE FROM THE SPIRIT OF REIFICATION

Both Lukács and Bakhtin warn against lapses back into reified thinking. In Lukács the way out is sought, predictably enough, in the confidence that the actions of the proletariat will finally contribute to the emergence of a classless society. In the 1930s Lukács is increasingly optimistic that the utopian condition of a harmonious social totality could be first achieved in the works of art which combat the principles of reification. It is important to stress that art can be the source of a de-reified human condition even before society as a whole is liberated. Thus, Balzac's novels are viewed by Lukács as a perfect embodiment of the author's talent for depicting reality and social life in their totality, while other writers (Sergei Tretiakov, Upton Sinclair, Ernst Ottwalt) and genres (reportage and documentary literature) are chastized for reproducing capitalist reification in their works. Indicative of Lukács's critical strategy are his texts 'Willi Bredels Romane' (1931-2), 'Reportage oder Gestaltung?' (1932), and 'Erzählen oder beschreiben?' (1936). All three uncover elements of reified artistic approaches in the reportage novel and in the prose of Naturalism. It is curious to see how Lukács's energetic revolt against reification makes him see its shadow in manifestations that can be perceived as mutually exclusive. For Lukács, the lack of psychologism in the reportage novel is a clear sign of reification, for it symbolizes the death of the hero as a human person endowed with an inner life, and thereby implies an objectified world which has ceased to be the creation of real and autonomous people. By the same token, however, reification is also manifest in cases where there is too strong an accent on psychologism. Lukács is willing to concede that psychologism was a 'romantic opposition against the dehumanising workings of capitalism', but he repeatedly argues that this is an inadequate protest because psychologism itself is no more than a parallel of 'commodity fetishism, a "reification" of consciousness' (*W*: 4, 37). In the second of these essays there is a special section entitled 'Fetishism', which juxtaposes Ernst Ottwalt's novel *Denn sie wissen, was sie tun* with Tolstoy's *Resurrection*. If we leave aside the incommensurability of the two writers, we will be certainly in a position to appreciate Lukács's point: Tolstoy, unlike Ottwalt, represents the

mechanics of the legal system in a way which enables the recognition of the whole behind the details. Tolstoy, Lukács thinks, is instinctively closer to the Hegelian regime of *Aufheben*, which permits the grasping of each particular detail as just a part of the whole and of each seemingly static moment as a link in a chain of transformations (*W*: 4, 45).

If Tolstoy is a case of non-reified writing under capitalism, for Lukács there are also unfortunate examples of reified writing under the desired conditions of socialism. He addresses this lapse into reification in his 'Narrate or Describe?' where he complains that very often the characters of the new novels are deprived of profundity and concreteness, and appear instead as pure symbols of ideas. A case in point here is Gladkov's *Energiia*, whose heroes, like so many others in the novel of production, are 'attachments to things, a human component of a monumental still life' (*W*: 4, 240).

Where Lukács is prone to envisage a classless society which abolishes reification and to celebrate a totality without social divisions, Bakhtin, similarly, is eager to see the whole of literature perfected and ennobled by the novelistic. This would transcend distinctions within literature, for the whole of it will share the features of the novel. The novel, however, never ossifies into a static generic form, and for this reason does not impose its 'canon' on the other genres: they are expected to change along with changes in it (*EN*, 39). For this reason, it is not the *novel* as such but rather the *novelistic* which is the positive agent; it is the *spirit* of the novel and not its form that affects literature so benignly. The juxtaposition of the two and the rejection of the canonical nature of the novel needs to be comprehended in its immediate historical context as an instance of the neo-Kantian dualism of value and its concrete materialization and of the philosophy-of-life legacy in Bakhtin's thought: forms should not restrict the freedom of the spirit of culture.

From here the way towards dialogue seems clear. In Bakhtin's utopian narratives dialogue is designed to function as the ultimate emblem of a freely flowing and potentially inexhaustible human exchange. But things are not that straightforward, because, in its aesthetic dimension, as present in the work of art, dialogue in Bakhtin's writings establishes a complex relationship with reification: the former sublates the latter. 'Sublate' is used here as the standard translation of the German *aufheben* to denote the overlapping of inheriting, preserving, and negating the reified. Lukács insists that reification is evidence of an illness which can be cured only through revolution; for Bakhtin reification already bears within itself the symptoms of recovery.

Reification, Bakhtin believes, will be overwhelmed by its own offspring—heteroglossia—and the ensuing dialogue of worldviews.

The birth of dialogue from the spirit of reification has a revealing history in Bakhtin's work. The main premise for the emergence of dialogue is the destruction of the primacy, monopoly and self-assertiveness of the author's discourse. The author must loosen his control over the whole, and the characters and their speech have to slip away from his surveillance. In other words, the work of art must appear as if alienated to its progenitor, reified. It is only after this that dialogue can possibly supervene. In the book on Dostoevsky, which immediately precedes the essays of the 1930s, Bakhtin remains split between an extolling and a bemoaning attitude to this prospect. He ardently admires the multi-voicedness of Dostoevsky's discourse, but is uncertain as to how to interpret it. The view that this dramatic artistic change is due to the extreme personal talent of Dostoevsky or to his moral benevolence rivals the concern that it is the upshot of unavoidable social shifts. 'The direct authorial discourse is at present undergoing a crisis, which is socially conditioned' states Bakhtin in the first edition of the Dostoevsky book (*PDA*, 85), and this implies that the erosion of authorial discourse could be equally regarded as undesirable and contingent on certain social occurrences that work against the will of the author. As we shall see in Chapter 7, Bakhtin even suggests that the direct discourse of the author is not possible in all epochs, and this is obviously one more indication that he is forced to regard the changing ratio of authorial and non-authorial discourse not as absolutely dependent on personal artistic or moral merits, but rather as linked to specific objective historical configurations. Moreover, Bakhtin seems to stipulate that it is the direct author's discourse which is the normal condition of art, from which certain epochs are unfortunately dislodged: 'Where there is no adequate form to express the author's intentions in an immediate way, one has to resort to their refraction in someone else's discourse' (*PDA*, 84).

In the essays of the 1930s we no longer encounter these hesitations. In 'Discourse in the Novel' the reified word, the result of the inevitable and salutary contact with alien discourses, is unambiguously posited as a precondition for dialogue. The merit of the reified word consists in its capacity to defy subjection to the purposes of the author's intentions. Bakhtin celebrates 'those words that are completely denied any authorial intentions: the author does not express *himself* in them [. . .]—rather, he *exhibits* them as a unique speech-thing, they function for him as something completely reified' (*DN*, 299). In his earlier discussion

with the Formalists in the *Formal Method*, Medvedev had attached a negative meaning to the verbs 'exhibit' (*pokazat'*) and 'reify' (*oveshchestvliat'*; *ob"ektivirovat'*). The reification of the word (*oveshchestvlenie slova*) was unacceptable to Medvedev because it was said to strip the word of its social contexts and to diminish, in Voloshinov's words, its thematic value.²¹ In the 1930s essays one can already witness a neutral, if not positive, attitude to this process in so far as the reified word challenges the omnipotence of authorial discourse from within.

The shift from the 1929 Dostoevsky book to the 1930s is significant in yet another aspect. Dialogue in the Dostoevsky book is an ontological category: being, Bakhtin contends, entails dialogue of man with himself and with others. (That the latter of these two dimensions of dialogue remains a utopian claim in the 1929 Dostoevsky book will be shown in Chapter 7.) This ontological aspect of dialogue moves into the background in the 1930s, and dialogue gradually turns into an exchange of outlooks (an element already present in the Dostoevsky book) which are, however, no longer necessarily attached to particular persons/heroes. The true site of this exchange is the novel. By incorporating some of the fruits of reification, the novel is thought to succeed in making a virtue of necessity and, finally, to oppose reification and contribute to the formation of a more perfect consciousness. Such a vision indulges in the illusion that there can be a bridge that spans the gap between social reality and the work of art and transfers the values of the former to the latter:

all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making them each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualising the world in words, specific world views, each characterised by its own objects, meanings and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to

²¹ There are two passages in *FM* which bear witness to a close intersection of the discourses of poetics and commodity fetishism. The inaccurate English translation of the first 'If we tear the utterance out of social intercourse and materialise it, we lose the organic unity of all its elements', p. 121) fails to render the implicitly Marxist colouration of the Russian original, where the verb *oveshchestvliat'* ('reify') is used: 'Esli my otorvem vyskazyvanie ot sotsial'nogo obshcheniia, oveshchestvim ego, to my utratim i dostignutoe nami organicheskoe edinstvo vsakh ego momentov.' The Marxist reading of this passage is strongly backed up by a passage later on (p. 151), which explicitly establishes the connection between the discourses of poetics and commodity fetishism: 'Attempting to separate the work from the subjective consciousness, the Formalists at the same time sever it from the objective fact of social intercourse, with the result that the artistic work turns into a meaningless thing analogous to a commodity fetish (*prevrashchaetsia v bessmyslennuiu veshch'*, *analogichnuiu veshchi v tovarnom fetishizme*'). This passage is all the more significant, because it substantiates our assumption that commodity fetishism was part of the stock of ideas accessible to, and discussed by, Bakhtin and his circle.

one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically. As such they encounter one another and coexist in the consciousness of real people—first and foremost, in the creative consciousness of people who write novels.

(DN, 291–2).

Bakhtin's idea that there can be a human species superior to others by virtue of the simple fact of writing novels is the ultimate expression of his quasi-Romantic belief in the omnipotence of art. Literature, being the creation of language, appears capable of solving problems which do not originate in language. Being a phenomenon predicated on the subject-object split, reification seems to be possible to overcome in the realm of language, which, in Bakhtin's view, transcends the division of subject and object. To analyse the foundations of this hope, we need to discuss the overall concept of ideology and language in the work of the Bakhtin circle.

For now we may conclude by stressing the common nature of Bakhtin's and Lukács's discourses, embedded as they are at the same time in emancipatory visions and in intense confrontation with modernity, whose effects (reification) they seek to transcend by endowing the heroes of their discourses—the proletariat and the novel—with the power of a totalizing consciousness which reshapes the givens of social experience in the light of eternal and universal human values. In the process, genre undergoes a vital transfiguration from a purely literary concept into a category of social thought.

As we have seen, the problem of reification unavoidably plunges us into the realm of ideology. I devote the next chapter to a deeper analysis of language, ideology, and the specific relation of literature to reality in Lukács's and the Bakhtin circle's writings of the 1920s and 1930s in the larger context of ideas inherited in their encounter with Marxism, neo-Kantianism, and *Lebensphilosophie*.

IDEOLOGY, LANGUAGE, AND REALISM

In the following pages I examine the Bakhtin Circle's views of ideology and language in the late 1920s and Lukács's doctrine of realism in the 1930s. My argument is that both the Bakhtin Circle's concept of ideology and Lukács's concept of realism were transfigurations of the concept of culture which they inherited from neo-Kantianism and *Lebensphilosophie*. By providing reference to culture, these concepts were also able to address some important social aspects of art, more particularly its place among other ideologies in society.

IDEOLOGY AND LANGUAGE IN THE WRITINGS OF THE BAKHTIN CIRCLE

Valentin Voloshinov's and Mikhail Bakhtin's views of ideology and language in the late 1920s articulated in Voloshinov's major work *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* enable us to 'place' the concepts of ideology and culture in the dialogue between Russian Marxism and other philosophical schools, mainly *Lebensphilosophie*. While the peculiar position of Voloshinov in the Marxist debates on ideology has been clearly recognized,¹ little has been done to explore the roots of his ideas. As I argue here Voloshinov's writings on ideology and language figured in a complex effort to reformulate and translate ideas originating in *Lebensphilosophie* and neo-Kantian philosophy into the language of Marxism so that they could become instrumental in its sociological project. In reading the Bakhtin of the second half of the 1920s as alternatively a philosophy-of-life, neo-Kantian or Marxist thinker, we fail to do justice to his organic, if temporarily limited (in the case of his dealings with Marxism), participation in all three traditions. Stimulated by his communication with Voloshinov, Bakhtin's participation never amounted to full belonging, and his presumed originality in the late 1920s should be traced to his ability to subject these three

¹ See, e. g., R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford, 1977, pp. 70-1; S. Weber, 'The Intersection: Marxism and the Philosophy of Language', *diacritics*, 1985, Vol. 15, pp. 94-111, esp. pp. 95-6.

approaches (philosophy-of-life, neo-Kantianism, and Marxism) to a mutually challenging examination. From this point of view, it would be as unsupportable to claim that Marxism was for Bakhtin merely rhetoric under which his allegedly heretical thoughts could remain hidden as it would be to consider him a consistent Marxist theorist. The history of ideas offers more stories of continuity and mixture rather than of radical breaks, neat divisions, and innocent conceptions. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* would seem to be a strong case in point: it reveals, beneath the Marxist sociological project, fascinating palimpsests of *Lebensphilosophie* and neo-Kantianism, two trends, whose historical intersections we have already stated briefly in Chapter 1.

The endeavour to bring Kantianism and Marxism together has been a significant element of Russian intellectual life ever since the latter half of the nineteenth century. By 1909–10, S. Frank, himself suspicious of the value of these efforts, had nevertheless affirmed the question of the relationship between Kantianism and Marxism as a traditional philosophical and social concern in Russia.² By the time Voloshinov and Bakhtin undertook their work on ideology and language, several neo-Kantian or philosophy-of-life thinkers such as H. Cohen, G. Simmel, K. Vorländer, and E. Cassirer were well known in the Bakhtin Circle, to Matvei Kagan, Lev Pumpianskii, and Voloshinov and Bakhtin themselves,³ which tends to reinforce the argument for interpreting their views on ideology and language in the triple clef of Marxism, *Lebensphilosophie*, and neo-Kantianism.⁴

² S. L. Frank, *Filosofia i zhizn': etudy i nabroski po filosofii kul'tury*, St Petersburg, 1910, p. 348.

³ See, among other sources, N. Nikolaev, 'Lektsii i vystupleniia M. M. Bakhtina 1924–1925 gg. v zapisiakh L. V. Pumpianskogo', in *M. M. Bakhtin kak filosof*, ed. L. Gogotishvili and P. Gurevich, Moscow, 1992, pp. 221–52; Iu. M. Kagan, 'O starykh bumagakh iz semeinogo arkhiva' (M. M. Bakhtin i M. I. Kagan), *DKH*, 1992, No. 1, pp. 60–88, *BD*, *passim*, and N. Nikolaev, 'Izдание nasledii M. M. Bakhtina kak filologicheskaiia problema (Dve retsenzii)', *DKH*, 1998, No. 3, p. 135, where Nikolaev furnishes information about Pumpianskii's acquaintance with the Russian translation (1909) of Vorländer's book on Kant and Marx.

⁴ On the Bakhtin Circle and neo-Kantianism see K. Clark and M. Holquist, 'The Influence of Kant in the Early Work of M. M. Bakhtin', in *Literary Theory and Criticism: Festschrift Presented to René Wellek in Honor of his Eightieth Birthday*, 2 vols., ed. J. Strelka, Bern and New York, 1984. Vol. 1, pp. 299–313; M. Freise, *Michail Bachtins philosophische Ästhetik der Literatur*, Frankfurt am Main and New York, pp. 58–9 and *passim*; B. Poole, "'Nazad k Kaganu": Marburgskaia shkola v Nevele i filosofii M. M. Bakhtina', *DKH*, 1993, No. 1, pp. 38–48; D. Haynes, *Bakhtin and the Visual Arts*, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 37–44; B. Poole, 'Rol' M. I. Kagan v stanovlenii filosofii M. M. Bakhtina (ot Germana Kogena k Maksu Sheleru)', *Bakhtinskii sbornik*, 1997, Vol. 3, pp. 162–81; R. Coates, 'Two of a Small Fraternity? Points of Contact and Departure in the Work of Bakhtin and Kagan up to 1924', in *The Contexts of Bakhtin*, ed. D. Shepherd, Amsterdam, 1998, pp. 17–28; B. Scholz, 'Bakhtin's Concept of

In order to place Voloshinov's concept of ideology in the then existing left fields of thought, we have to consider briefly the semantic compass of the concept in the Marxist tradition. Raymond Williams summarizes three different conceptual versions of ideology in Marxist philosophy: '(1) a system of beliefs characteristic of a particular class or group; (2) a system of illusory beliefs—false ideas or false consciousness—which can be contrasted with true or scientific knowledge; (3) the general process of the production of meaning and ideas.'⁵ Terry Eagleton's more nuanced analysis of the concept, too, singles out, among others, the meanings pointed to by Williams.⁶ Eagleton's and Williams's typologies overlap in the way they define points (1) and (3), but Eagleton is subtler in outlining the possible ramifications—and through that the essence—of ideology as captured in point (2). Despite their differences, these two typologies do offer a safe ground on which to describe the concept of ideology in early Soviet Marxism as favouring a combination of senses (1) and (3) and far less obsessed with sense (2) than the later official doctrine. Even Lenin, in *What is to be Done?*, regards the ideology of the proletariat as undergoing 'the general conditions of birth, development and consolidation of any ideology'. The general laws governing the rise and workings of any ideology are precisely what lay at the heart of the writings of Plekhanov, Bukharin, and Voloshinov himself. While agreeing on the nature of ideology as a superstructural phenomenon, they were not unanimous on how ideology is connected with other elements of the superstructure and with language. These are the two problems on which my discussion here is centred.

A good starting point for our analysis is Nikolai Bukharin's 1921 *Historical Materialism*, which, despite the fact that Voloshinov never explicitly mentioned it, was one of the most influential works in postrevolutionary Russian Marxism. (In his article 'Po tu storonu sotsial'nogo' (1925) Voloshinov polemicizes with another work by Bukharin, his article 'Enchmeniada', without, however, mentioning explicitly Bukharin's name.) While Bukharin remains predictable and

'Chronotope': The Kantian Connection', *ibid.*, pp. 141–72. While these publications pay considerable attention to Cohen and Natorp, the crucial impact of Simmel remains largely unexplored. An exception is N. Bonetskaia's work (see especially her thorough comments on the 'Author and Hero' essay in *Bakhtinologiiia*, ed. K. Isupov, St. Petersburg, 1995, pp. 239–87); see also Iu. Davydov, 'Tragediia kul'tury i otvetstvennost' individa (G. Zimmel' i M. Bakhtin)', *Voprosy literatury*, 1997, No. 4, pp. 91–125.

⁵ R. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, p. 55.

⁶ See T. Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, London and New York, 1991, pp. 1–2.

orthodox in the way he splits society into base and superstructure, he does offer a truly intriguing picture of the internal divisions within the latter. The need to outline this division is anticipated in his rather broad definition of the superstructure: 'We shall interpret the word "superstructure" as meaning any type of social phenomenon erected on the economic basis: this will include, for instance, social psychology, the social-political order, with all its material parts (for example, canons), the organization of persons (official hierarchy), as well as such phenomena as language and thought. The conception of the superstructure is therefore the widest possible conception' (*HM*, 208). Even without his own inference, it is not difficult to see Bukharin's definition as overly inclusive. Superstructure, to him, designates a vast field of human activities which can be as wide, vibrant, and fluctuating as culture is in the philosophy-of-life tradition, especially with Simmel. Both superstructure and culture, because of their dynamic and all-embracing nature, seem necessarily to defy a more rigid definition. Against the background of these problems of determining what superstructure is, it comes as no surprise that the centre of Bukharin's analysis is shifted toward questions of internal morphology: what cannot be defined as a whole should be approached and interpreted in terms of the elements which constitute it.

Bukharin distinguishes two major entities within the superstructure: social ideology and social psychology. This internal division, foreshadowed in Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*,⁷ was established by Plekhanov, whom Voloshinov explicitly mentions in his discussion of the concept of social psychology (*MPL*, 19). In his *Fundamental Problems of Marxism* (1908) Plekhanov, while complaining that Marxism is 'still far from being capable of discovering the causal link between the appearance of a given philosophical view and the economic situation of the period in question',⁸ already questions this possibility by arguing that the base and the different ideologies are bound not in a direct cause/effect relationship, but rather in one that is mediated by people's mentality, or, as he renders it, by 'the psychology of the epoch'. It is the properties of that mentality (psychology)—and not the base itself and its respective sociopolitical system—that are reflected

⁷ 'Upon the different forms of property, upon the social conditions of existence, rises an entire superstructure of distinct and peculiarly formed sentiments, illusions, modes of thought and views of life' (K. Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Selected Works*, London, 1968, p. 116).

⁸ G. Plekhanov, *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, trans. J. Katzer, London, 1969, p. 78.

by the various ideologies.⁹ Although anticipating the important debates on how the superstructure is structured, Plekhanov remains primitively confined to the traditional Marxist idea that the 'psychology of the epoch', the *Zeitgeist*, is always to be understood as the psychology of a given class only. In the earlier 'The Materialist Conception of History', the tensions within Plekhanov's ideas of ideology are evinced more saliently: 'What is known as ideology', he writes, 'is nothing but a multiform reflection in the minds of men of the single and indivisible history'.¹⁰ In a rather contradictory manner, Plekhanov reinforces the reflectionist view of ideology, while at the same time positing as the object of reflection the challenging whole of history at large. He does not confine himself to the base/superstructure dichotomy, in which the superstructure reflects the economic foundations of society, but tries to replace it with a notion of history that would hold together both the economic and the cultural aspects of social life.

Plekhanov's concept of ideology crystallized in the process of his appropriation of the work of A. Labriola, the French edition of whose *Essays on the Materialist Conception of History* Plekhanov had reviewed in 'The Materialist Conception of History'. With Labriola, one can already discern the strategy of viewing history as an organic whole and of ascribing to social psychology a mediating function in the recognition of this whole: 'Passing from the underlying economic structure to the picturesque whole of a given history, we need the aid of that complexus of notions and knowledge which may be called, for lack of a better term, social psychology.'¹¹ Labriola insists on describing social psychology as the locus in which the basic experience of the social conditions of human life is being restructured into different ideologies: 'Before attempting to reduce secondary products (for example, art and religion) to the social conditions which they idealize, one must first acquire a long experience of specified social psychology, in which the transformation is realized.'¹² Again, we are confronted here with the vacillations typical of the still productive and unorthodox forms of both Western and Russian Marxism. The understanding of ideology is suspended between the realization of its status as a secondary product

⁹ Ibid., p. 80. This idea can be recognized as early as 1897 in Plekhanov's article 'The Materialist Conception of History' (G. Plekhanov, *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, pp. 103-38, esp. p. 115).

¹⁰ G. Plekhanov, *Fundamental Problems of Marxism*, p. 138.

¹¹ A. Labriola, *Essays on the Materialist Conception of History*, trans. Ch. Kerr, New York and London, 1966, p. 111.

¹² Ibid., pp. 219-20.

and its power not simply to reflect, but also to idealize, i. e. ideology is understood as a product which produces.

By the time Bukharin developed his own project, Plekhanov's ideas of social psychology had already become classic and been subjected to a number of different uses serving different purposes.¹³ Moreover, throughout the 1920s, despite all the new aspects introduced by Bukharin in the interpretation of superstructure, social psychology, and ideology, he seems to have abided in the shadow of Plekhanov's popularity. The latter's ideas, which were gradually gaining the shape of a dogma, had already been reduced by the late 1920s to the almost magic formula known then as *piatichlenka* (a five-point formula), and his authority was often appealed to when a simplified picture of society as a whole was needed. The five elements included the means of production, the economic relations, the political order, the social psychology, and the various ideologies reflecting the peculiarities of this psychology. In the early 1930s, however, the climate of opinion changed and Plekhanov's legacy acquired the stigma of a mechanistic account of society, which was, moreover, intoxicated with Kantianism.¹⁴

Bukharin's advance on both Plekhanov and Labriola consisted in posing the relationship of the superstructure to the respective ideologies as a sociological problem (note the suggestive subtitle of his book: *A System of Sociology*). No longer committed to the understanding of ideology as the exclusive product of classes, Bukharin sought instead to grasp its existence as nurtured by a wider range of social formations. In addition, he strived for a more adequate and elaborate picture of the morphology of the superstructure, that is, of the differences between ideology and social psychology. Describing ideology as a 'unified, coordinated system of thoughts [...], feelings, sensations, forms' exemplified by science, art, religion, philosophy, or morality, Bukharin also noted that, because 'we live in "every-day" life', we constantly produce and encounter 'a great mass of incoherent, non-coordinated material, by no means presenting an appearance of harmony'. This is the material from which the realm of social psychology—the non-systematized or but little systematized feelings, thoughts and moods found in the given society, class, group, profession, etc.' is

¹³ On the appropriations of these aspects of Plekhanov's thought in the literary debates of the 1920s, see H. Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories, 1917–1934: The Genesis of Socialist Realism*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1963, pp. 61–5.

¹⁴ See e.g. the criticisms in O. Voitinskaia, 'Plekhanov-Pereverzev-Shchukin', *Marksistko-Leniniskoe Iskustvoznaniie*, 1932, No. 4, p. 105 (quoted in H. Ermolaev, *Soviet Literary Theories, 1917–1934*, p. 98).

constructed (*HM*, 208).¹⁵ The difference between social psychology and ideology, contends Bukharin, lies 'merely in their degree of systematization' (*HM*, 209). He compares social psychology to a sort of 'supply-chamber for ideology,' or a 'solution out of which ideology is crystallized'. Ideology, Bukharin goes on to say, 'systematizes that which has hitherto been not systematized, *i.e.*, the social psychology' (*HM*, 215). Now, the status of the different ideologies proper (art, religion, etc.) is ambiguous, for they amount to '*a coagulated social psychology*' (*HM*, 215), which clearly suggests that they are regarded as hierarchically higher and more elaborated phenomena. On the other hand, however, ideology is static and petrified, relying on social psychology to provide it with material and incentives for change. Thus ideology is at once superior and inferior to social psychology, both erected above it and grounded or dependent on it. The binomial partitioning of the superstructure into one region of constant change and flux and another one, which cannot move and subsist on its own, closely follows (Simmel's) philosophy-of-life visions of culture, where the forces of organic growth, creation, and shift are in conflict with the forces of solidification and consolidation.

Voloshinov retains this division, yet he also departs from it on two significant points. First of all, he chooses to speak not of 'social psychology' but of 'behavioural ideology'. Thus he unambiguously insists on the essentially common nature of ideology proper and 'behavioural ideology' as components of the superstructure. The idea of their unity goes back to Voloshinov's *Freudianism* of 1927, where he emphatically claims that 'the haziest content of consciousness of the primitive savage and the most sophisticated cultural monument are only extreme links in the single chain of ideological creativity' (*F*, 87). Unfortunately, 'behavioural ideology' does not adequately render the Russian *zhiznennaia ideologiia* ('life-ideology') and blurs the considerable impact of Simmel's *Lebensphilosophie* on Voloshinov's views.¹⁶ The way Voloshinov

¹⁵ That ideology proper (art, science, etc.) should be viewed as an organized form of the disorganized 'living experience of the collective', and hence as different by virtue of its structure from that experience, can also be inferred from Aleksandr Bogdanov's works on proletarian culture, esp. from his 'On the Artistic Legacy' (1918) and 'The Paths of Proletarian Creativity' (1920); see A. Bogdanov, *O proletarskoi kul'ture, 1904-1924*, Leningrad and Moscow, 1924, pp. 148 and 197-9.

¹⁶ Voloshinov's use of 'zhiznennaia ideologiia' in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* can likewise be traced back to his book on Freud, where he speaks of *zhitskaia ideologiia* (see V. Voloshinov, *Freidizm*, Moscow, 1993, pp. 87, 88). Also in this case the English translation prefers 'behavioural ideology' (*F*, 88).

defines 'life-ideology' (or 'behavioural ideology' in the English translation) stresses substantially the vigour and mobility of life, just as do Bukharin and Simmel:

To distinguish it from the established systems of ideology—the systems of art, ethics, law, etc.—we shall use the term *behavioural ideology* for the whole aggregate of life experiences and the outward expressions directly connected with it. Behavioural ideology is that atmosphere of unsystematized and unfixed inner and outer speech which endows our every instance of behaviour and action and our every 'conscious' state with meaning. Considering the sociological nature of the structure of expression and experience, we may say that behavioural ideology in our conception corresponds basically to what is termed 'social psychology' in Marxist literature.

(*MPL*, 91)

A comparison with the Russian text¹⁷ would single out some vital nuances revealing the philosophy-of-life subtext of Voloshinov's argument. We have already commented on the inadequate translation of 'life-ideology' as 'behavioural ideology'. Moreover, the original *stikhiiā*, rendered in English inaccurately by 'atmosphere', conveys the philosophy-of-life understanding of being as an undifferentiated and unstoppable process evolving in more than one direction. Moreover, rendering *postupok*—a notion central to neo-Kantian ethics and a key-concept in Bakhtin's early *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* ['Filosofiia postupka']—as 'instance of behaviour' the translation unduly emphasizes the psychophysiological dimensions of the act rather than its ethical colouration and value.

By speaking of 'life-ideology', Voloshinov not only underlines the common nature of ideology and what Bukharin and Plekhanov call 'social psychology', but also makes a much stronger case for their mutual dependence. While Bukharin regards them as exhibiting a one-way connection—'a change in the social psychology will . . . result in a corresponding change in the social ideology' (*HM*, 216)—Voloshinov envisages the two as necessarily interacting. The firmly structured ideological modes of expression (science, art, religion, etc.) exert a 'powerful, reverse influence on experience (*perezhiwanie*): they begin 'to tie inner life together, giving it more definite and lasting expression' (*MPL*, 90), even setting the tone for life-ideology (*MPL*, 91). This statement, again, concedes that ideology proper should be considered as

¹⁷ The Russian text reads: 'Zhiznennaia ideologiia—stikhiiā neuporiadochennoi i nefiksirovannoi vnutrennei i vneshnei rechi, osmyslivaishchei kazhdyi nash postupok, deistvie i kazhdoe nashe 'soznatel'noe' sostoianie' (*MFI*, 100).

occupying a higher hierarchical position than life-ideology. Yet, as we shall see, Voloshinov does not fail to point out that this is only one side of the coin and thus argues for the ambiguity of ideology proper. What is of the greatest importance, however, is the fact that Voloshinov takes further and disambiguates Bukharin's occasional hints that ideology proper does not emerge from the economic base. In a defiant move that distances him from the prevailing Marxist tenets, Voloshinov sees it instead as born from the womb of just another type of ideology and governed by it all along. It was Voloshinov's polemic with Freudianism that, together with Plekhanov's and Bukharin's work, made him alert to the broad—and not exclusively economic—domain of everyday life as the initial source of ideological meanings which are then reshaped and structurally upgraded to products of ideology proper (*F*, 87–9).

Voloshinov's second significant departure from Bukharin's model consists in the different place he assigns to language. For Bukharin, language is unequivocally an element of the superstructure (*HM*, 203), as is thought, a category that remains obscure and so broad as to appear stripped of any real meaning. Both thought and language create problems for Bukharin; since everything can be said to be a manifestation of them, their definition as specific elements of the superstructure becomes suspect. Hence the inconsistency in Bukharin's view of the evolution of language: 'If, as a result of enhanced productive forces, a huge and complicated ideological superstructure has been erected, language will of course embrace this superstructure also' (*HM*, 205). Language is shown here to be not only an element of the superstructure, it is at the same time a *modus/locus operandi* of the superstructure as a whole.

The same difficulty faces Voloshinov. His project, not unlike Bukharin's, is sociological: he derives language from the primordial fact of social intercourse. First, '*social intercourse is generated (stemming from the basis); in it verbal communication and interaction are generated; and in the latter, forms of speech performances are generated; finally, this generative process is reflected in the change of language forms*' (*MPL*, 96, emphasis original). This statement could be considered the one major concession made by Voloshinov to the vulgar Marxist view of language: note that social intercourse is for him pre-linguistic, occurring prior to, and outside, language. Unlike Bukharin, however, Voloshinov never identifies language as part of the superstructure. Language partakes of ideologies without being an element of any particular ideology. It is, Voloshinov believes, 'neutral with respect to any specific ideological function. It

can carry out ideological functions of *any* kind—scientific, aesthetic, ethical, religious’ (*MPL*, 14). The vague idea that language could possibly reconcile the status of an element of ideology with the status of an indispensable condition for the existence of ideology is couched in a self-contradictory formulation: ‘*The word functions as an essential ingredient accompanying all ideological creativity whatsoever*’ (*MPL*, 15, emphasis original). The original Russian formulation—‘Slovo soprovozhdaet kak neobkhodimyi ingredient vse voobshche ideologicheskoe tvorchestvo’ (*MFI*, 19)—makes the contradiction even more palpable: language is meant to play only an accidental, accompanying role and to be at the same time a necessary element of all ideologies. Voloshinov’s attempt to find a way out of this discrepancy leads him to credit language with the no less contradictory status of an active vehicle through which all ideological creativity is not simply carried out but also commented on—socially evaluated—and thus accomplished. Language becomes the milieu in which the interaction with all other sign systems proves possible and, moreover, inevitable: ‘All manifestations of ideological creativity—all other non-verbal signs—are bathed by, suspended in, and cannot be entirely segregated or divorced from the element of speech’ (*MPL*, 15).¹⁸ Having set out to cope with the difficulties arising from the attempt to locate language in the superstructure, Voloshinov ends up anticipating a totally different solution to the problem; having laid bare the impasse created by the unduly sharp juxtaposition of base and superstructure, he gradually moves on to a different frame where language is theorized as a master code through which all other sign systems become mutually translatable.

What is of more interest to us here than the semiotic tendencies in Voloshinov’s work is his attitude toward *Lebensphilosophie* and neo-Kantianism. To begin with, the very ‘science of ideologies’ (*nauka ob ideologiiakh*) can be recognized as a pendant of, and a materialist alternative to, the neo-Kantian ‘idealistic “philosophy of culture”’, as Voloshinov terms it at several points in the first chapter of his work (*MPL*, 11–12).¹⁹ To Voloshinov, ‘the domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs’ (*MPL*, 10). This is precisely a definition of ideology as broad as Bukharin’s definition of the superstructure. The crucial difference is that whereas Bukharin highlights the superstructure against the background of the base, Voloshinov chooses to contrast

¹⁸ An earlier prototype of this contention can be found in *F*, 88.

¹⁹ The same term, again used disapprovingly, also frequently appears in the first chapter of *FM*.

ideology—through the sign—to nature and only inconsistently to what Simmel calls ‘objective culture’.

Simmel, whose thought (as we have demonstrated in Chapter 1) had a considerable impact not only on Voloshinov and Bakhtin but also on Lukács and Mannheim, among others, elaborates on the distinction between subjective and objective culture in his essay ‘On the Nature of Culture’ (1908).²⁰ Objective culture for Simmel is the domain of artifacts which are meant to be instrumental in promoting the spiritual cultivation of the individual, of his/her subjective culture. Beginning with the neo-Kantian doctrine of the world as disintegrated and poised between a realm of facts and a realm of values (hence also the splitting of knowledge into *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften*), Simmel goes on to radicalize this doctrine, arguing that even within culture (the realm of values) there are two different worlds which, initially co-existing in peace and harmony, are doomed eventually to drift apart. Simmel’s later studies of the conflicts of modern culture picture the process of growth and development as a constant struggle between the subjective culture of individuals and the objective culture of the artifacts that they themselves produce. At the root of this conflict lies the formative principle of objectification, which is absolutely indispensable for the rise and progress of human culture. The natural development of life, however, informed by the principle of objectification, necessarily endows cultural forms with an autonomous existence and transforms creative impulses into stiff and lifeless products: ‘It is the essential nature of life to transcend itself, to create from its own material what no longer qualifies as life.’²¹ While optimistic at times and seeing in this a sign of the omnipotence of life,²² Simmel remains more often than not wistful in the face of the increasing expansion of objective forms and artifacts to the detriment of organic life-contents.

²⁰ G. Simmel, ‘Vom Wesen der Kultur’, *Georg Simmel Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 8, Frankfurt am Main, 1993, pp. 363–73, esp. pp. 370–1.

²¹ G. Simmel, *Fragmente und Aufsätze aus dem Nachlass und Veröffentlichungen der letzten Jahre*, Hildesheim, 1967, p. 24.

²² In his 1908 *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung* Simmel describes this process in a still fairly dispassionate manner, more as a sociologist striving for objectivity than a philosopher of culture facing the inevitability of its ‘tragedy’. He speaks of the ‘complete turnover from the determination of the forms by the materials of life to the determination of its materials by forms that have become supreme values’ (G. Simmel, *Sociology*, trans. and ed. K. Wolff, Glencoe, Ill., 1950, p. 42). By 1918, however, with his essay on ‘The Conflict in Modern Culture’ (1918), Simmel has clearly recognized the tragic inevitability of the life/form opposition: ‘Life can express itself and realize its freedom only through forms; yet forms must also necessarily suffocate life and obstruct freedom’ (G. Simmel, *On Individuality and Social Forms: Selected Writings*, ed. Donald N. Levine, Chicago and London, 1971, p. 375).

This is unfortunate, as Simmel perceives it, for it evinces a clear asymmetry: the subjective culture of the individual never ceases to be dependent on the objective culture of artifacts, while the domain of artifacts grows independent and over time even imposes itself on the subjective culture of the individual without any longer assisting its development. The problem which torments Simmel is whether the propitious work of the form-giving factors can be reconciled with the danger of its inevitably promoting the gradual domination of culture by ready-made and independent forms.

Voloshinov's definition of ideology as 'the world of signs' remains slightly ambiguous, because it seems to accommodate both subjective and objective culture: 'Any item of nature, technology, or consumption can become a sign' (*MPL*, 10). It is quite revealing, however, that Voloshinov, unlike Bukharin, speaks of 'ideological creativity' and not simply of 'ideological production'. It is precisely 'creativity' that conveys the originality and the redeeming character of ideology proper as subjective culture in contrast to its traditional reflectionist understanding in Marxism. Moreover, 'ideological creativity' is also conceptually opposed to ideology viewed as false consciousness. This could be inferred from its capacity to accommodate religion on an equal footing with art and science (*MPL*, 9).²³

The differences between subjective and objective culture, which are somewhat blurred in Voloshinov's definition of ideology as an indiscriminate world of signs, are resolutely restored and fortified by stressing the importance of 'life-ideology' for the products of ideology proper. The works of all fields of ideological creativity must prove their right to exist by being subjected to the test of different social groups at different times in their everyday life. The very idea of transferring elements from the world of ideology proper back into the organic world of everyday life-ideology is strongly reminiscent of Simmel's drive to protect subjective culture from the encroachments of objective culture by trying to impute to the latter a renewed commitment to the organic characteristics and demands of the former. Bukharin, whose *Historical Materialism* is scattered with (positive) references to Simmel, confronted the issue of the necessary 'translatability' between the spheres of life-ideology and ideology proper earlier than Voloshinov.

²³ Again, this is the case also in *FM* (p. 3), where no unfavourable distinctions are made between religion and the other elements of ideology proper. 'Ideological creativity' is persistently used in the first chapter of *FM* and incidentally also in Bakhtin's 1929 *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo*, see e. g. *PDA* (p. 56 and *passim*).

But Bukharin remained blissfully nonchalant *vis-à-vis* Simmel's awareness of the problems such a transition entails. While he admitted that ideology proper is '*crystallized or congealed in things which are quite material*', this seemed to him not a perilous lapse into the province of artifacts, but rather a cause for celebration because such artifacts enable us 'to judge the psychology and ideology of their contemporaries with precision' (*HM*, 270).

For Voloshinov, on the contrary, the products of ideology proper, unlike the undefinable stream of everyday life-ideology, are not immune to the danger of ceasing to exist as phenomena of subjective culture. If we now recall Bukharin's views of social psychology, we will be able to appreciate yet another aspect of Voloshinov's advance on him: Voloshinov recognizes that outside the element (*stikhiia*) of life-ideology the already formalized products of ideology proper would be dead. For Bukharin, social psychology is active only prior to ideology's crystallization of its scattered impulses, while Voloshinov sees life-ideology as coming back on stage after the products of ideology proper are a fact and acting as a vital force which endows them with life. Indeed, the process of creation of ideological forms cannot be accomplished before they have re-established their connection to life-ideology. This move in Voloshinov's argumentation opens up a totally new perspective: the flexible, bilateral contact between the different forms of everyday experience and of ideology proper is fully realized only in the reception of the works of ideology proper by the social milieu set by life-ideology. Because life-ideology alone (thanks to its versatile nature and immediate proximity to the base) 'draws the work into some particular social situation . . . in each period of its historical existence, a work must enter into close association with the changing life-ideology, become permeated with it, and draw new sustenance from it. Only to the degree that a work can enter into that kind of integral, organic association with the life-ideology of a given period is it viable for that period (and of course, for a given social group)' (*MPL*, 91).²⁴ It is clear to Voloshinov that the products of ideological activity cannot be born '*outside objectification, outside embodiment in some particular material*' (*MPL*, 90). But he is equally strong in his insistence that absent their connection with life-ideology these products would cease to exist or to be

²⁴ Cf. Bukharin, for whom social psychology, as part of the superstructure, is likewise an intermediate element between it and the base: 'the ideology is the outgrowth of a specific psychology; the psychology of a specific economy; the economy of a specific stage of the productive forces' (*HM*, 230).

experienced 'as something ideologically meaningful' (*MPL*, 91). They would remain dead monuments of civilization if they were not re-introduced into the formless flux of life.²⁵

That this 'perception, for which alone any ideological piece of work can and does exist' (*MPL*, 91), is communicable only in the language of life-ideology (i.e. in the language of organic, still unformed and unorganized human experience) creates a problem with Voloshinov's idea. Obviously, it precludes any possibility of one product of ideology proper (e.g., art) to be evaluated by means of the highly organized discourse of another (e.g., science). (The fear that judgements about art made in the terms of scholarly discourse will inevitably end up judging art by criteria that are external to it can be traced to Simmel's Kantian belief that as different cultural forms gradually claim and attain independence they should be thought of as incommensurable.) In deliberately placing the entire process of evaluation in the field of life-ideology, Voloshinov seems to be suggesting that the creation of culture is a self-sufficient activity which proceeds only within the limits, and between the different levels, of the superstructure: the creative impulses originating in life-ideology are shaped by the steadfast forms of ideology proper, which in turn, far from petrifying into lifeless products, are endowed with genuine existence through the evaluative reception taking place in the everyday manifestations of life-ideology.

How is this circular exchange possible, and to what is the miracle of self-sufficiency bestowed upon ideology to be ascribed? For Voloshinov, the implicit solution to the neo-Kantian dilemma of fact versus value and culture versus civilization becomes language. It is to language that he looks to provide the glue that can bond the different levels of the superstructure together, for language never ossifies and never ceases to move within and between the social groups which employ it. Never fully detached from its possible materializations, language is never fully embodied in them either. There is always some unrealizable potential to language that saves it from petrification and

²⁵ Voloshinov's examples of such dead objects are the cognitive idea, when it is disconnected from the process of a living, evaluative perception, and, under the same conditions, the 'finished literary work' (*zakonchennoe literaturnoe proizvedenie*, *MFL*, 100). I quote here from the Russian text and give my own translation because '*zakonchennoe literaturnoe proizvedenie*' is inadequately rendered in the English translation as 'any literary work' (*MPL*, 91). The English text misses the subtle (and exemplarily neo-Kantian) distinction, implied in Voloshinov's choice of '*zakonchennoe*' over '*zavershennoe*', between the physical process of finishing and the social process of accomplishing a literary work, the latter being possible only through the work's reception and appropriation by society.

exhaustion, and this makes language the great redeemer which can objectify our creative impulses without ever deadening them. It stabilizes and brings to fruition a writer's ideas in a literary work, but then conveys those ideas to a living world of everyday reception and thereby destabilizes them, shattering in a wholesome way the work's finishedness and abstractness as fact and clearing the path for its varied accomplishment as value through numerous instances of social appropriation and evaluation. In order to be able to shuttle continually between the realm of forms and the realm of life, between life-ideology and ideology proper, language must preserve its freedom to partake of all ideologies proper without identifying itself with any one ideology in particular. Voloshinov formulates this mandate in terms of a law: '*Linguistic creativity (tvorchestvo iazyka) does not coincide with artistic creativity nor with any other type of specialized ideological creativity*' (MPL, 98).

Given this view of language as nonidentical with any of the elements of the superstructure, we are now better able to grasp where the roots of Bakhtin's and his colleagues' disagreement with the Russian Formalists lie. These roots evidently went much deeper than purely literary disputes, and into philosophical and sociological principles. What was at stake in the debate with the Formalists was not merely the question of form/content precedence, as has often been asserted. The true apple of discord was the nature of language as a social phenomenon. Voloshinov and Bakhtin refrained from identifying language and art (literature) not because they thought that the art of literature was not linguistically bound and determined, but because they believed that the essence of language rules out its identification with any one product of ideology proper. Their reasons for deploring the Formalists' identification of literature with a specific, prevailing function of language are impossible to understand outside the neo-Kantian approach to language and culture. In refusing to identify language and art (literature), they are undoubtedly following Cassirer, the first (1923) volume of whose *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* deals with language and was known to Voloshinov.²⁶ There, in contemplating the status of linguistics and opposing Croce's and Voßler's view that it should be subsumed under aesthetics as a science of expression, Cassirer concludes:

²⁶ See Voloshinov's personal file published by N. Pan'kov in *DKH*, 1995, No. 2, pp. 70–99, esp. p. 75, where it becomes evident that Voloshinov translated two portions of Cassirer's work. Voloshinov mentions Cassirer explicitly in *MPL* (pp. 11, 47).

If language is to be singled out as a truly autonomous and original energy of the spirit, then it should be incorporated with the whole of these forms without ever coinciding with any of the already extant elements of that whole. So within the whole, language should be assigned a place in accordance with its specific nature and thus its autonomy should be secured, despite all systemic connectedness with logic and aesthetics.²⁷

Voloshinov was clearly attempting to modify Cassirer's views and to translate them into Marxist parlance. Language, though not identifiable with any branch of ideology, is replete with ideological meaning, which for Voloshinov (here departing resolutely from Cassirer) is socially produced and grounded in the specific power of language, thanks to its mobile position, to *refract* reality. It is important to stress that endowing language (and hence literature) with the power to refract, not merely to reflect, reality signifies a major departure from the prevailing Marxist view of that time, in which language and the superstructure were afforded a largely passive status.

We find the refraction doctrine clearly formulated as early as 1928 in Medvedev's book on the Formalists. Still inconsistently espousing his own innovation, Medvedev, however, contends that literature, like any other ideology, both refracts and reflects the world (*FM*, 16), and he does not seem to see any irreconcilability between these two essentially different acts. On the contrary, he seems to be bestowing upon language and its products the twofold power of providing both an *objective reflection* and a class-determined *subjective refraction* of reality. Then, in the slightly later *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, we find a predominant, if not exclusive, emphasis on refraction (*MPL*, 15) that evinces a determination to advance a more sophisticated sociological approach to language and art.

Language renders any superstructural component equally capable of refracting existing reality. There is, however, also a master component—literature—which refracts the refractions of all other ideological spheres (*FM*, 16). It is of particular importance to recognize the neo-Kantian tenor behind this proposition. Medvedev specifically identifies Hermann Cohen's aesthetics as a source for this privileged status of art, which in the *Formal Method* is seen to be embodied in literature: 'Cohen understands "the aesthetic" (*das Ästhetische*) as a kind of

²⁷ E. Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Vol. 1, Berlin, 1923, p. 121 (my translation). Cassirer's use of 'energy' reveals the continuity between his and Humboldt's views of language. For Voloshinov's discussion of Humboldt's ideas and for his criticism of Croce and Voßler (which follows Cassirer's), see *MPL*, pp. 48–9 and 30–2, respectively.

superstructure over other ideologies, over the reality of cognition and action. Thus, reality enters art already cognized and ethically evaluated' (*FM*, 24). And although Medvedev criticizes Cohen for not paying attention to exactly how the worlds of ethics and cognition enter the world of art, he nevertheless remains committed to the general conclusions about the special relevance of art (literature) as a refractor of all other ideologies.

Compared to Cohen's aesthetics and Cassirer's philosophy of language, Voloshinov's arguments in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* can thus be seen as evolving in two different steps: first, in a forceful and untraditional move, he grants all ideologies the power to refract rather than reflect reality; second, by seeing in the verbal art of literature the master ideology which refracts all other ideologies, he seems to fall back on a neo-Kantian philosophical framework for discussing art. Despite all their disagreements, the Bakhtin Circle and the Formalists finally came to endorse the same conclusion: literature is not just one art among others, but is to be celebrated as a model on which all other aesthetic appropriations of reality can be based and interpreted. The Formalists drew their arguments from an anticipatory glorification of language as a universal semiotic pattern (master code); the Bakhtin Circle, while not entirely averse to this line of thought, reshaped it by foregrounding a powerful combination of neo-Kantian and Marxist reasoning about art as superideology (master refractor).

It is essential to recognize that for Voloshinov language is not only the mechanism by which all ideology is produced and stratified, but also the site of all developments crucial to social change. While *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* emphasizes the process of transformation of the amorphous life-ideological elements into solid ideological forms (e.g. the rise of literary genres from everyday speech genres), *Freudianism* stresses not only this process,²⁸ but also the subversive

²⁸ 'an exclamation of joy or grief is a primitive lyric composition (*liricheskoe proizvedenie*)' (*F*, 88). Commentators on Voloshinov have failed to recognize the fact that Benedetto Croce's *Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistics*, which Voloshinov treated with caution (cf. *MPL*, 52), has nevertheless served as the source of this equation of small and great discursive genres in Voloshinov's (and in the 1950s in Bakhtin's) theory; cf. the following passage from the *Aesthetic*: 'Expression is an indivisible whole. Noun and verb do not exist in it, but are abstractions made by us, destroying the sole linguistic reality, which is the *sentence*. This last is to be understood not in the way common to grammars, but as an organism expressive of a complete meaning, which includes alike the simplest exclamation and a great poem' (B. Croce, *Aesthetic as Science of Expression and General Linguistics*, trans. D. Ainslie, New Brunswick and London, 1995, p. 146)—note the correspondences in Croce's and Voloshinov's choice of words: exclamation in either case and 'poem' (Croce) vs. 'lyric composition' (Voloshinov).

actions of life-ideology by which the existing ideology proper is ultimately destroyed. Ironically enough, on closer inspection Voloshinov's reasoning proves to be modelled on the Freudian dichotomy of conscious vs. unconscious, which Voloshinov himself was quick to declare untenable. However, he simply replaces Freud's binarism with that of 'official' vs. 'unofficial' conscious. The latter is located predominantly (but not exclusively) in the depths of life-ideology, while ideology proper is, predictably, the abode of the 'official' conscious. The different aspects of language cover both the unofficial and often free work of life-ideology and the censored work of ideology proper. Then, in a second move, Voloshinov identifies life-ideology with 'inner speech' and ideology proper with 'outward speech', claiming that the former's unimpeded transition to the latter is directly dependent on the proximity between these two forms of the conscious: 'The wider and deeper the breach between the official and the unofficial conscious, the more difficult it becomes for motives of inner speech to turn into outward speech . . . wherein they might acquire formulation, clarity, and rigour' (*F*, 89). As the Russian text²⁹ implies, this is a desirable change, the obstacles to which are regrettable. The volatile contents of inner speech/life-ideology, refused the chance to enter the realm of articulation and stability, are assigned instead to the social underground, where they work to erode the established regime of ideological production from below:

At first, a motive of this sort will develop within a small social milieu and will depart into the underground—not the psychological underground of repressed complexes, but the salutary political underground. That is how *a revolutionary ideology* in all spheres of culture comes about.

(*F*, 90).

The activist metaphor of the underground should not mislead us into interpreting Voloshinov's texts in strictly Marxist terms.³⁰ When

²⁹ 'chtoby v nei oformit'sia, uiasnit'sia i okrepnut' (*Freidizm*, p. 89).

³⁰ In an otherwise brilliant book-length study of the development of psychoanalysis in Russia, Voloshinov's *Freudianism* is discussed (against existing evidence) as Bakhtin's work, in which is seen, rather one-sidedly, the grim ideal of a totalitarian state that does not allow for any difference between official ideology and life-ideology and promotes complete transparency of the unconscious; see A. Etkind, *Eros nevozmozhnogo. Istoriia psikhoanaliza v Rossii*, Moscow, 1994, p. 317. This account should not be surprising, given the lack of serious interpretations of *Freudianism*. Two notable exceptions are G. Pirog, 'The Bakhtin Circle's Freud: From Positivism to Hermeneutics', *Poetics Today*, 1987, No. 3–4, pp. 591–610; and C. Emerson, 'Freud and Bakhtin's Dostoevsky: Is there a Bakhtinian Freud without Voloshinov?', *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*, 1991, Vol. 27, pp. 33–44, neither of which, however, foregrounds or investigates the aspects of interest to us here.

he asserts that 'in the depths of life-ideology accumulate those contradictions which, once having reached a certain threshold, ultimately burst asunder the system of the official ideology' (*F*, 88*), he is clearly drawing on Marx's explanation of the way new relations of production are substituted for outdated when this is demanded by the growth of productive forces. The point, however, is that this extrapolation, ascribing superstructural changes to the stimulation/suppression of certain speech activities and to the conflict between fluctuating content and rigid forms, which takes place simultaneously and indiscriminately across the organic whole of life (an unmistakable philosophy-of-life motif), erases the distinction between primary base and derivative superstructure.³¹ Voloshinov's disclaimer that these changes can take place only when based on the economic interests of a whole social group (*F*, 90) appears so remote from the rest of his argument that it scarcely succeeds in challenging the idea that the superstructure has its own self-sufficient mechanisms of development and modification. No less important is that this argument seems to work against Voloshinov's case for exclusive scientific rationality by suggesting that as the product of the unofficial conscious—of its scattered, undifferentiated, and exclusive forces—the rise of new ideological phenomena can never be fully explained in objective terms. His discourse thus effectively corroborates the apprehensions of early Western Marxism that the formation of ideologies would prove to be a 'very complicated, often subtle, tortuous and not always legible'³² process.

It seems that Voloshinov's ambition to represent a gradual organic change starting in the base and moving through the lower strata of ideology up to its stabilized forms has yielded a result beyond his own expectation. His power as a Marxist sociologist can be seen in his innovative identification of ideology with culture at large and, more specifically, with the processes of signification, which he believed to be the superstructure's principal mode of existence and operation. Even more importantly, the recognition of the role of language and signification in human labour strongly relativized the base/superstructure

³¹ The way Voloshinov suggests to explain the transformations of ideology is rather indicative of Simmel's impact on him. In the latter half of his career Simmel himself believed that the ubiquitous principle of struggle between life-contents and forms could indeed be translated into Marxist diction and employed to elucidate the regularities behind changes in the relations of production. For a comment on this idea, see Guy Oakes's introduction to G. Simmel, *Essays on Interpretation in Social Science*, trans. and ed. G. Oakes, Manchester, 1980, pp. 34–5.

³² A. Labriola, *Essays*, p. 152.

dichotomy and thus deconstructed the classic notion of superstructure. Asserting that signs, and hence signification, have a material nature was not enough to restore the balance. Voloshinov ended up reducing culture to a single—ideal—mode of existence and ignoring those aspects that rest on practices entailing explicit domination (politics, law etc.). This choice made Voloshinov's construction implicitly capable of accounting only for those social phenomena which did not contradict his stipulation that language has a conspicuous and autonomous role in the formation of social life. Thus, while avoiding a Formalist position on literature, Voloshinov pursued a language-centred type of social theory.

We could now summarize the results of our analysis. By synthesizing neo-Kantian, philosophy-of-life, and Marxist traditions of thought, Voloshinov identified two different strata within the superstructure—life-ideology and ideology proper—and substantial differences between them. At the same time, he insisted on the essential unity of these strata, since they are bound together by the workings of language (Cassirer's neo-Kantian understanding of language is decisive here). Given the ambivalent picture of the relations between life-ideology and ideology proper (official ideology), drawn in the Bakhtin Circle, it is now possible to see why over time Bakhtin became so preoccupied with celebrating the power of non-canonical culture to create works of art that seem to escape the relentless grip of form and rigidity (the novel), and with extolling the vigour of life-ideology in popular culture (carnival). Bakhtin's essays on the novel of the 1930s and his *Rabelais* are not so much a departure from, but rather an organic continuation of the Circle's work on ideology and language of the 1920s, no less than this work, in turn, is the continuation of the early writings on artistic creativity.³³

³³ The failure to recognize this aspect of the continuity of Bakhtin's work is particularly palpable in the otherwise wonderful analysis of his early texts in N. K. Bonetskaia's essay 'Bakhtin's Aesthetic as a Logic of Form' (*Bakhtinologia*, ed. K. Isupov, St Petersburg, 1995, pp. 51–60). The trouble seems to lie in Bonetskaia's attempt to accommodate *Rabelais* in her observations. Bonetskaia simplifies things when, right at the start, she claims that at the time Bakhtin wrote *Rabelais*, 'Marxism supplants an orientation towards neo-Kantianism' (p. 51). Marxism—as we argue in this chapter—neither supplanted nor abolished neo-Kantianism in the works of the Bakhtin Circle, but only refigured it as a palimpsest which remains legible and active beneath the surface of its texts. With this in mind, one should try to reformulate the relationship of *Rabelais* to the rest of Bakhtin's *oeuvre* in new and different terms. Bakhtin's work presents a unity not, as Bonetskaia is inclined to believe, in the sense of a 'system' (p. 59), where each particular bit should match the rest, but rather in the sense of a flowing continuum underlain by stable (but not fixed) philosophical assumptions.

Thus we may argue that what links the seemingly disparate writings of the early, mature, and late Bakhtin is the philosophy-of-life concern with the inter-relationship of life and culture (forms). In his early 'Author and Hero' essay, Bakhtin was already passionately declaring that 'life tends to recoil and hide deep inside itself, tends to withdraw into its own inner infinitude, is afraid of boundaries, strives to dissolve them', and he was trying to reconcile this insight with his view of aesthetic culture as 'a culture of boundaries' (AH, 203). His attempts to argue the existence of art as more than a mere philosophical paradox led him into an exploration of the place of art in the realm of culture during the 1920s and of how artistic forms (the novel) could appropriate life, without violating its versatile and dynamic nature, during the 1930s. The sociological trend in the work of the Bakhtin Circle in the late 1920s, which developed in an intensive affiliation and critical dialogue with Marxism, did not cancel out the neo-Kantian ground of Bakhtin's philosophizing. In addition to its preservation, Voloshinov and Bakhtin also transformed the basic categories and propositions of *Lebensphilosophie* so that these could broaden the horizons of their own sociological analysis.

With the observations about language and the ideological refraction of reality we have already entered the field of the heated theoretical debates of the 1920s and 1930s, in which Marxist aesthetics was trying to legitimize the power of art to produce pictures of life that would be reliable, truthful, and committed at the same time. This is the angle from which the problem of ideology was scrutinized by Lukács, to whose theory of realism I now turn.

LUKÁCS'S DOCTRINE OF REALISM

In this section I attempt to revise the received opinion of Lukács's theory of realism as a mere weapon in the political struggles of the 1930s. I will suggest that there was a deeper philosophical background to Lukács's doctrine and that the concept of realism was shaped in the process of responding not only to Hegel's concept of totality but also to the attempts of *Lebensphilosophie* to reconcile form and life. In arguing the case for the inseparability of Lukács's theory of realism from earlier philosophical debates, I will also analyse the status of his concepts of method and genre and will demonstrate the inherent instability of his claims that specific artistic forms can enjoy a privileged position in attaining a truthful representation of reality.

Lukács's ideas about realism, while being most influential in the 1960s and mid-1970s (although even then they enjoyed a controversial reception within the Marxist tradition, mainly in Germany³⁴ and France³⁵) nowadays appear largely discredited and have disappeared from the agenda of theoretical debates. The situation is aggravated by the fact that even among supporters of realism, Lukács does not seem to be held in high esteem any longer and is generally referred to critically.³⁶ Against this background it is not surprising that in a recent study of literary realism he is relegated to a dismissive footnote.³⁷

The process of turning Lukács's name into a self-evident label of failed theoretical reputation was preceded in the mid- and late 1980s by a body of sharp, solid, and informed criticism from scholars looking at what can be said to be, in Lukács's own view, an exemplary case of realism: the novels of Balzac and Stendhal.³⁸ This work drew on a variety of approaches. The first originates in Jakobson's Formalist revision of realism³⁹ as no more than a system of artistic (linguistic) conventions designed to replace an earlier system of conventions that is no longer capable of providing the reader with fresh images of reality. At the heart of this theory one can distinguish the principle of *ostranenie* which recasts literary history as a never-ending string of fading realisms.

³⁴ The German debates were stirred by the posthumous publication in the second half of the 1960s of Brecht's polemic of the 1930s against Lukács. For a critical evaluation of Lukács's concept of realism in the 1970s see W. Mittenzwei, 'Marxismus und Realismus', in *Lehrstück Lukács*, ed. J. Matzner, Frankfurt am Main, 1974, pp. 125–64; E. Lunn, 'Marxism and Art in the Era of Stalin and Hitler: A Comparison of Brecht and Lukács', *New German Critique*, 1974, No. 3, pp. 12–44; H.-J. Schmitt (ed.), *Der Streit mit Georg Lukács*, Frankfurt am Main, 1978.

³⁵ The most serious continuation and at the same time the most radical criticism of Lukács's views of realism within the French Marxist tradition is P. Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production*, esp. Macherey's analysis of Balzac's *Les Paysans*. See also the persuasive interpretation of Lukács's notion of realism in Fr. Jameson's *Marxism and Form*.

³⁶ Cf. R. Tallis, *In Defence of Realism*, London, 1988, esp. pp. 77, 196.

³⁷ K. Kearns, *Nineteenth-Century Literary Realism. Through the Looking Glass*, Cambridge, 1996, p. 260, n. 57.

³⁸ Cf. above all Chr. Prendergast, *The Order of Mimesis*, Cambridge, 1986; A. Jefferson, *Reading Realism in Stendhal*, Cambridge, 1988; S. Petrey, *Realism and Revolution*, Ithaca and London, 1988. Leaning on largely similar theoretical frameworks, these three authors offer different ways of examining Lukács's argument. Prendergast exercises a direct criticism on the philosophical foundations of Lukács's concept of realism, while A. Jefferson chooses the elegant and more indirect path of demonstrating the proximity between Stendhal's and Barthes's and Todorov's notion of realism. Unlike them, Petrey erodes Lukács's views of realism by deconstructing Lukács's own opposition between naturalism and realism in its application to Zola.

³⁹ R. Jakobson, 'On Realism in Art', in *Readings in Russian Poetics*, ed. L. Matejka and K. Pomorska, Cambridge, Mass., 1971, pp. 38–46.

A second major critical impulse came from Barthes's astute analysis of the semiotic mechanisms underlying the production of what he terms the *reality effect*.⁴⁰ Barthes takes up the Jakobsonian tradition of close attention to the linguistic aspects of the 'realistic' mode of writing but goes further than Jakobson by considering its ideological implications.

While Barthes's insights, in conjunction with a careful employment of Wittgenstein's criticism of the ostensive definition and Austin's and Searle's speech-act theory, dominated the critiques of realism in the 1980s, more recent discussion has already taken a slightly different turn. Crucial to this shift is the awareness that what can be described as a specific language game (a specific social use of language) is at the same time inextricably linked to what Wittgenstein calls specific '*forms of life*' shared by a given community.⁴¹ In literary studies this opens up the perspective of interpreting and evaluating realism in more relativistic and flexible terms as a culturally and historically relevant phenomenon bound—as much as any other—to certain epistemological and ideological strategies. But it also promotes a view of realism which, in line with proposals coming from Habermas and Rorty, makes it a part of the controversies over the modes of exchange and consensus in society and thus helps us reconceive it 'not as a form or period that we rightly [. . .] put behind us, but as a continuing social project'.⁴²

Of all these approaches, mine is closest to the historicist orientation which places the doctrine of realism in the past and thinks of it as part of the past—not so much because it is flawed, but because it is the result of a unique constellation of concrete social and ideological factors. Following this approach, I shall try, as far as possible, to avoid evaluative statements and shall seek instead to analyse Lukács's doctrine of realism historically, as a product of his desire to bring together the theory of the novel and social theory on the basis of philosophy-of-life and Hegelian–Marxist views.

My path to Lukács's discourse on realism goes via a largely neglected essay he wrote in 1932. It is entitled 'On the Question of Satire', and it

⁴⁰ R. Barthes, 'Le Discours de l'histoire', *Social Science Information*, 1967, No. 4, pp. 65–75; 'L'Effet de réel', *Communications*, 1968, No. 11, pp. 84–9; *S/Z*, Paris, 1970. For a criticism of the limitations of *S/Z* as regards a theory of realism see A. Jefferson, 'Realism Reconsidered: Bakhtin's Dialogism and the "Will to Reference"', *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 1986, No. 2, pp. 179–80.

⁴¹ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, Oxford, 1958, p. 226.

⁴² B. Robbins, 'Modernism and Literary Realism: Response', in *Realism and Representation*, ed. G. Levine, Madison and London, 1993, p. 225.

is tempting to see in it one more point of convergence between Lukács's and Bakhtin's theoretical interests.⁴³

Lukács argues in this essay that every piece of genuine literature is realistic in that it reflects the dialectic of appearance and essence: behind the surface of immediate appearances of reality and its immediate reflection in human consciousness, the work of literature foregrounds the essence of phenomena. This tenet recurs in all his later work as realism's most unquestionable and vital hallmark. A problem arises, however, when Lukács chooses to go a step further and raises the question of the specificity of satire. If the representation of the dialectic of essence and appearance is the feature of all (realistic) literature, what, then, is the distinctive feature of satire? Small wonder that in his consistently novel-centred theory, Lukács relies once again on the novel to perform the service of a foil. In the novel, he asserts, the dialectic of essence and phenomenon is 'validated through a thoroughly mobile system of mediations (*Vermittlungen*)' and—at times—this dialectic does not even become explicit or visible but is instead made perceptible only by means of the system of mediations itself (*W*: 4, 90). Satire, on the other hand, deliberately excludes these mediations. It is said to accomplish an unmediated 'sensuous embodiment' of the contrast between essence and appearance (*W*: 4, 91), which volunteers to ignore all aspects of social genesis in favour of a more direct and undisguised attitude.

The thrust of Lukács's essay is the vindication of satire against the strong received opinion of it as a marginal episode in literary history. Hegel, who admittedly furnishes the whole conceptual framework of Lukács's scrutiny (the opposition between mediated and unmediated representation of the contradiction between essence and appearance), is nonetheless charged with not being perceptive enough to recognize the vitality and continuing importance of satire throughout the history of mankind. At first sight, Lukács appears to be vehemently revising Hegel's argument of satire as a genre. Leaning on Schiller, Lukács introduces the concept of 'creative method' which, like Schiller's *Empfindungsweise*, soars above genre to incorporate works of different kinds. Satire, Lukács generalizes, 'is not a literary genre but a creative method', which extends from short verse forms to 'the big novel and comedy' (*W*: 4, 107).

If we recall Lukács's distinction between satire and the novel, we can see the contradictory nature of his propositions. When elevating satire

⁴³ Cf. Bakhtin's own essay on satire in *SS*.

to the status of method, Lukács calmly subsumes the novel under it as just one more example and possible field of application; but when he outlines the essence of satire, he contrasts it with the novel and creates the unmistakable impression that both satire and the novel are regarded as being on equal footing as literary genres. Thus Lukács goes back to the Hegelian interpretation of satire that he was so anxious to supersede. Considerations of method are reduced here to a discussion of genre, and we need to ask what the reasons for this substitution might be.

The first major reason may be seen in the instability of Lukács's concept of method. Throughout his works he tends to endow this concept exclusively with characteristics pertaining to the worldview (*Weltanschauung*) of the author, from which he then derives the features that relate to form and technique. This approach is problematic in so far as it says a great deal about method in general, but almost nothing about *artistic* method as such.

Lukács's category of method seems more plausible and seamlessly attachable to his discussions of particular schools and movements. In his essay 'The "Greatness and the Decline" of Expressionism' (1933-4)⁴⁴ there is a special section entitled 'The Creative Method of Expressionism' and elsewhere in his work ('Narrate or Describe?' (1936) and 'On Zola's One-Hundredth Birthday' (1940), to quote just two of the numerous examples) he is concerned to adumbrate the specificity of naturalism.⁴⁵ The cases of expressionism and naturalism, both constructed by Lukács as inwardly unified entities, make for a partial concealment of the difficulty of explaining changes in style and form merely by resorting to sweeping historical shifts in mentality. When this trajectory is abandoned and attention turns to phenomena outside the convenient frame of a particular period, school, or movement, as is the case with satire, Lukács's discourse on method begins to appear inadequate and has to be restructured as a discourse on genre which allows for a more efficient equilibrium between aspects of worldview and artistic creativity.

⁴⁴ First published in 1933 as "Velichie i padenie" ekspresionizma' in *Literaturnyi kritik*, the essay appeared in German in 1934 in *Internationale Literatur*. In Lukács's *Werke* (4: 109-149) it is signed as written in 1934. This is only one of the abundant instances of chronological and textological queries which Lukács's legacy presents.

⁴⁵ As we have established in Part I of the book, Lukács's discontent with naturalism goes back to his early writings. A case in point is his book *History of the Development of Modern Drama* (see especially chapter 10, 'Möglichkeiten und Grenzen des Naturalismus').

This substitution, however, can also take place for different reasons. Lukács's understanding of method as the expression of worldviews and thus as a category superior to genre, carries the tacit assumption that it ought to be possible for each method to be transparently mirrored and adequately represented in a particular genre which realizes the full potential of this method. This is why whenever Lukács's own theorizing fails to demonstrate the exemplary realization of a method in a well-defined genre this method loses its power as a system of representation and dissolves into a mere sum of possible generic realizations with neither centre nor cohesion. The definition of satire as a method remains questionable precisely because it cannot be identified with a given period or school, nor with any particular genre. Deprived of these two props, Lukács's Marxist historicism is forced into compromise: method is seen not solely as the product of historic developments, but also as an universal mode of artistic perception.

It is, of course, very unlikely that any given method will have a single distinct genre allocated to it to serve as the perfect embodiment of its supposed essence. In the 1930s, naturalism and realism have to struggle in Lukács's theory over the same genre: the novel is the battleground on which each of them strives to prove its right to represent reality. The goal of most of Lukács's writings of the 1930s is to eliminate all possible tension between the novel and realism, and to present the two as inseparable and inherently connected, i.e. as an exemplification of the ideal epistemological condition of identity between method and genre.

Realism is bifurcated in Lukács's writings between a perennial trend in literature (he frequently points to Homer, Dante, and Shakespeare as true masters of realism), and a specific, historically determined mode of literary production. The latter view is by far the dominant one. It conceives of realism as the method of literary creation based on reflection of reality in its totality, typicality,⁴⁶ and contradictoriness and occurring in high (industrial) capitalism. The elements of this formula were widely discussed throughout the 1960s and 1970s, and this dispenses me from rehearsing well-known arguments. Nevertheless, some comments are in order. Above all, there is a striking and crucial gap between Voloshinov's and Medvedev's notion of refraction, on the one hand, and Lukács's concept of reflection, on the other. Transferred into his literary theory from Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-criticism*, this

⁴⁶ For a cogent criticism of Lukács's concept of type from the point of view of philosophy of language see Chr. Prendergast, *The Order of Mimesis*, pp. 32–6.

concept suggests that literature can abide in direct contact with the world it represents. In contrast to the Bakhtin Circle's notion of refraction, which assigns literature a place among other ideologies, Lukács's concept of reflection ignores the fact that literature is never the sole medium for conceptualizing reality. Lukács places the work of the writer in a vacuum cleared of all other ideological appropriations of reality, and he thereby secures for literature a primacy over potential rivals. Although the Bakhtin Circle's notion of refraction conveys the same Romantic and neo-Kantian (albeit couched in Marxist terms) enthusiasm about the uniqueness of literature as the principal refractor, it does so by stressing the fact that literary representation always takes place in an active environment of other representations which can never be switched off and neutralized. Lukács, on the contrary, even when he recognizes proximity and interaction (as in the case of literature and philosophy), still prefers to speak not so much of the impact of philosophy on literature but rather of the eventual superiority of the latter to the former. In discussing the work of G. Keller he points out Feuerbach's influence only to conclude that Keller 'as a realist goes further and higher than his master' (*W*: 7, 360). Heine's poetry is interpreted as an attempt to supersede Hegel, to whom, Lukács gladly admits, Heine owes so much (*W*: 7, 298–301). Lest these examples appear perfunctory and isolated, I shall briefly analyse Lukács's notorious formula of the 'victory of realism', which he applies when evaluating most of the work of Balzac, Stendhal, Keller, Tolstoy, and many others. Borrowed from Engels, this formula ultimately implies the idea of literature superseding philosophy and other ideologies. Despite his (false) worldview, which is determined by his class position, the bourgeois writer is capable of rendering a true image of the world, if he chooses to rely on the method of realism. Literature celebrates a victory over all received ideas which attend the life and the activity of the writer. The method of realism 'corrects' the flaws of all inherited or acquired views and ensures that they remain silenced in the work of art. Thus one ideology (literature) is promoted over other ideologies and is presented as a purifying retort in which undesirable components will disappear. Realist literature is celebrated as an active social force which produces the right picture of reality in struggle with inherited or class-bound ideas.

We thus arrive at the main paradox of realism. On the one hand, it is but reflection, on the other hand, it claims the power of production. It views other forms of ideological creation and other literary methods

as inferior, but it nonetheless has to contest and fight them. Needless to say, the productive aspects of realism and its holistic approach rest on ideas originating in Hegel (*'Das Wahre ist das Ganze'*), but also in a materialist interpretation of *Lebensphilosophie*. Life, Lukács's doctrine of realism suggests, is always stronger than any idea that seeks to capture its essence. More importantly, life can rectify the 'errors' in the writer's outlook. In this celebration of reality over ideas, we can hear the echo of a philosophy-of-life type of mistrust of any restrictive form of representation. If we recall Lukács's earlier hope that the forms of experiencing can coincide with the forms of aesthetic communication, we can understand his passion for realism as the passion for a form which cancels itself to give way to the vigour and richness of life. Realism provides the ideal situation in which the writer does not imitate reality (*'Narrate or Describe?'*), but also does not depart from it. The realistic work of literature remains loyal to the versatility of life without abdicating its essence as a work of art. Realism is about the reconciliation of culture and life through artistic forms which do not claim any significance of their own, but seem instead to surrender voluntarily their specificity as forms in the transparency of reflection. We thus see that historically the doctrine of realism presents an attempt to solve the philosophy-of-life dilemma of life and form and the (neo-)Kantian contradiction of essence and appearance. This needs to be taken into account before we look at realism in the customary way as a political weapon of the Left in the 1930s. Lukács's doctrine of realism, as we have already seen, has its roots in much earlier times and philosophical trends, and our interpretation hopes to be doing justice to this fact. Bakhtin, as we will demonstrate in Chapters 8 and 9, is seeking to restore the same harmony of life and form, of culture and nature, albeit with different means.

Lukács's understanding of realism, predicated as it is on the totality of representation, takes us closer to the alliance of realism and the novel. In his essay on satire, Lukács argues that it is precisely the novel which, unlike satire, has the task of providing an image of reality in its totality. Echoing his own preoccupation with fetishism and totality in *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács entrusts the novel with the dissipation of all the cognitive illusions generated and maintained by capitalism. Through the novel, realism should portray a world which neither conceals its contradictions nor presents itself in a fragmented and beguilingly autonomous fashion. The novel is the point where realism as a timeless method of perception and depiction and realism

as an historical entity are finally supposed to intersect. Realism did exist before the novel in drama and the epic, and yet it is only with the advent of the novel as the magisterial genre of the bourgeois epoch that its deepest essence is materialized. This cannot occur before capitalism itself has developed sufficiently for its own contradictions to mature and reach a certain degree of palpability. The history of German literature, as interpreted by Lukács, is a case in point. The long essay 'Heinrich Heine as a National Poet' (1935) narrates Lukács's scenario of the rise of German realism. The backwardness of Germany and the latent condition of capitalist antagonisms at the time Heine was active as a poet 'make a great German realism impossible'. For this reason Heine is credited with discovering in the ironical-satirical and the fantastic the 'then sole feasible *German form* of the highest literary expression of social contradictions' (*W*: 7, 318).

If realism and the novel are historically conditioned forms of social activity which are summoned to foster a new awareness of the mechanisms of social development, then an explanation is required of the fact that it is the novel of nineteenth-century 'critical realism' (another formula Lukács coins to convey the scope of social activity that realism can execute under capitalism) which throughout his career remains the proof and the privileged model of artistic perfection, on which all future literature should be created.

With Lukács's preference for nineteenth-century 'critical realism' in mind, we can begin to approach the problem of the interrelations of the novel and modernity in Bakhtin's and Lukács's theoretical discourses, and to address in a deeper way the issue of their historicism and essentialism.

THE NOVEL, THE EPIC, AND MODERNITY

The specificity of Bakhtin's and Lukács's views of the novel can be accounted for only if we examine their inherent connection with the notions of social dynamics and transformation. The debates on the novel that took place in Moscow in December 1934 and January 1935, in which Lukács was a central figure, as well as their subsequent echoes in Bakhtin's writings of 1935–41 are particularly significant in this respect. An adequate analysis of these debates is vital, if we are to appreciate the historical setting and the specific meaning of Lukács's and Bakhtin's ideas.

When defining the meaning of the idea of modernity, which constitutes the framework of my discussion here, I emphasize—to start with—the sense of awareness of the transitory nature of social structures, worldviews, and artistic achievements. If a consensus is to be reached over the extremely divergent meanings invested in the idea of modernity in the present theoretical climate, then at least two important aspects have to be taken into consideration: first, the independence of the social and aesthetic norms of the present from the binding legislation of the past (an idea worked out in the 1960s and 1970s by Hans Robert Jauss and other German and French literary theorists and historians who drew on the work of Nietzsche, among others), and, secondly, the importance of the interaction with the Other and otherness as an indispensable condition of attaining self-identity understood as a process rather than as an ever-stable condition (Hegel, Lacan, and various strains of post-structuralist thought). We also have to keep in mind the fact that 'modernity' in its established use denotes, in addition, a particular epoch in European history, whose onset roughly coincides with the rise of capitalist social relations.

Bakhtin's and Lukács's views of the novel relate differently to the idea of modernity and to the reality of bourgeois social order. Faced with the necessity to formulate a clear stance to the past and the present, they start from similar premises to arrive eventually at dissimilar conclusions.

LUKÁCS'S WRITINGS AND THE 1934-1935 DEBATE
ABOUT THE NOVEL

Although Lukács's Soviet period has drawn considerable scholarly attention, Lukács's contributions to the Moscow discussion on the novel have not been closely examined.¹ Nor is there an examination of the textological issues flowing from the fact that these texts were preserved in both German (the language they were written in) and Russian (the language into which they were translated and then published). While comparing the German and the Russian versions on several occasions, my main concern is to place these texts in a broad historical context and to estimate their significance for a theory of the novel as a response to modernity in the 1930s.

The discussion about the novel, which took place on 20 and 28 December 1934 and 3 January 1935 in Moscow, was organized in order to undertake a critical examination of Lukács's entry on the novel for the first Soviet literary encyclopaedia under the general editorship of Lunacharskii. The invitation to Lukács to contribute an article on the novel reflected the growing power of a circle of Marxist scholars in the Institute of Philosophy at the Communist Academy. Besides Lukács, this circle featured his closest Russian friend Mikhail Lifshits and Frants Shiller. They all shared a considerable advantage over the rest of the scholarly public, for they were closely engaged in the editing and publication of previously unknown works by Marx and Engels, some of them bearing directly on literature and art.² This circle was responsible for the irreversible canonization of Marx, Engels, and Lenin as legislators of aesthetic interpretation. It was thanks to this section of the Institute, with special credit going to M. Lifshits, that the first ever volume of Marx and Engels's writings on art was compiled and published.³

¹ An exception to this is a succinct and thoughtful analysis in Russian: G. Belaia, "Fokushicheskoe ustranenie real'nosti" (O poniatii "roman-epopeia"), *Voprosy literatury*, 1998, No. 3, pp. 170-201, esp. pp. 177-85. Belaia draws only on the published versions of Lukács's texts in Russian and often leaves aside aspects of the discussion which we concentrate on here; for a general overview of Soviet theories of the novel in the 1930s and Lukács's place in it, see the contributions in *Disput über den Roman*, ed. M. Wegner et al., Berlin, 1988.

² These include Marx's *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts*, Engels's letters to Paul Ernst, Margaret Harkness, and Minna Kautsky, and Marx and Engels's correspondence with Ferdinand Lassalle on his tragedy *Franz von Sickingen*, most of which were published 1931-2, and Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*, first published in 1929-30.

³ *K. Marks i F. Engels ob iskusstve*, Moscow, 1933. Earlier than Lifshits, Valentin Voloshinov and Pavel Medvedev had plans—dating back to the late 1920s—to publish a similar anthology; but these plans never materialized (cf. Dmitrii Iunov, 'Glavnye trudy V. N. Voloshinova. Rekonstruktsiia', Unpublished Manuscript [1999], p. 3).

Lunacharskii's book *Lenin i literaturovedenie* of 1932 was also a significant step in this direction.

Strange as it might appear, there was an element of willing risk and an almost dissident excitement in this enterprise: because it was clear that Marx and Engels did not write copiously on art, there were deep-rooted fears among the official exponents of communist ideology that focusing on Marx and Engels as theorists of literature and art might provoke an uncontrollable interpretative liberty. Concerns about Lukács's passion for Hegel appear to have been stronger still. Armed with convenient support from Lenin's warning that one cannot understand Marx without first acquainting oneself with Hegel,⁴ Lukács was indulging in sustained loyalty to the traditions of classical German philosophy.

Bearing this in mind, it should come as no surprise that Hegel figured prominently in Lukács's paper on the novel of 1934. In 1935 Lukács published two significant portions of Hegel's analysis of the epic in *Literaturnyi kritik*.⁵ They were designed to keep the discussion about the novel alive,⁶ and retrospectively to impart to Lukács's audience some authoritative knowledge supporting his own line of reasoning.

Hegel is the source of Lukács's understanding of the novel in one crucial aspect: the accommodation of the novel within a dialectical narrative that presents the history of mankind as the history of its (artistic) consciousness. This consciousness is destined to complete a journey through a number of different stages marking its approach towards perfection. Each stage in its development presupposes a distinctive and historically determined form of self-expression. The novel is

⁴ Later no more than a trivial slogan, this warning was virtually unknown until the early 1930s, because it was contained in Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*.

⁵ Gegel', 'Epicheskaia poezia', *Literaturnyi kritik*, 1935, No. 6, pp. 57–76; No. 8, pp. 87–110.

⁶ The materials of the discussion were published in *Literaturnyi kritik*, 1935, No. 2, pp. 214–49; No. 3, pp. 231–54. The published version differs slightly from the stenographic records in that it omits the contributions of Viktor Shklovskii and Igor Sats and reproduces the contribution of Aristova without her remarks pertaining to Shklovskii's contribution (cf. 'Institut filosofii Komakademii. Pravlennaia stenogramma diskussii po dokladu G. Lukacha "Problemy teorii romana"', Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences [RAN], Moscow, fond 355, opis' 2, edinitsa khraneniia 32, l. 65–6; 69–75; 97–101). There is also an uncorrected version of the stenographic records which reproduces these contributions in an unabridged and unrevised form (cf. 'Institut filosofii Komakademii. Nepravlennaia stenogramma diskussii po dokladu G. Lukacha "Problemy teorii romana"', Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences [RAN], Moscow, fond 355, opis' 5, edinitsy khraneniia 32–4). On Shklovskii's contribution and his relation to Lukács see G. Tihanov, 'Viktor Shklovskii and Georg Lukács in the 1930s', *SEER*, 2000, Vol. 78, pp. 44–65.

thought of as precisely one of these emerging but transient forms. In Hegel's and Lukács's account, it comes to supplant the epic and to impose itself as the 'literary phenomenon, most typical of bourgeois society'.⁷ From the additional Marxist perspective of a future classless society, the novel and the epic make up the two poles of what Lukács calls 'great epic poetry'. The ancient epic is to him the first artistic form to represent a society marked by as yet inchoate class contradictions and governed by a primitive unity between individuals. In contrast, the novel is the consummate manifestation of the irreducible contradictions between self and society in capitalism, the last class formation. Lukács borrows Hegel's instruments of description and draws a neat picture of division: the epic depicts the struggle of society as a whole with an external agent (in war and labour); the novel is given over to representing the struggle *within* society.

Yet the novel and the epic, being the two poles of a single phenomenon, suggest an essential mutual proximity. It is in the process of identifying this affinity that Lukács ostensibly departs from Hegel's judgement. Both the epic and the novel strive to attain the totality of life, but only the epic succeeds in accomplishing this task. The form of the novel, Lukács submits, is subordinated to the creation of an epic action (R, 363), i.e. an action which reveals all the vital aspects of social life in their totality. This equivalence of the tasks of the novel with the aesthetic programme of the epic is already problematic in itself. It presupposes that the novel has no examples of excellence beyond the hallowed tradition of antiquity. It is only by following the epic in the drive to totality that the novel can find the justification for its own existence. The idea of modernity seems to be expelled here and to be replaced by a call for the restoration of the past.

Consistent as it is, this logic is not the only one at work in Lukács's argument. Epic action and totality require what he terms 'an adequate knowledge of bourgeois society', something he considers to be difficult to attain under capitalism. Unlike the proletariat who, despite being heavily intoxicated by bourgeois ideology, will hopefully surmount its own illusions (*History and Class Consciousness*), the novel remains for Lukács often unredeemed and destined to reproduce the picture of a fragmented and inorganic totality. As early as 1916 in his *Theory of the*

⁷ G. Lukács, 'Referat über den "Roman"', in *Disput über den Roman: Beiträge aus der SU 1917 bis 1941*, ed. M. Wegner et al., Berlin and Weimar, 1988, p. 360. Hereafter all references to Lukács's paper follow this version, abbreviated as 'R' and with the relevant page number in brackets.

Novel Lukács called this type of totality 'extensive' in order to differentiate it from the organic, or intensive, totality, accessible only to the epic. The totality he now assigns as artistic task to the novel is a negative one: it is the totality of contradictions between atomized social agents within a society that breeds hostility and competition. What is more, it is not a dynamic, but only a static totality, for even the most talented writers under capitalism, no matter how accurately and insightfully they register its conflicts, are unable to provide a way out of the status quo. Since the genuine totality of the epic is irretrievably lost—a loss for which the capitalist social order, and not the novelist, is to blame—Lukács glorifies the history of the novel as the history of an heroic struggle against the adverse conditions for artistic creativity in bourgeois society (R, 362). Here he contradicts Hegel: while for Hegel the novel should facilitate the reconciliation of the individual with the realities of bourgeois life, Lukács views the novel as going beyond this role and even opposing it. The great novel starts as a direct attempt to negotiate a place for the individual in society, but quickly turns into a romantic revolt of the self against this society.

Where does this leave us with respect to the idea of modernity? Lukács's reasoning is ambivalent: on the one hand, he allocates the novel a particular place in history and underscores its significance as the exemplary genre of bourgeois culture, which at its best is capable of conveying the contradictions of capitalism. On the other hand, he sees the novel as a temporary suspension of the great epic tradition. Under the inclement conditions of bourgeois society, the novel longs for the past and craves a secure relocation in the bosom of the epic. The knowledge communicated by the novel is knowledge of an imperfect and unjust world, severed from its previous state of grace and harmony. This knowledge, no matter how necessary and timely, is only a pale shadow of epic lore and wisdom, which give access to a world of primordial social peace and child-like serenity. Thus the novel, celebrated by Lukács as the representative genre and the typical product of capitalist modernity, is at the same time deprived of full independence and constantly suffers a traumatic yearning for protection in the womb of the epic.

Given all this, it is quite logical that when Lukács comes to insist on the transitory nature of the novel and its ultimate dissolution in the communist future, this is to be construed not as remorseless historicism, but rather as a further demonstration of his doubts about the possibility of judging the novel other than by the standards of the epic.

Lukács's account of the historical path of the novel, which we will review below, reveals the full extent of his anti-modernist hesitations.

The scheme outlined by Lukács singles out five key stages: (1) 'The novel *in statu nascendi*'; (2) The epoch of the 'Conquest of everyday reality'; (3) 'The poetry of the "spiritual kingdom of animals"' (the title of this section is a borrowing from Hegel's *Phenomenology*); (4) 'Naturalism and the dissolution of novelistic form'; (5) 'Prospects of socialist realism'. Predictably enough, for Lukács, the first of these five stages overlaps with the emergence of early bourgeois society. The outstanding figures of this period, Rabelais and Cervantes, have to combat both the medieval enslavement⁸ of man and his degradation attending the embryonic phase of capitalism. The dissemination of plebeian motifs and the deliberate drawing on medieval art in this period, Lukács maintains, account for the birth of the principal style of the epoch, 'fantastic realism', which remains partly active during the next period in Swift and Voltaire. Fantastic realism is realism beyond the conventional, a daring presentation of human life and nature on a large scale. This style epitomizes the short-lived but intensive upsurge of the new bourgeois class. (Note the close proximity between Lukács's notion of 'fantastic realism' and Bakhtin's notion of 'grotesque realism'.)

The period of the 'conquest of everyday reality' coincides with the age of initial accumulation. The broad and inspiring horizon of the fantastic shrinks to realism proper (R, 367). Energetic attempts at the creation of a 'positive' bourgeois hero take place (Defoe, Fielding, Smollett).

Unlike the first and the second period, the 'poetry of the "kingdom of animals"' offers a picture of mature and fully developed contradictions tearing bourgeois society apart. Romanticism arises as a passive opposition to capitalism, already thought of as a given. The struggle for the 'positive' hero intensifies dramatically, and the novel of education (Goethe) provides the best testimony to this phenomenon. The contradictory nature of capitalism is reflected in the ironic fact that

⁸ 'Enslavement' is the word in the German typescript, which at the beginning of this section speaks of 'mittelalterliche Versklavung' (R, 366), but subsequently equates enslavement with degradation in the phrase: 'Die großen Schriftsteller, insbesondere Cervantes, führen einen doppelten Kampf gegen die alte und neue Degradation des Menschen.' The Russian text, which was the only known and publicly discussed version of Lukács's paper, uses 'degradatsiia' throughout. Characteristically, one of the objections at the discussion addressed Lukács's obsession with degradation, which seemed to accentuate the subjective culpability of the individual for his plight and to overlook the objective factors of his 'enslavement'.

artistic greatness becomes attainable only through an unintentional break with the original artistic conception (Balzac).

The stage of 'Naturalism and dissolution of the novelistic form'⁹ sees the rapid decay of the bourgeoisie and the deterioration of 'great realism' into empty subjectivism or inflated objectivism. Action loses its 'epic nature' (R, 369) and narration is ousted by description. The ultimate break-down of the novel does not, however, occur until under imperialism (Proust, Joyce), which Lukács, following Lenin, regards as the highest and final stage of capitalism. Opposing this trend is another string of 'great writers' who attempt to restore realism and to establish an international anti-fascist literature (R. Rolland, Thomas and Heinrich Mann etc.).¹⁰

The last stage outlined in Lukács's panorama highlights the prospects for socialist realism. It is significant that Lukács's subtitle speaks of the future of socialist realism at large, but not of the novel. The novel is relegated here to an auxiliary means of painting the picture of Communist culture. As society advances towards a state of classlessness, the novel is destined to undergo a substantial modification towards rapprochement with the epic (R, 371). The scope and significance of social change are best served by a return to an epic breadth of representation.¹¹ Yet, it should not be forgotten, Lukács warns, that the merging of the novel with the epic is only a trend and will remain a trend so long as the proletariat is busy 'overcoming the relics of capitalism in the economy and in people's consciousness'.¹² The creation of the new is tied up with the revision of the old. Liberation from the remnants of bourgeois society already links the new novel with the 'great bourgeois realist novel' (R, 372), whose legacy should be carefully appropriated and rethought.

Several inferences seem to flow from this succinct overview of Lukács's argument. Above all, as in his previous work, Lukács's interest in the novel is primarily socio-philosophical and has very little to do

⁹ In the Russian text 'Naturalism' is replaced by 'New realism'. A plausible explanation for this change should take into account Lukács's growing theoretical ambition to map the global history of literature as the advancement, be it irregular and intermittently marked by conspicuous relapses, of realism as the single mode of artistic representation.

¹⁰ Lukács analyses this counter-trend only in the German typescript, where seventeen lines are devoted to it. In the Russian text these lines are omitted.

¹¹ Lukács's example of the rebirth of the epic is Sholokhov's *Tikhii Don*. The reference to it is, however, absent in the Russian text.

¹² In the German text the name of Stalin appears in brackets after the quotation marks. The Russian text reproduces the German without the inverted commas and without mentioning Stalin's name.

with an autonomous inquiry into its aesthetic aspects. He engages with issues of style only to prove that style is not an independent category. Whether he is discussing fantastic realism, or realism 'proper', or naturalism, he is always inclined to derive them from overarching social developments and the class dispositions that hold sway at each particular stage in modern European history. Ironically, these views brought him, against his will, very close to Valerian Pereverzev, his major opponent at the discussion. Pereverzev, who termed his own approach 'Marxist sociological method', conceived of style as an emanation of the 'psycho-ideological' features of the 'economic form'. Style is the corner-stone of his essays on aesthetics and he accentuates its importance over genre. He defines style as the unity of 'the structures born by a given social reality',¹³ and the scope of this concept of style is unprecedented in Marxist criticism. Similarly, for Lukács style relates not so much to the particular piece of art (in whose artistic *specifica* he is only rarely, if ever, interested) as to the underlying ideological unity of art as a whole at any given moment of its evolution. This notion of style makes it understandable why in Lukács's writings of the 1930s the novel rarely rises above the role of a subservient hero in a drama of sweeping historical developments that celebrate the victory of the proletariat and realism.

Secondly, one cannot help noticing that Lukács's picture of the history of the novel is strongly dependent on developments occurring in the epic. There is, of course, nothing wrong about situating a genre within a frame of reference posited by other genres. Neither is it alarming that Lukács's preferred counterpart of the novel is the epic. The real problem lies in the fact that the novel is robbed of its own autonomous history and is shown to be advancing at the mercy of the epic. The first strong evidence for this can be seen in the neat attribution of the novel almost exclusively to the age of capitalism. At the very beginning of his discussion Lukács acknowledges that in antiquity and the Middle Ages there were texts akin to the novel, but he never comes back to this to expand and substantiate his argument. His remark does no more than pay mere lip-service to the historical variety of the novel, and it is clearly his firm belief that only the Renaissance saw the '*statu nascendi*' of the novel. In Lukács's account, the novel had to wait for the natural (and much regretted) demise of the epic, before it could make its way up onto the stage of great literature. We are witnessing a case of

¹³ V. Pereverzev, 'Problemy marksistskogo literaturovedeniia', *Literatura i marksizm*, 1929, No. 2, p. 20.

peaceful linear inheritance with no bloodshed or loss of energy. It is astonishing that Lukács should concentrate on the struggle of the Renaissance novel against the conventions of bourgeois society, without saying a single word about the fight of the novel with the received genre repertoire of the preceding epoch, in which the epic still occupies an honourable position. This harmonious picture of peaceful co-existence of the old and the new has its roots in a characteristic asymmetry in the Marxist attitude to the socio-economic formations predating capitalism. Marx and Engels were primarily concerned to emphasize the unbridgeable gap between class- and classless formations. For this reason, class formations, despite all distinctions drawn between them, remain in their view a more or less continuous stretch of human history, equally opposed to the preceding age of primitive homogeneity and to the communist order lying ahead. What matters most is the dramatic point of transition from the 'realm of necessity' (class societies) to the 'realm of freedom' (Communism). While Marx and Engels are not entirely inattentive to the pre-capitalist modes of production based on private property, Lukács is far more willing to disregard the whole pre-Renaissance, i.e. pre-capitalist history of European literature. His reader is permitted a look at the novel at a moment when it has already taken shape. Instead of being involved in tracing the pains of labour, we find ourselves confronted with a genre which already has its own list of 'great authors' (Rabelais, Cervantes). Thus, Lukács's subtitle, 'The novel *in statu nascendi*', is seriously misleading, for while it promises the exciting performance of birth, it delivers a picture of effortless maturity and straightforwardly classic output.

Thus the history of the novel as genre is couched in the terms of a constant oscillation away from, or towards, the pole of the epic. All successes ascribed to the novel are accountable for either as the result of meeting the high standards of epic breadth, or as the outcome of dispositions materialized in an involuntary and instinctive fashion. In the first case we are confronted with the satisfaction of criteria which are external to the novel itself; in the second—with achievements that the novelist accomplishes beyond his own conscious will and against the nature of the novel. It is important to realize, however, that this inconsistency in Lukács's argument could also be described in positive terms as a perceptive guess at the contradictoriness of the novel as genre. The novel, one might infer, thrives and succeeds only when it is not identical with itself, when it defies the very idea of rigid rules and patterns.

Lukács's views were not taken for granted. They triggered heated debates, during which the accusation of abstractness was the mildest objection raised.¹⁴ It is essential to analyse this discussion, because both the paper and the comments upon it were available to Bakhtin, who followed them closely. Traces of the arguments can be identified in his own writings on the novel.

The first group of critiques concerns the history of the novel as genre. Notably, most of the remarks address the question of the pre-history of the novel. Shiller, for example, reprimands Lukács for his lack of attention to the formative stages of the novel, i.e. antiquity and the Middle Ages, or in Shiller's own words, for the neglect of the 'genetic' aspect of the genre. No attention is given, Shiller opines, to the 'hybrid' forms of the novel, which existed for some considerable time before it became an established and 'pure' genre. He also poses the question of the significance of the Chivalric Romance, which he regards as the novel of the Middle Ages and as a laboratory for the modern genre of the novel (Dis, 2:220-1). Shiller's reservations are deepened by Pereverzev, a particularly vigorous exponent of this strain of criticism. He asks directly how is it possible for Lukács to omit the whole pre-bourgeois history of the novel. Characteristically, he—just like Bakhtin in his own later essays on the novel—adduces as examples Petronius's *Satyricon* and Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, terming them 'typical novels' and pointing out that the European novelists, at least in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, learned the craft of writing from the ancient novel of love and robbery (Dis, 2:230). Pereverzev goes even further and expresses doubts about the validity of the assertion that the novel was the single representative genre of the entire capitalist formation: in a significantly transformed, if somewhat 'artificial' version, the epic persisted until much later than usually admitted by Marxist historians and was a contemporary of the seventeenth century novel (Dis, 2:230).

Pereverzev's seminal statements met with severe rebuff. When analysing the 1934-5 debate about the novel, one should not forget that it was by no means only a scholarly event. It was an arena for clashing methodologies and diverging political ideas about communist culture.

¹⁴ Cf. D. Mirskii's characteristic remark that with the exception of Marietta Shaginian, no Russian writer could possibly understand Lukács's paper (*LK*, 1935, No. 2, p. 221). All further references to the discussion will be given in brackets as 'Dis', accompanied by the relevant number of *LK* for 1935 (2 or 3) and the page number, e.g. (Dis, 2:221).

In this context Pereverzev quickly assumed the role of an *enfant terrible* destroying Marxist orthodoxy. His insistence on the exemplariness of the ancient Greek novel was considered highly provocative and a demonstrable infringement of received dogmas, questioning as it did the rigid Marxist division between different socio-economic formations. M. Lifshits makes this explicit in his reply to Pereverzev, accusing him of erasing the boundary between capitalism and pre-capitalist formations and thus of endorsing a bourgeois philosophy of history, according to which antiquity, being the soil for the development of the novel, was as corrupt as capitalism, while capitalism, still fostering epic poetry of heroic deeds, appeared less inhuman than it really was (Dis, 3:247). It is clear that what is at stake here is actually the understanding of modernity and contemporary developmental trends, rather than the purely aesthetic issues of the history of the novel and the epic. Only an absolute demarcation between capitalism and its antecedents could provide the much-needed certainty that the socialist order had a well-defined target to attack and break with. Furthermore, only such a demarcation could ensure that the hope of establishing socialism will not eventually be dashed by the dispiriting discovery that the construction of a supposedly unprecedented social order is no more than a reproduction of a recurrent historical model.

A similar message was conveyed in Kemenov's reply (Dis, 3:241), which tried to assert the methodological compatibility of maintaining that the novel was present in pre-bourgeois societies but was fully characteristic only of capitalism. Kemenov invoked Marx's strategy of economic analysis in *Capital* to argue that the novel, despite its presence in earlier societies, can be said to be a typically capitalist phenomenon, simply because it was best developed under capitalism. Convincing as it is, Kemenov's reply still does not seem to address adequately the historical facts underlying Pereverzev's criticism. Pereverzev does not deny that the novel is at its most advanced only under capitalism. What he claims is that whenever the novel has been present in history (i.e. not only under capitalism), it has also been the dominant literary genre (Dis, 2:239):

But at which moment was the novel not the leading genre? In the period when ancient drama existed, there were no novels and, understandably, then it wasn't the leading genre. If we take a look at Greece in the period of Homer, there were no novels there at all. But name, along with things such as Petronius's novel or Apuleius's novel, name another genre, which at this time was something superior to the novel in ancient literature?

This aspect of Pereverzev's criticism remained unrefuted and it provides cogent testimony to the fact that Lukács's argument was based on a pre-conceived philosophical approach which remained detached from the plethora of recalcitrant historical evidence.

A further group of reservations demanded that the area of relevant comparisons between the novel and other genres be expanded. D. Mirskii suggested that the boundaries of the novel cannot be set without exploring its relation to drama.¹⁵ Pereverzev, apart from joining Mirskii and Rosenfel'd in their disagreement with Lukács's exclusive attention to the epic as the counterpart of the novel,¹⁶ voiced a more specific criticism, asking why Lukács equates the epic with the 'heroic epic song' and why he compares the novel to it alone (Dis, 2:229). Of special importance, however, is the criticism articulated in Timofeev's contention that Lukács, by not specifying the nature of the novel in respect to other literary genres, ends up treating it as a metaphorical designation for the art of literature at large.¹⁷ In Lukács's paper, Timofeev warns, a huge variety of literary genres is collapsed into the notion of the novel, itself inflated and not clearly delineated (Dis, 2:226-7). The reverse aspect of this disagreement is put forward by F. Shiller. Lukács's concept of the novel seems to him not to contain sufficient internal differentiation. The evolution that has taken place within the genre is totally overlooked and Lukács fails to trace the sub-genres constituting the whole: the historical novel, the philosophical novel, the social novel, and later on the detective novel and the novel of production (Dis, 2:221). Shiller's line of reasoning is very close to the spirit of A. Tseitlin's article on genre in the same encyclopaedia for which Lukács was preparing his own contribution on the novel. In it Tseitlin expresses reservations about the generic definability of the novel in what appears to be a rhetorical question: 'But is the novel a genre?' Even a seemingly well-specified type of the novel such as the novel of adventure, concludes Tseitlin, is too broad a category to constitute a genre. Instead, one is only entitled to speak of separate genres within the novel of adventure, the novel of roguery, the detective novel, etc. This uncertainty over the idea of genre in the Russian debates of the 1930s was a significant part of the background to Mikhail Bakhtin's

¹⁵ For similar objections see also Rosenfel'd (Dis, 2:227) and Nusinov (Dis, 2:238); in 1946 Nusinov supported Bakhtin at the public defence of his dissertation.

¹⁶ The novel, Pereverzev submits, is a 'syncretic genre' and that is why it is absolutely 'hopeless' to analyse it only in relation to the epic (Dis, 2:231).

¹⁷ For a similar criticism see also T. Fokht (Dis, 2:224 and 3:235).

thinking of the novel when he entered the field of genre theory in a tacit polemic with Lukács's paper.

All these attempts to rethink and contest Lukács's paper in the direction of increased attention to the generically specific nature of the novel are counterbalanced by the desire—against all historical evidence—to impose a less fragmented and detailed picture of the novel as genre. Its most ambitious exponent, Mikhail Lifshits, who chaired the discussion,¹⁸ implies in his talk that attempts at greater differentiation might prove irrelevant, since the lasting and overwhelming trend in the current development of the novel is its gradual rapprochement with the epic, which, in turn, is to be considered as only one particular manifestation of the general process of homogenization of literary genres in socialist art (Dis, 3:249, 250). Lifshits's statement regarding literary genres closely parallels the Party's calls to abolish differences between village and town, on the one hand, and manual and intellectual labour, on the other. In the age of communism, all dissimilarities, otherwise inherent in art and social life, are bound to disappear and to be replaced by an essential and primordial harmony evoking the blissful state of unity, characteristic of the early classless societies.¹⁹

That the problems of the novel as genre were only secondary to the problems of modernity and social transformation is also evident from the preoccupation of the discussants with the as yet vague features of the contemporary Soviet novel, which they urgently wished to clarify. Logically, Lukács was accused on this account of not saying enough (if anything) about writers such as Fadeev (with whom Lukács and the entire board of *Literaturnyi kritik* were, as we have seen in the introduction, at war) and Panferov and about how the epic style of their novels differs from the bourgeois novel (Mirskii, Dis, 2:222). As Grib alleged, life itself was providing instances of a perfect blend between individual and collective views and emotions which fuelled the process of the epic transformation of literature under socialism.²⁰

¹⁸ It might appear strange and is perhaps indicative of the friendly and still competitive relationship between Lifshits and Lukács that the former does not mention this dispute in his memoirs, as if he did not remember it at all. Instead, he speaks of the 1936 discussion against vulgar sociology, where he was one of the central figures, as 'the first of the great literary discussions of the decade' (M. Lifshits, 'Iz avtobiografii idei', *Kontekst 1987*, Moscow, 1988, p. 285).

¹⁹ In impatient anticipation of this state of unity between the different arts, some of the discussants drew examples for the flowering of the epic from cinema, rather than from literature (cf. Grib's enthusiasm for 'Chapaev', Dis, 2:249). On other aspects of the art of socialist realism as a *Gesamtkunstwerk* see B. Groys's well-known *The Total Art of Stalinism*, Princeton, 1992.

²⁰ Grib (Dis, 3:244) adduces the large-scale construction of Belomorstoi and—at the other pole—Kirov's assassination as events which necessarily engender epic reactions.

Lukács's closing statement was designed to clear him of all the charges made against him in the discussion.²¹ His main target was Pereverzev. Like Kemenov, Lukács seems to miss the point of Pereverzev's objections. What Pereverzev said was that Lukács had to draw a picture of the novel at all stages of its evolution (antiquity, the Middle Ages, capitalism). Lukács's retort to this was an analogy to Marx's concentration on English capitalism alone, to the conscious neglect of capitalism in, say, Denmark or Portugal (Dis, 3:253). The point is obviously wide of the mark: for while Pereverzev insists on a diachronic variety in the interpretation of facts, Lukács replies that Marx did not seek to pursue an extended synchronic analysis of them. Later on, however, Lukács does eventually arrive at the actual sense of the message. This time his strategy is to blame Pereverzev for following Ranke's bourgeois relativism embodied in his infamous (for Lukács) slogan 'All epochs stand equally close to God.' By promoting this rule, Ranke has, Lukács believes, encouraged historians to obliterate the distinctions between progress and reaction and between the typical and the untypical. In his 'Theses towards the closing statement' (written in German in 1935), on which his concluding speech was built, Lukács's accusation against Pereverzev went further and he attacked him for envisaging an ever-present epic along with an ever-present novel, thus surrendering to 'empirical sociologism turning into idealism'.²² As one can see at this point, the very idea of modernity, to which Lukács was so eager to subscribe, is heavily compromised by his reluctance to recognize all developmental stages as equally worthy of study. Instead of conceiving history as a string of successive occurrences, each of which contributes to the next and passes over in 'sublation', Lukács becomes preoccupied with the apogee, the final and most glorious moment in the history of the novel. This choice cements his cultural conservatism, which makes later developments look necessarily worse than those preceding them: 'we cannot call Winckelmann, orientated as he is to Phidias, "outdated", and there is no way that we can join the "contemporary" Riegl with his promotion of late Roman artistic production' (Dis, 3:253).

²¹ In the stenographic records, we find evidence that Lukács's concluding speech was delivered in German, with Lifshits providing a consecutive translation which paraphrased Lukács's statements (see 'Institut filosofii Komakademii. Pravlennaia stenogramma diskussii po dokladu G. Lukacha "Problemy teorii romana"', Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences [RAN], Moscow, fond 355, opis' 2, edinita khraneniia 32, l. 145').

²² G. Lukács, 'Thesen zum Schlußwort der Diskussion über "Einige Probleme der Theorie des Romans"', in *Disput über den Roman: Beiträge aus der SU 1917 bis 1941*, ed. M. Wegner et al., Berlin and Weimar, 1988, p. 488.

Even socialist art, being new and revolutionary, is nevertheless deemed to be a specific point of crisis, where the high standards set by the 'great bourgeois novel' are, inevitably, temporarily suspended and must be aspired to once again in the future.

The only point of criticism Lukács accepts in his closing statement is the need to outline the features of the novel in relation to other genres, especially drama and the *Novelle* (Dis, 3:254). He partially fulfils this promise in his articles on the historical novel (1936–7), where a brilliant comparison between the historical novel and the historical drama can be found. Before that, however, he makes other corrections, elaborations, and refinements, the result of which can be seen in his article 'The novel as bourgeois epic' in the *Literary Encyclopaedia*.²³

Several moments in this article call for attention. First of all, already at the outset Lukács is trying to make a case for the irrelevance of studying the pre-bourgeois novel. In contrast to other genres, which the bourgeoisie adopted and used without altering their identity (Lukács's example is the drama), the novel under capitalism underwent such a substantial transformation, Lukács claims, that it became a predominantly 'new artistic form' (*LE*, 795), which stands on its own, independent of earlier brands of the novel.

Secondly, Lukács reinforces the contrasting connection between the novel and the epic. In the German version he devotes to this a special sub-heading, 'Epos und Roman', the text of which is preserved in the Russian version, but without the subtitle. Hegel is praised as the greatest revolutionizer of genre theory, for, by contending that the novel is the counterpart of the epic in bourgeois society, he saved the novel from its hitherto contemptible status as a 'low genre' (*LE*, 795) and emphasized its capacity for educating people for life in bourgeois society (*LE*, 800). In a sentence missing in the Russian text Lukács even speculates that, thanks to Hegel, 'the theory of the novel becomes a historical phase of the general theory of the great epic' (*DR*, 313–14). Being, on the other hand, the product of the decay of the genuine epic form,

²³ G. Lukács, 'Roman kak burzhuaiznaia epopeia', *Literaturnaia entsiklopediia*, Vol. 9, Moscow, 1935, cc. 795–832 (abbreviated hereafter as '*LE*', with column numbers given in brackets). Again, there is a German version of this text, which differs in places from the Russian: G. Lukács, 'Der Roman', in *Disput über den Roman: Beiträge aus der SU 1917 bis 1941*, ed. M. Wegner et al., Berlin and Weimar, 1988, pp. 311–59 (abbreviated hereafter as '*DR*', with page numbers given in brackets). The German text is dated 1934, i.e. it predates the theses to Lukács's closing statement and also the *Referat*, presented at the end of December 1934 at the discussion. The Russian version, which bears clear marks of attention to the issues raised in the discussion, can be assumed to have been written in early 1935, immediately after the debates.

the novel is the surrogate epic of a society which has destroyed all opportunities for authentic epic creation. Thus, taken as a whole, Lukács's considerations work to impose further restrictions still on the possibility of understanding the novel as an historically autonomous artistic form and, thereby, on the idea of modernity as the celebration of the new as worthy in its own right and yet destined to perish in its turn.

The third new moment in the article for the *Literary Encyclopaedia* is the shift of emphasis within the various sub-periods of the bourgeois novel. The period of the 'conquest of everyday reality' is singled out as the time in which a genuinely realistic novel is first summoned into being (*LE*, 813). But it is also the time of the first serious challenge to the great realistic form, resulting from the ever-increasing powerlessness of man to cope with the reification of life and his ensuing withdrawal into a non-reified, yet also less real, inner life of the self (*LE*, 816). Later, in the sub-period of the "'New" realism and the decay of the form of the novel', the representation of truly typical characters and situations gives way to a false dilemma: either the banal, the average or the 'original', the 'interesting', the exotic. Hence also the deeper preoccupation, on Lukács's part, with popular literature, stigmatized as an apology of bourgeois life (*LE*, 821, 826). A more material picture of the trend towards the epic is attempted in the sub-section on the 'Prospect for the socialist novel'.²⁴ Drawing mainly on Lenin, Lukács reassures the reader that the state is on the wane and that the world, relieved of bureaucratic and reified institutions, will once again become amenable to epic depiction. The names of Sholokhov and Lukács's personal enemy Fadeev are added to the previously scandalously short list of masters of the new epic novel.²⁵

A brief conclusion is in place after the examination of Lukács's most significant writings on the novel in 1934–5 in the context of the debates that were current at the time. For Lukács, the novel is a genre without

²⁴ It is important to note that, unlike both the German version and the conference paper, which speak of the 'prospects of socialist *realism*', here Lukács is more modest and more concrete. One reason for this might be his unwillingness to trespass against the rules of clear allocation of powers and fields of competence among the contributors to what was considered an almost official, and certainly Party-sanctioned, edition.

²⁵ In the German version this list is expanded to include Panferov and Gladkov (*DR*, 357). Again, a quotation from Stalin (*DR*, 356) is replaced by a quotation from Lenin in the Russian text (*LE*, 830). The German version is slightly longer, due partly to quotations from German writers dropped in the Russian text (e.g. H. Mann, *DR*, 351). There are also some minor stylistic changes, which were the obvious prerogative of the Russian translator, whose work Lukács was not in a position to supervise.

predecessors; it owes its genesis only to capitalist reality and embodies that reality in full measure. On the other hand, however, the novel is an inferior heir to the epic, and its entire development is subordinated to the anticipated glorious return of the epic in the upcoming second (and final) kingdom of freedom and classlessness. Hence Lukács's deeply controversial and compromised vision of modernity, which attempts a reconciliation between soberly calculated historicism and enthusiastic utopian eschatology.

BAKHTIN'S FOUR ESSAYS ON THE NOVEL (1935–1941) IN
THE CONTEXT OF THE RUSSIAN TRADITION AND THE
1930S DEBATES

Exploring the ratio of inherited and new elements in Bakhtin's approach to the novel is a vital step if we are to discuss seriously his attitudes to modernity. Surprisingly, the Russian intellectual field from the late nineteenth century up to the 1930s still appears to be uncomfortably under-researched as a source of Bakhtin's thought. Despite significant steps towards studying the Kantian and the neo-Kantian background of Bakhtin (cf. the literature in Chapter 5, n. 4), we do not know enough about the home traditions of theoretical thought on culture, religion, philosophy, and literature. There are notable exceptions,²⁶ and most of the thinkers and scholars discussed in them will not

²⁶ See, among others, C. Emerson, 'Solov'ev, the late Tolstoy, and the early Bakhtin on the problem of shame and love', *Slavic Review*, 1991, No. 3, pp. 663–71; C. Emerson, 'Russkoe pravoslavie i rannii Bakhtin', *Bakhtinskii sbornik*, 1991, Vol. 2, pp. 44–69; C. Emerson, 'Protiv zakonomernosti: Solov'ev, Shestov, pozdnii Tolstoy, rannii Bakhtin', in *Bakhtinologia*, ed. K. Isupov, St Petersburg, 1995, pp. 117–32; N. Perlina, 'Funny Things are Happening on the Way to the Bakhtin Forum', *Kennan Institute Occasional Papers*, 1989, No. 231; N. Perlina, 'Khronotopy bakhtinskogo khronotopa', *DKH*, 1996, No. 3, pp. 77–96; N. Bonetskaia, 'Bakhtin v 1920-e gody', *DKH*, 1994, No. 1, pp. 16–62; N. Bonetskaia, 'Teoriia dialoga u M. Bakhtina i P. Florenskogo', in *M. M. Bakhtin i filosofskaia kul'tura XX veka. Problemy bakhtinologii*, ed. K. Isupov, St Petersburg, 1991, Vol. 1, Part 2, pp. 52–60; N. Nikolaev, 'The Nevel School of Philosophy (Bakhtin, Kagan and Pumpianskii) between 1918 and 1925: Materials from Pumpianskii's Archives', in *The Contexts of Bakhtin: Philosophy, Aesthetics, Reception*, ed. D. Shepherd, Amsterdam, 1998, pp. 29–41; V. Makhlin, 'Tretii Renessans', in *Bakhtinologia*, ed. K. Isupov, St Petersburg, 1995, pp. 132–54; N. Tamarchenko, 'M. Bakhtin and V. Rozanov', in *Bakhtinologia*, pp. 171–8; N. Tamarchenko, 'Problema avtora i geroia i spor o bogochelovechestve (M. M. Bakhtin, E. N. Trubetskoi i Vl. S. Solov'ev)', *Bakhtinskii chleniia*, Vitebsk, 1998, Vol. 2, pp. 105–30; V. Babich, 'Dialog poetik: Andrei Belyi, G. G. Shpet i M. M. Bakhtin', *DKH*, 1998, No. 1, pp. 5–54; M. Sokolianskii, 'M. M. Bakhtin i G. O. Vinokur: dva podkhoda k nauchnoi poetike', *Russian Literature*, 1998, No. 2, pp. 227–39. Two articles on Bakhtin and Vinogradov also deserve a special mention: N. Perlina, 'A Dialogue on the Dialogue: The Bakhtin-Vinogradov Exchange (1924–1965)', *Slavic and East European Journal*,

fall within the scope of my attention here. Instead, I concentrate exclusively on work in literary theory and history to discuss in more detail Veselovskii, the Formalists, and Ol'ga Freidenberg and to touch upon Grifitsov. At the outset, my aim is to outline and analyse their work in a rigidly selective way and with special reference to their formative effect on Bakhtin's writings on the novel. Later in this chapter, I examine Bakhtin's reactions to this inherited theoretical field.

The Intellectual Background of the Essays

When in his 1929 essay 'Sketch and Anecdote' Viktor Shklovskii, in a typically cursory manner, gives an overview of the Russian theory of the novel, he arrives at a dispiriting conclusion:

Greece did not bequeath to us a theory of the novel, though it left behind novels and novelistic patterns, part of which live to this day. But for the novel which has existed for centuries there was no respect, it was extra-theoretical (*vneleoretichen*), and in Russian literature, too, the novel and the *povest'* remained for long an extra-theoretical genre.²⁷

Shklovskii's proclivity towards swift and school-biased generalizations led him to an estimate which is only partially true. His friend and fellow Formalist Boris Eikhenbaum records in 1924 the appearance of learned dissertations on the novel in Russia as early as 1844.²⁸ Furthermore, Eikhenbaum interprets these texts as an unmistakable token of the growing self-consciousness of Russian prose. The fact remains, however, that it was not until the 1890s, in the writings of Alexandr Veselovskii, that a serious account of the origins of the novel was attempted in Russia.²⁹

1988, No. 4, pp. 526–41; R. Bush, 'Bakhtin's *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo* and V. V. Vinogradov's *O khudozhestvennoi proze*—A Dialogic Relationship', in *Bakhtin and Otherness*, ed. R. Barsky and M. Holquist, special issue of *Discours social/Social Discourse*, 1990, No. 1–2, pp. 311–23.

²⁷ V. Shklovskii, 'Ocherk i anekdot', *O teorii prozy*, Moscow, 1929, p. 246.

²⁸ The text in point is M. A. Tulov's *O romane*; Eikhenbaum establishes the fact in his *Lermontov. Opyt istoriko-literaturnoi otsenki*, Leningrad, 1924, p. 139.

²⁹ There are attempts to declare Bakhtin the first great theoretician of the novel in Russia, see e.g. M. Aucouturier, 'The Theory of the Novel in Russia in the 1930s: Lukács and Bakhtin', in *The Russian Novel from Pushkin to Pasternak*, ed. J. Garrard, New Haven, 1983, pp. 229–40. While stressing the power of his insights, such attempts, as I hope to demonstrate, seem to underestimate Bakhtin's embeddedness in a rich preceding (and coterminous) Russian tradition of theoretical discourse on literature and the novel. For a more balanced approach, see O. Osovskii, *Dialog v bol'shom vremeni*, Saransk, 1997, pp. 68–112; a richer and more recent outline of the Russian theory of the novel can be found in C. Emerson, 'Theory', in *The Cambridge Companion to the Classic Russian Novel*, ed. M. V. Jones and R. F. Miller, Cambridge, 1998, pp. 271–93.

Veselovskii's essays are not of theoretical design and, in his own words, he finds himself unable to answer the question why the novel gradually becomes the dominant expression of modernity. Instead, he chooses to contemplate the 'how' of this process. Even after setting this restrictive framework, Veselovskii is still remarkably cautious about letting causal explanation govern his discourse. Thus he belies the received opinion that his endeavours were of strictly genetic nature. What he offers in his 'Iz vvedeniia v istoricheskuiu poetiku' ['From an Introduction to Historical Poetics'] (1893), is a 'parallel, which, perhaps, could clarify for us not the genesis of the novel, but the features of the social environment, capable of cultivating it'.³⁰ Since Veselovskii's reconstruction of the way the novel arose is of particular relevance to Bakhtin's views, I shall allow myself a longer quotation:

In Greece, the drama is still in the zone (*v polose*) of national historical development; the novel belongs in the time when Alexander the Great's conquests disturbed this development, when an autonomous Greece has dissolved into a world-wide monarchy, mixing East and West; the tradition (*predanie*) of political freedom darkened, together with the ideal of a citizen, and the individual, feeling lonely in the vast space of cosmopolitanism, retreated into himself, taking interest in matters of the inner life in the absence of social ones, building up utopias for lack of legends (*predanie*). Such are the main topics of the Greek novel: there is nothing traditional in them, everything is intimate in a bourgeois fashion; this is a drama transferred to the hearth, from the stage—into the conditions of the everyday round of life (*obikhod*). . .³¹

It is essential to note Veselovskii's vivid interest in a continuous history of the novel, stretching from antiquity up to his beloved Renaissance period. With his dauntingly erudite studies of Boccaccio and Rabelais in mind, Boris Engel'gardt, the author of one of the few astute contemporary analyses of Russian Formalism, scrutinizes Veselovskii's affection for the Renaissance in terms other than those of sheer personal predilection: 'Now, the very designation "Renaissance" shows

³⁰ A. N. Veselovskii, *Istoricheskaia poetika*, ed. with an introduction and notes by V. M. Zhirmunskii, Leningrad, 1940, p. 66.

³¹ Ibid., p. 66. Cf. also the 1899 'Tri glavy iz Istoricheskoi poetiki' (Ibid., p. 380), and Veselovskii's later conspectus of the unfinished Chapter 7 ('Cosmopolitan trends') of his 'Poetika siuzhetov' (1897–1906): 'The cosmopolitanism of the Alexandrian epoch; instead of a national hero—a solitary person, scattered around the world. Secluded life of feeling; geographic expanse—and utopia' (Ibid., p. 393, emphasis original). In his lectures of 1958–59, Bakhtin reinforced his acceptance of the lack of 'a single national centre and a national central character' (*edinogo natsional'nogo tsentra i natsional'nogo tsentral'nogo geroia*) as a prerequisite for the transition from epic to novel (cf. *LH*, 76).

that here the literary historian is concerned above all with certain old intellectual and artistic currents, which have been muffled for some time by other phenomena of spiritual culture and which are now re-viving for a new life in social and individual consciousness.³² Veselovskii, like Pereverzev in the 1930s, insists on the importance of the pre-bourgeois and early Renaissance novel, and does not cherish the idea of a crucial break in the history of the genre, after which it takes on an allegedly new identity. For him, the rise of the novel is inseparable from contradictory historical developments allowing for the discovery of an inexhaustible and cosmopolitan outer world along with the private and everyday dimensions of a life by the fireplace. Thus the novel is already endowed with Protean features: it can stimulate the exploration of the world while fostering a sense of solitude; it can broaden the horizons of human existence while making people more sensitive to their own selves.

The Formalists inherit the idea of continuity and retain it in a strongly modified version.³³ Their concept of continuity is deprived of the concrete historical demarcations within the flow of an otherwise unbroken development which we see Veselovskii or Pereverzev draw in their writings. The notion of *historical* continuity is ousted by the Humboldtian idea of an ever-present form-building 'energy, which, by its essence, is constant—it does not appear and it does not disappear, and because of this it acts beyond time'.³⁴ Paradoxical though this may sound, Eikhenbaum calls this energy 'historical', only to conclude that

³² B. M. Engel'gardt, *Aleksandr Nikolaevich Veselovskii*, Petrograd, 1924, p. 101. Engel'gardt's *Formal'nyi metod v istorii literatury* (1927) was known in the Bakhtin circle, and P. Medvedev mentions it several times in his own 1928 study of the Russian Formalists.

³³ On Bakhtin and the Formalists see, above all, A. Hansen-Löwe, *Der Russische Formalismus. Methodologische Rekonstruktion seiner Entwicklung aus dem Prinzip der Verfremdung*, Vienna, 1978, pp. 436–61; P. Steiner, *Russian Formalism: A Metapoetics*, Ithaca, 1984, pp. 33–6 and 261–7; M. Aucouturier, *Le Formalisme Russe*, Paris, 1994, pp. 88–93; I. Shaitanov, 'Bakhtin i formalisty v prostranstve istoricheskoi poetiki', in *M. M. Bakhtin i perspektivy gumanitarnykh nauk*, ed. V. Makhlin, Vitebsk, 1994, pp. 16–21 (on this see my review in *Australian Slavonic and East European Studies*, 1995, No. 2, pp. 151–6, esp. p. 152, and my article 'Formalisty i Bakhtin. K voprosu o preemstvennosti v russkom literaturovedenii', in *Literaturovedenie na poroge XXI veka*, ed. P. A. Nikolaev, Moscow, 1998, pp. 64–71), and Shaitanov's later text 'Zhanrovoe slovo u Bakhtina i formalistov', *Voprosy literatury*, 1996, No. 3, pp. 89–114. On a particular parallel between Tynianov and Bakhtin, see M. Weinstein, 'Le débat Tynjanov/Bakhtin ou la question du matériau', *Revue des Etudes Slaves*, 1992, No. 2, pp. 297–322; and D. Kujundzic's book on Nietzsche, Tynianov and Bakhtin, *The Returns of History: Russian Nietzscheans After Modernity*, Albany, 1997.

³⁴ B. Eikhenbaum, *Lermontov*, p. 9. For an excellent analysis of the Formalist idea of historicism, see Fr. Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*, Princeton, 1972, pp. 97–8.

this is a special type of historicity yielding a grasp of the facts that withdraws them from time.

Reformulating continuity into constancy, the Formalists present the fate of the various literary genres as a set of transformations that follow predictable patterns. Replete with dynamics, this picture of alternating ups and downs is nevertheless bereft of history. Since genre is conceived predominantly as an indwelling system of devices for the 'deformation of the material'³⁵ and its estrangement, it is placed beyond time and social change. Admittedly, the position of genres varies within the literary system, for they descend from supremacy to the periphery and ascend back to the centre to assume a leading role. In these struggles for domination, however, the generic repertoire remains essentially the same all along.³⁶ The question of the genesis of literary genres loses its relevance and is supplanted by attention to the change in their status.³⁷ Literary forms are not born and do not disappear, they only change their resonance and their place on the map of literature. The war they have to fight has a somewhat melodramatic flavour, for it lacks the authentic severity of a struggle for survival. Inferior species never wither away: they are assigned a secure place, whether on the bottom or on the top, and periods of oblivion are inevitably followed by feasts of canonization. Tynianov's account of this process almost assumes the tone of a fairy tale: 'In the epoch of the decomposition of a certain genre, it moves from the centre to the periphery, while from the trivialities of literature, from its backyard and lowlands, a new phenomenon emerges in its place.'³⁸

This invites the question of how a genre behaves when it makes its way up from the 'backyard' and reaches the top of the literary hierarchy. An earlier text by Tynianov offers an answer bearing directly on Bakhtin's future theory. Referring to the ode at the stage where it is already a 'senior' genre, Tynianov emphasizes that 'it existed not so much as a finished, self-enclosed genre, but as a certain constructional

³⁵ V. Shklovskii, *Mater'ial i stil' v romane L'va Tolstogo 'Voina i mir'*, Moscow, 1928, p. 9.

³⁶ 'As regards literary genres, one has to say the following: there cannot be an unspecified number of literary series . . . there is a set number of genres, connected by a set plot crystallography' (V. Shklovskii, *Gamburgskii schet*, Leningrad, 1928, p. 41).

³⁷ 'The celebrated sequentiality in literary history—epic, lyric, drama—is not a sequentiality of origin, but rather a sequentiality of canonization and ousting' (V. Shklovskii, 'Ornamentálnaia proza', *O teorii prozy*, p. 205).

³⁸ Iu. Tynianov, 'Literaturnyi fakt' (1924), *Arkhaisty i novatory*, Leningrad, 1929, p. 9. Cf. also Shklovskii's description of the 'non-canonized, deserted (*glukho*) existence' of Derzhavin's tradition in the poetry of Kiukhel'beker and Griboedov in his article 'Literatura vne "siuzheta"', *O teorii prozy*, p. 227.

tendency'.³⁹ Tynianov can be credited here with asserting the possibility of a differently conceived generic identity: for him, genre is no longer a cluster of firmly defined and static marks but a dynamic word-set (*ustanovka slova*), a direction. This is a crucial point, in so far as it allows a new picture of intergeneric relations to emerge. Resting on an open word-direction, (senior) genres can attract other genres, or they can even drag them along, colonize them and 'liven up' at their expense. What is more, new life-substance, previously thought unsuitable, could now enter the domain of literature through the open door of a generic set (*ustanovka*).⁴⁰ Finally, more space is left for safe alterations within the now notably more pliable confines of a genre: 'the absorbing genre (the ode) could change out of all recognition without ceasing to perceive itself as an ode, as long as the formal elements were fixed by [their] orientation (*ustanovka*) to the principal discourse function'.⁴¹ Shklovskii amplifies this statement and applies it directly to the genre of the novel: 'the canon of the novel as genre is perhaps more often than any other [canon] capable of parodying and modifying itself'.⁴² Thus, with Shklovskii, the limits of the novel become remarkably more flexible and loose, and the canon of the genre much more permeable.⁴³ For him, the existence of the novel entails self-parody as a means of examining and reaffirming the identity of the genre. *Tristram*

³⁹ Iu. Tynianov, 'Oda kak oratorskii zhanr' (1922), *Arkhaisty i novatory*, p. 74. The ode and the poetics of Russian Classicism were widely discussed in the Bakhtin Circle in the 1920s; cf. S. S. Konkina and L. S. Konkina, *Mikhail Bakhtin. Stranitsy zhizni i tvorchestva*, Saransk, 1993, p. 183, and N. Nikolaev, 'O teoreticheskom nasledii L. V. Pumpianskogo', *Kontekst 1982*, Moscow, 1983, pp. 289–303, where Pumpianskii's controversial reaction to *Arkhaisty i novatory* is evidenced (pp. 295–6, n. 17). Voloshinov's work on Lomonosov's ode and his contacts with Tynianov in 1922–24 have been established by D. Iunov (see D. Iunov, 'Glavnye trudy V. N. Voloshinova. Rekonstruktsiia' [1999], unpublished manuscript, p. 1).

⁴⁰ Shklovskii's famous analysis of the device of insertion in 'Kak sdelan Don Kikhot' can be said to illuminate the compositional equivalent of the novel's omnivorousness. Through its ever-expanding ramifications and insertions, the novel 'prepares' itself to accommodate the influx of new material (see V. Shklovskii, *O teorii prozy*, pp. 91–125).

⁴¹ Iu. Tynianov, 'Oda kak oratorskii zhanr', p. 74.

⁴² V. Shklovskii, 'Literatura vne "siuzheta"', p. 230.

⁴³ Interestingly, there is certainly an indirect connection between Bakhtin, Shklovskii, and Viacheslav Ivanov on this point. When preparing during the second half of the 1920s a German book publication (1932) of his early work on Dostoevsky, Viacheslav Ivanov added some new material, including a paragraph that echoes Shklovskii's idea and foreshadows Bakhtin's praise of novelistic versatility and flexibility. Ivanov sees the novel as 'Protean—that is to say, so fluid and transmutable that it seemed bound to no set form, comprising, with equal readiness and flexibility, narration and commentary, dialogue and soliloquy, the telescopic and the microscopic, the dithyrambic and the analytical' (V. Ivanov, *Freedom and the Tragic Life. A Study in Dostoevsky*, trans. N. Cameron, London, 1952, p. 6).

Shandy is, of course, his most extreme and aggressive example of a novel that does not fear the process of invigorating self-mockery.

Thought of in this way, the struggle over genre ceases to be a struggle for the preservation of fixed attributes and becomes instead 'a struggle over the direction of the poetic word, over its orientation'.⁴⁴ This revolutionary shift in the understanding of genre, especially the equation of genre and word-tendency, necessarily results in what we have seen to be an unprecedented assurance of the fate of any given genre. After descending from its position as a 'senior' genre, Tynianov reassuringly claims, the ode does not vanish: 'Doomed to a clandestine, underground life, disgraced, it rises to the surface in the revolt of the archaists.'⁴⁵

For all the odds in the fortunes of genres, the ultimately unalterable generic make-up of the literary system requires the Formalists to explain its growth and expansion. Commentators on Russian Formalism have long explored the feel of insufficiency the Formalists experienced *vis-à-vis* the closed territory of literature, fenced off and jealously guarded by them from the outset. Equally well studied are the ways out suggested by Formalist theory. Here I want to address the relevance of these suggestions with Bakhtin's subsequent discourse on the novel in mind.

The dissatisfaction with the 'purity' of the literary series is apparent as early as 1922 in Tynianov's 'The Ode as an Oratorical Genre'. Rich in implications, this article is especially unambiguous in its insistence on analysing the literary system in correlation with neighbouring systems, that is 'with the nearest extra-literary series—the spoken word (*rech'*)', with the material of adjacent verbal arts and of everyday speech'.⁴⁶ The proposed attention to extra-literary but still strictly verbal series elicited different responses among the Formalists. While approving of it in principle, Eikhenbaum, after a period of characteristic interest in *skaz*, parted ways with Tynianov and focused on the significance of more remote series, such as literary institutions and the social status of the writer. To Shklovskii's charge that he fails to attend to the meaning of extra-aesthetic factors,⁴⁷ Eikhenbaum, whose plans

⁴⁴ Iu. Tynianov, 'Oda kak oratorskii zhanr', pp. 85–6.

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 84–5.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 49.

⁴⁷ Shklovskii's reproach is characteristically idiosyncratic in style and is directed equally against himself: 'Boris plays the violin all the time. He has many faults. The first of them—one that my works share—is a disregard for the significance of extra-aesthetic series' (V. Shklovskii, *Tret'ia fabrika*, Moscow, 1926, p. 100).

to write a book under the title *Literary Labour* have recently been shown to date back to 1924,⁴⁸ seems to have responded by pushing things in the opposite direction. His 1927 article 'Literaturnyi byt'⁴⁹ stultifies Tynianov's premises and largely suspends attention to the linguistic aspects of literature.

Tynianov's idea was, however, confirmed and elaborated by the most inveterate defender of pristine literariness among the Formalists, Viktor Shklovskii. In 1926 he made up for his confessed faults by willingly conceding that 'alteration of works of art can and does arise for non-aesthetic reasons, e.g. because of the influence on a given language of another one, or because of the emergence of a new social order'.⁵⁰ If this statement goes rather too far along the path towards reconciliation with the new reality of 'social orders', Shklovskii produced other statements in which his proximity to Tynianov's views is couched in more elegant fashion. In the same book, only a few pages later, he commends Tynianov's article 'The Literary Fact' for establishing a mobile concept of literature. To generous acclaim Shklovskii appends a poignant metaphorical conclusion of his own: 'Literature', he asserts, 'grows through the margins (*kraem*), sucking in extra-aesthetic material . . . Literature subsists by spreading over non-literature'.⁵¹ It is especially important to note that in Shklovskii's understanding of literary evolution the incorporation of extra-literary material and the position of marginality presuppose each other. The expansion of literature proceeds by pushing back the boundaries of literariness, a process that takes place at the margins, in the 'lowlands'. The marginal is the chief entrance point for the elements of everyday language and life. Going back to the ideas of his 1922 article, Tynianov builds on his and his fellow Formalists' work to argue the importance of the correlation between literature and everyday life. The fundamental mode of this correlation is speech-based: '*everyday life* (byt) relates to literature primarily

⁴⁸ Cf. M. Chudakova's commentary in B. Eikhenbaum, *O literature*, Moscow, 1987, p. 521.

⁴⁹ B. Eikhenbaum, *Moi vremennik*, Leningrad, 1929, pp. 49–58. Several translations have been attempted of the virtually unrenderable word *byt*. Ann Shukman and L. M. O'Toole translate it as 'life' or 'everyday life' (see *Russian Poetics in Translation*, ed. A. Shukman and L. M. O'Toole, Oxford, 1977, Vol. 4, p. 16); Carol Any prefers 'literary milieu' (C. Any, *Boris Eikhenbaum. Voices of a Russian Formalist*, Stanford, 1994, p. 105 and ff.); and Victor Erlich's choice is 'literary mores' (V. Erlich, *Russian Formalism. History—Doctrine*, New Haven and London, 3rd edn., 1981, pp. 125–9 and *passim*). Shukman and O'Toole's translation, I believe, has, despite its lack of precision, the advantage of a higher degree of adequacy and a most welcome flexibility.

⁵⁰ V. Shklovskii, *Tret'ia fabrika*, p. 95.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

through its speech aspect'.⁵² It is precisely this belief that informs Tynianov's and other Formalists' explicit interest in the novel's 'changing method of introducing into literature extra-literary speech material'.⁵³

The discovery of the spoken word and of everyday life in their relation to literature is of invaluable significance for the entire scene of literary and cultural theory in inter-war Russia, not least for Bakhtin's theoretical project. In the realm of literary theory, it can be matched only by the Formalists' path-breaking invention of the idea of immanent literariness. On the road from self-sufficient literariness to open interaction between literature and everyday life and speech, the Formalist movement went through a dangerous rite of passage and, by accepting the self-destructive consequences attending this transition, sealed its own intellectual integrity.

The idea of continuity in the life of literary forms that dominated the Russian theory of the novel in the 1920s and 1930s can be discerned in yet another guise in the work of Ol'ga Freidenberg, whose book *The Poetics of Plot and Genre*, completed in 1935 and published in 1936, Bakhtin knew and quoted from in his *Rabelais* (R, 54).⁵⁴ Trained as a classicist in Petersburg by some of the most renowned specialists in Greek antiquity, who also taught Bakhtin,⁵⁵ Freidenberg found in

⁵² Iu. Tynianov, 'O literaturnoi evoliutsii' (1927), *Arkhaisty i novatory*, p. 41.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 37.

⁵⁴ Bakhtin also quotes from the same book in the preparatory materials for an article under the title 'Satira' of 1940 (SS, 34). On Bakhtin and Freidenberg see K. Moss, *Olga Mikhailovna Freidenberg: Soviet Mythologist in a Soviet Context* (Ph.D Dissertation, 1984), Ann Arbor, 1988, pp. 150–91; A. Kullik, 'Olga M. Freidenberg od mitu do literatury', *Przeglad humanistyczny*, 1987, No. 11, pp. 149–62; N. Perlina, 'From Historical Semantics to the Semantics of Cultural Forms: O. M. Freidenberg's Contribution to Russian Literary Theory', *Soviet Studies in Literature*, 1990–1, No. 1, pp. 5–21; N. Perlina, 'Olga Freidenberg on Myth, Folklore, and Literature', *Slavic Review*, 1991, No. 2, pp. 371–84 (see also K. Moss's reply in the same issue); K. Moss, 'Introduction', in O. Freidenberg, *Image and Concept: Mythopoetic Roots of Literature*, Amsterdam, 1997, pp. 1–27; see also numerous publications in Russian, notably by Iu. Lotman, V. Ivanov, and N. Braginskaia (a good bibliography of Russian work on Freidenberg can be found in I. Protopopova, '"Grecheskii roman" v khronotope dvadtsatykh', *DKH*, 1995, No. 4, pp. 123–4). My own account rests on Freidenberg's major works and on the research I carried out in Ol'ga Freidenberg's archive in Oxford in the summer of 1996. On contacts between other members of the Bakhtin Circle and Freidenberg see Moss, 'Introduction', pp. 21–2, and Iu. Medvedev, 'Na puti k sozdaniu sotsiologicheskoi poetiki', *DKH*, 1998, No. 2, p. 31.

⁵⁵ T. Zielinski and Ivan Tolstoi are the most prominent in this string of brilliant scholars of ancient Greece. On their impact on Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle see N. Perlina's erudite and lucid 'Funny Things are Happening on the Way to the Bakhtin Forum'. On attentively reading Zielinski's work, one might find Perlina's claim that Bakhtin's genre theory was directly related to Zielinski's ideas (set out in the articles 'Ideia pravstvennogo opravdaniia' and 'Proiskhozhdenie komedii' in his book *Iz zhizni idei*) to be perhaps rather strong.

the Greek novel a life-long source of fascination. In her unpublished memoirs *The Shoots of Life* (*Probeg zhizni*), she gives an account of her initiation into the field: 'I knew almost nothing about the Greek novel. Dealing with it was not the done thing. After Rohde,⁵⁶ nobody had touched it, and those who had hadn't moved it on any further.' Even at Petersburg University, Freidenberg remembers, 'the courses on literature were confined at this time to the Classical period. Hellenism was regarded as a decline. They did not even get as far as the novel. People were ashamed of it as of a fallen daughter.'⁵⁷ Against this background, Freidenberg's ambition to say a new word on the novel is even more striking. She calls the moment of her decision to take up the Greek novel the most important day of her life.⁵⁸

Leaning on Nikolai Marr's method of 'semantic palaeontology', which identifies the traces of a unitary and primordial mythological heritage at all later stages of historical development (usually understood by Marr and his school as coinciding with various socio-economic formations in the Marxist sense),⁵⁹ Freidenberg defines as the centre of her work the notion that 'differences are a form of identity, while sameness bears in itself heterogeneity'.⁶⁰ In fact, however, the nice balance of this formula is destroyed in Freidenberg's writings in strong favour of identity. Applied too straightforwardly in her *Poetics*, the principle of identity produces a picture according to which the novel is no more than a version of the epic. Both are said to descend from a common mythological legacy that guarantees their generic proximity: 'the Greek novel, in which the same folklore heritage is used as in the epic, is by its plot repertoire one of the variants of the epic' (*P*, 269). This, however, does not abolish the type of difference that Marxism craves to detect or, if not detectable, to conjure up. Freidenberg

⁵⁶ Freidenberg first turns to Rohde in 1922 in her article 'Vstuplenie k grecheskomu romanu', which remained unpublished until 1995. After praising him ('The history of the study of the Greek novel is very easy to outline: Erwin Rohde started it and finished it'), Freidenberg is quick to distance herself from the master (see O. Freidenberg, 'Vstuplenie k grecheskomu romanu', *DKH*, 1995, No. 4, p. 78). Rohde is also mentioned several times in Bakhtin's essays on the novel. Bakhtin calls his book *Der griechische Roman und seine Vorläufer* (1876) 'the best book on the history of the ancient novel' (*EN*, 4), while the prominent Marxist critic Mikhail Lifshits brands him, along with Nietzsche, as a predecessor of fascist ideology (*Dis*, 3: 247).

⁵⁷ Ol'ga Freidenberg Archive, folder 2, notebooks III–IV, pp. 125–6. I should like to thank Dr Ann Pasternak Slater for her kind permission to acquaint myself with Freidenberg's memoirs and to quote from them.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

⁵⁹ See O. Freidenberg, *Poetika siazhetia i zhanra*, Leningrad, 1936, p. 32; subsequent references in text as *P*, followed by page number.

⁶⁰ Ol'ga Freidenberg Archive, folder 3, notebooks V–VI, p. 202.

argues, manifestly under the influence of Marr, that in the hands of different social classes at different historical stages the common mythological heritage has been differently shaped: 'as an epic in the early slave system, and as a novel by the already rich class of money-owning slave-holders in the Hellenistic period' (*P*, 268).

Insisting on the underlying sameness of the epic and the novel, Freidenberg seems to adhere to Veselovskii's view of the novel as an epic clad in everyday dress. 'The Greek novel', she writes, 'is humanized and rendered real; heroic deeds, in accordance with changes in social structure and thinking, have here become adventures' (*P*, 273). In the novel, fate appears already in the lowered meaning of 'good fortune' (*P*, 276).

The trouble with Freidenberg's ideas lies in the fact that, eventually, all genres merge, thanks to their common mythological ancestry. The novel fuses not only with the epic, but also with the lyric, the drama, the Passion.⁶¹ This list could be even longer, for each of these genres turns out in the end to be just a facet of another. Paradoxically, while Freidenberg admits that ancient literature provides patterns for later European art up to the age of industrial capitalism (*P*, 332), she is reluctant to ascribe to the Greek novel a similar capacity to generate recurrent narrative models. These do not originate in the novel's own generic specificity, but rather in 'primitive thought'. For that reason, Freidenberg argues, 'the Greek novel is not the stable genre from which all European novels of adventure are allegedly copied' (*P*, 277). Thus under the stern gaze of a thinker inclined to believe in 'primitive thought' as a universal source and essential feature of human culture, the novel proves to be constantly threatened with loss of identity and dissolution into the eternal realm of myth.

Finally, we need to consider briefly a book which, despite its patent eclecticism, risked the title *A Theory of the Novel*.⁶² Its author, Boris Griftsov, would seem to have borrowed this title from Lukács, whose name he mentions approvingly a couple of times and whose *Theory of the Novel* (the first edition of 1920) appears in Griftsov's bibliography.

⁶¹ See O. Freidenberg, 'Evangelië—odin iz vidov grecheskogo romana', *Ateist*, 1930, No. 59, pp. 371–84; Mikhail Lifshits, who accuses bourgeois literary historians of lacking in scholarly courage and for that reason of being unable to connect the novel with the 'Gospel parables' (*Dis*, 3: 248), must have known Freidenberg's article.

⁶² B. A. Griftsov, *Teoriia romana*, Moscow, 1927; subsequent references in text as *T*, followed by page number. Bakhtin refers to Griftsov's book in *DN* (p. 372). At the beginning of a long manuscript in Bakhtin's archive, from which the well-known text on Goethe and the *Bildungsroman* stems, Bakhtin's notes on, and extracts from, Griftsov's book can be found.

Griftsov's book lacks a clearly stated organizing principle; it is, rather, a cursory history of the genre sprinkled with some general observations. Like his contemporaries, he, too, refers to the authority of Rohde (*T*, 147) and points to Greece as the birthplace of the novel (*T*, 17). It is worth noting that Griftsov pictures the history of the novel as a process of 'gradual separation from the other, more artificial, genres'. Becoming 'ever more aware of its naturalness and of its unique right to naturalness', the novel forced the other genres to withdraw and die out (*T*, 9-10). Driving them to a 'miserable state, the novel conquered the entire field of verbal culture' (*T*, 19). This does not, however, mean that Griftsov claims a continuous existence for the novel: 'There is not an unbroken history of the novel. It has flourished several times, but always sporadically and locally' (*T*, 18). The very idea of the 'omnipotence' of the novel, he thinks, 'would be illusory and dangerous' (*T*, 19). In inventorying the history of the genre, Griftsov stresses, not without strong influence from the Formalists, that the periods when prose is in the ascendant alternate with spells of decline when poetry thrives. Although the reasons why Griftsov should find the omnipotence of the novel undesirable are not made entirely explicit, he does intimate that the novel can be morally detrimental. Flaubert's *Emma Bovary* is his example of personal destruction as the consequence of trust in the illusions that novels create and nurture. In his revealing conclusion, Griftsov seems wholeheartedly to endorse Lukács's idea of the moral superiority of the epic over the novel: 'true, the novel can depict everything. But doesn't it depict [things] always in a distorted manner? [. . .] There were epochs without the novel, they are possible also in the future.' The return to the epic, as in Lukács, is deemed to be a token of human emancipation: 'Having realised its power, its right to self-fulfillment, mankind can go back to the epic, without envying the fate of poor Emma' (*T*, 148).

Thus, as I have demonstrated, by the time Bakhtin wrote the first of his essays on the novel (1934-5), there was already a well-established tradition of theorizing about the novel in Russia. Three main ideas, all variations and details aside, constitute the mainstay of this tradition: the continuity of the genre; its versatile, flexible, and unstable identity; and, last but not least, the idea of the novel's strong affinity for everyday speech and life phenomena. While the Formalists were the only movement to stress the verbal aspect of this taste for the everyday, and should certainly be credited with the introduction of live speech into the study of the novel, the idea of the novel as an everyday version of

the epic was widely represented in the work of all other major theoretical trends (Veselovskii and Freidenberg). If one adds to this the discussions of 1934 and early 1935, with Lukács's powerfully argued view of the novel as a temporary suspension of the epic, the context of Bakhtin's essays gradually assumes sharper contours.

Bakhtin's Innovativeness: Limits and Substance

Bakhtin's essays were produced in a straight chronological sequence, separated by regular and short intervals: 1934–5 (DN), 1937–8 (the text which when published by S. G. Bocharov and V. V. Kozhinov became known as FTCN, with the 'Concluding Remarks' and the passage immediately preceding them written in 1973);⁶³ 1940 (FP); 1941 (EN).⁶⁴ My interpretative choice is to comment on these four texts with a special focus on two questions: what the origins and the mode of the novel's existence are, and how this relates to thinking about society and social transformation. I argue that Bakhtin's originality is ultimately bound to the way in which he answers the questions that he inherits from the Russian theoretical tradition and from the 1934–5 debates on the novel.

There seem to be good reasons for regarding the four essays as a polemic with opponents who shift over time. The path that Bakhtin's discourse on the novel follows evinces his commitment to debates he has already been involved in. Thus the first essay, albeit written during and shortly after the 1934–5 discussion, returns above all to the Formalist legacy, which was central to the self-definition of the Bakhtin Circle in the 1920s and with which Bakhtin now seeks to settle the score. The echo of Lukács's work is present from the very start, but in this essay it reverberates less intensely.

Bakhtin defines his own methodology as the 'overcoming of the divorce between an abstract "formalism" and an equally abstract "ideologism" in the study of verbal art' (DN, 259*). This 'overcoming' is put on the agenda as a result of the idea that 'form and content are one in discourse, once we understand that discourse is a social phenomenon' (DN, 259*). The idea of the social nature of discourse, which is a direct continuation of Bakhtin's and Voloshinov's views of

⁶³ The source of the information that the passage preceding the concluding remarks was written in 1973 is an interview with S. Bocharov (Moscow, 24 May 1997).

⁶⁴ The earliest short entry on the theory of the novel in Bakhtin's archive appears to date to 1930 (cf. V. Kozhinov, 'M. M. Bakhtin v 1930-e gody', *DKH*, 1997, No. 3, p. 53).

the 1920s, is now backed up with the idea that 'the great historical destinies' of discourse are entwined with the destinies of genre (DN, 259). Bakhtin's break with his early personalistic approach transpires from his choice to speak in this and the next essays of the 'great' and 'anonymous' destinies of artistic discourse as being determined precisely by the destinies of genre. Genre, being supra-individual and irreducible to individual talent, acquires the capacity to shape the destinies of discourse.

In setting out to explore first the stylistic features of the novel, Bakhtin is determined to correct the shortcomings of traditional stylistics, which separates style and genre. However, he does not claim unalienated originality on this point. Alluding indirectly to the Formalists, he locates the beginning of the interest in novelistic prose in the 1920s. This seems to be Bakhtin's only tribute to Formalism: throughout the remaining essays he will seek to differentiate himself, at times in vain, from the Formalists.

(a) *The Novel and the Wor(l)d of the Everyday and the Unofficial*

Following the Formalists, Bakhtin regards the novel as a 'structured artistic system' (DN, 262; FP, 47). Unlike theirs, however, his system consists of utterances and languages, not of devices. The novel, Bakhtin's central proposition goes, is an artistically organized 'diversity of social speech types (sometimes a diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices' (DN, 262*). Bakhtin is never concerned to offer a careful differentiation between speech diversity and language diversity (heteroglossia) and he quickly shifts to a concept of the novel as always (and not just 'sometimes') the site of 'social dialogue among languages' (DN, 263). This definition conveys a strong belief that the novel should no longer be regarded simply as a story *about* society; it is also a verbal model *of* society, which exemplifies the encounter and the conflict between different attitudes that are social rather than individual.

Undoubtedly, Bakhtin's attention to the discursive span of the novel would have been impossible without the Formalist tradition of interest in *skaz* and other speech manifestations of everyday life. Yet in taking up these impulses, Bakhtin visibly departs from the Formalist method by establishing a close connection between language and worldview. Language, Bakhtin stipulates, should be regarded not as a system of abstract grammatical categories, but rather as 'ideologically saturated, language as a worldview, even as a concrete opinion' (DN, 271). Hence the 'image' of a language in a novel would be the 'image of the range

of views held (or current) in society (*sotsial'nogo krugozora*), the image of a social ideologeme' (DN, 357*).⁶⁵ The novel sees a mixing of linguistic forms behind which a 'collision between differing points of view on the world' (DN, 360) should be recognized.

Bakhtin's designation of the interaction between languages in the novel as 'dialogue' might be misleading, for by this he does not mean a harmonious, composed and enlightened exchange. Rather, the dominant face of dialogue is the *agon*, the almost corporeal 'struggle among socio-linguistic points of view' (DN, 273).⁶⁶ The notion of the agonistic interaction of languages and worldviews underlies Bakhtin's proximity to the epistemological paradigms of modernity and its ideas of flux, of change and equally consecrated, yet ultimately transitory views. In 'Discourse in the Novel' the gap between literary imagination and social analysis proves to be closed; heteroglossia is implicitly presented as the manifestation of the object's internal contradictoriness. Dialogue is explicitly paralleled by dialectic:

Along with the internal contradictions inside the object itself, the prose writer witnesses as well the unfolding of social heteroglossia surrounding the object, the Tower-of-Babel mixing of languages that goes on around any object; the dialectics of the object are interwoven with the social dialogue surrounding it.

(DN, 278)

In his notes of 1970–1, Bakhtin disavows this intimate connection between dialogue and dialectic. He reverses the starting positions of the two and treats dialectics as the product of cognition rather than as its process. From these premises, he warns that dialogue disappears in dialectics (*SG*, 147). In the 1930s, however, one can see him still optimistic about the existence of a necessary and transparent bond between the nature of the object, the knowledge one gains of it, and the adequacy of representation of this knowledge in the novel. Once again, the novel is thought of as a model—if only a fictional and mediated one—of social reality.

If the novel is unique in offering a meeting place for competing languages and worldviews, this is certainly a consequence rather than a starting point. The way in which the novel could become the host for

⁶⁵ The existing English translation renders the italicized words by 'a set of social beliefs'.

⁶⁶ It is astonishing that while many commentators draw parallels between Buber and Bakhtin (see e.g. N. Perlina, 'Mikhail Bakhtin and Martin Buber: Problems of Dialogic Imagination', *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature*, 1984, No. 1, pp. 13–28; N. Bonetskaia, 'Bakhtin v 1920-e gody', *DKH*, 1994, No. 1, pp. 16–62), none of them seems to insist on this important distinction between the ways they conceived dialogue.

different and, at times, antagonistic pictures of the world, is reconstructed by Bakhtin with constant reference to an evidently metaphysical necessity. At each stage of human history, two contradictory forces are at work: a centripetal one busily creates the unity and the centralization of the verbal-ideological world and canonizes ideological systems (DN, 271), while a centrifugal one seeks to erode this process. Bakhtin never attaches a clearly defined social group or class to either force, any more than he presents the concrete historic dynamics of this conflict, and this makes for the metaphysical resonance of his account. Instead, he attaches two groups of literary genres to the poles of de/centralization: the novel, with 'those artistic-prose genres that gravitate toward it'; and poetry, drama, and epic. In a spirit reminiscent of Voloshinov's 1929 glorification of the the unformed and the unofficial ('life-ideology'), but also of the late Formalists' focus on *byt*, Bakhtin allocates novelistic prose, 'born on the stages of local fairs and at buffoon spectacles' (DN, 273), to the low, the popular, the everyday, while poetry is accorded a life 'in the higher official socio-ideological levels' (DN, 273; FP, 67). The world of the everyday ensconces and conveys its word in the novel, while the 'formal' genres are responsive only to the demands of already shaped and accomplished ideologies. Heteroglossia, as Bakhtin argues, is a pre-given and essential feature, traces of which—even when overturned—should be discernible in every verbal work of art. Not surprisingly, the only way to detect such 'traces' in poetry is to examine the 'low' genres of the satiric and the comic (DN, 287). All these unofficial genres have remained beyond the conceptual horizon of poetics 'from Aristotle to the present day' (DN, 269), and Bakhtin passionately seeks to retrieve them from their status as—to recall Shklovskii's words about the novel—'extra-theoretical genres'.

Let me summarize. In arguing for the heteroglot nature of the novel, Bakhtin continues his polemics with the Formalists. He is indebted to them for the incentive to turn to the wor(l)d of the everyday and the unofficial. He also shares with them a common theoretical matrix. Both conceive the work of art as a system and both deem the destinies of genre to be shaped by the contest of contrasting metaphysical principles: either by the de/automatization of devices or by the de/centralization of languages and worldviews. The two sets can be seen to overlap in the Formalists' and Bakhtin's shared vision of the de/canonization of literary forms. In addition to this, for both Bakhtin and the Formalists, the novel is unduly neglected by all previous theory. Bakhtin, however, differs manifestly as regards the substance he fills

this matrix with: instead of analysing stylistic devices, he concentrates on the struggle of languages which, unlike the Formalists' understanding of language, are bound up with worldviews and attitudes.

Thus, social language and artistic device are the respective dominants of the work of art in Bakhtin's and the Formalists' theory. As dominants, they determine the functions of all other elements of the system. A striking similarity in this respect surfaces when one looks at the subservient role of plot. For Shklovskii and Eikhenbaum, plot exists only to serve the evolution of the devices, or, in Shklovskii's words, plot is 'motivated' by them. Similarly, in Bakhtin we read: 'The plot itself is subordinated to the task of correlating (*sootneseniia*) and exposing languages to each other' (DN, 365*⁶⁷). This equivalence of the inner mechanisms of their theories should not, however, blind us to the fact that the analysis of the novel as a 'low', everyday genre, which was only an inchoate trend with the Formalists, becomes in Bakhtin, after a decisive shift in viewpoint, a major means of recasting literary theory as a response to modernity.

(b) *The Generic Identity of the Novel*

Bakhtin seems to have derived a positive lesson from the objections raised against Lukács's paper on the novel at the 1934–5 discussion. Unlike Lukács, he expands the field of comparison beyond the epic to include poetry as a foil against which the features of the novel would emerge in an even more salient fashion. Early in his first essay he defines the poetic genres as 'single-linguaged and single-styled' (DN, 266). A dialogized image, Bakhtin concedes, 'can occur in all the poetic genres as well, even in the lyric'. Yet he is quick to make a vital disclaimer: dialogic currents can be present in the lyric without ever being able 'to set the tone', for the dialogic 'can fully unfold, achieve full complexity and depth and at the same time artistic closure, only under the artistic conditions present in the genre of the novel' (DN, 278).

What is at stake here is more than just issues of style. Bakhtin's differentiation between the ambiguity (*dvoismyslennost'*) of poetry and the double-voicedness (*dvugolosost'*) of prose (DN, 328) conceals an epistemological distinction. Socially undiversified, the language of poetry can produce messages which are ambiguous in their meaning because of the complex and elusive nature of the objects addressed. But its messages always enjoy unshakeable stability as regards the identity of their senders. This stability ultimately precludes the appropriation of

⁶⁷ The existing English translation renders the italicized Russian word as 'co-ordinate'.

alien discourse and alien viewpoints and acts as an impoverishing factor. The poetic lore and the prosaic picture of the world become incommensurable in Bakhtin's discourse; the novel is designated as the only agent of true and socially multifaceted knowledge.

The accommodation of alien voices and stances in the novel relates directly to its generic identity. Novelistic discourse, Bakhtin maintains in all his major essays, is self-critical (DN, 412, EN, 6). This self-criticism vouchsafes the unique place of the novel among other genres in terms of inner dynamics and change. Bakhtin projects the novel as 'the sole genre that is in a process of becoming and is as yet uncompleted' (EN, 3*). To be sure, this is not a strikingly original thought. It can be found in Friedrich Schlegel ('Letter on the Novel' in his 'Dialogue on Poetry'), whom Bakhtin mentions on several instances in his studies, and, more importantly, in Lukács's own *Theory of the Novel* (TN, 72-3), which Bakhtin also knew. The novelty of Bakhtin's idea is not even in the adoption of a Hegelian sense of 'becoming' (already visible in Lukács), but rather in the attempt to radicalize this central notion of Hegel's philosophy. Hegel's 'becoming' is always already contaminated with realization and closure. With him, 'becoming' describes the inevitable movement of the Spirit toward the final point of perfection. This process of self-development is governed by an inexorable entelechy which in the end translates motion into rest. Bakhtin's idea of 'becoming' is new in that it frustrates the Hegelian assurance of final peace after reaching the goal. At first sight, Bakhtin sticks to the same rhetoric of promised completion: the novel as genre is 'as yet uncompleted', the 'generic skeleton of the novel is *still* far from having hardened' (EN, 3, emphasis added). Yet his contention that 'the novel has no canon of its own' and that, what is more, it is 'by its *very nature* not canonic', that it is 'plasticity itself' (EN, 39, emphasis added) already clearly suggests that the 'becoming' of the novel and its non-canoncity should be thought of not as historically conditioned features, but rather as indwelling qualities, as givens of its nature. Thus for Bakhtin the novel is a genre 'that is ever questing, ever examining itself and subjecting its established forms to review' (EN, 39). Its generic identity is paradoxically couched in terms of non-identity and constant modification.⁶⁸ In a way, Bakhtin's concept of the novel appears to be cognate with the ideal of permanent aesthetic decanonization dreamt of by the Formalists.

⁶⁸ Bakhtin extends the principle of non-identity to the novelistic hero as well: 'One of the basic internal themes of the novel is precisely the theme of the inadequacy of a hero's fate and situation to the hero himself' (EN, 37).

By endowing the novel with unmatched versatility, Bakhtin then needs to address the question of whether and how the dynamics of the novel relate to those of other literary genres. Being exclusive in its capacity for critical self-consciousness, the novel proves to be excluded from the 'harmony of genres' (EN, 4). There are only two alternatives left for the novel: it should either rule over all other genres (EN, 4, 5) or, as the Formalists would have it, 'live an unofficial life outside great literature' (EN, 4*). In either case the novel behaves like a stranger. It always approaches the existing literary field from outside. The first alternative portrays it like a colonizer. Bakhtin concedes two possibilities which seem to contradict each other. The first one pictures this process, not unlike Griftsov's book, in altogether dark hues: '[the novel] fights for its own hegemony in literature and wherever it triumphs, the other older genres go into decline' (EN, 4). In the second version, the novel is already granted the status of an enlightened colonizer, supposedly stimulating the entire process of literary production:

when the novel becomes the dominant genre, all literature is then caught in the process of becoming, and in a kind of 'generic criticism' . . . In an era when the novel reigns supreme, almost all the remaining genres are to a greater or lesser extent 'novelized': drama (for example Ibsen, Hauptmann, the whole of Naturalist drama), epic poetry (for example *Childe Harold* and especially Byron's *Don Juan*), even lyric poetry (as an extreme example, Heine's lyrical verse) . . . In the presence of the novel as the dominant genre, the conventional languages of strictly canonical genres begin to sound in new ways, which are different from the ways they sounded in those eras when the novel was not present in great literature.

(EN, 5-6*)

Bakhtin dwells with astonishing insistence and repetitiveness on this point. He summarizes it finally by stressing with even greater force the beneficial effect of the novel on literature as a whole: 'In the process of becoming the dominant genre, the novel sparks the renovation of all other genres, it infects them with its spirit of process and inconclusiveness' (EN, 7).

It matters very little, if at all, whether the novel is portrayed as the destructive *enfant terrible* of literature or as its mindful guardian and inspiring reformer. It remains a stranger all the same, an external entity which is never part of the established 'harmony'. Indeed, both versions speak one and the same metaphysical language in describing the novel in terms of an essential and irreducible difference. At the close of his essay on the epic and the novel, Bakhtin tries once again to reconcile a

pseudo-historicist and an essentialist discourse: 'From the very beginning', Bakhtin states, 'the novel was made of different clay than the other already completed genres; it is a different breed, and, in some sense, with it and in it the future of all literature was born' (EN, 39*). Thus the novel appears to be a genre in the process of becoming, but this very becoming, repeatedly underscored by Bakhtin as its essential mode of existence, seems to be contradicted by the idea of ever-present features, constituting a difference which is there 'from the very beginning', endowed by nature as a founding principle. Instead of seeking a historicist explanation of the novel's properties, Bakhtin's discourse rejoices in demonstrating their pre-given and timeless status. A difference in 'breed' cannot be qualified, neither can it be historicized.

Being an outsider to literature (either a destroyer or a colonizer) and, what is more, a measure of ultimate *otherness*, the novel has been witnessing and fostering the whole process of the self-understanding of literature. By challenging literature's self-identity at every step of its development, the novel has been providing it with the image of its own (literature's) Other, and thus with the only means by which its self-recognition as art could take place.

It is very important to see how Bakhtin's discourse of otherness is entwined with his discourse of everyday life and cultural liminality. Noting the novel's close relationship with extraliterary genres, with the 'genres of everyday life and with ideological genres', Bakhtin often sees the boundary separating 'fictional literature' from other verbal genres as permeable and negotiable:

After all, the boundaries between artistic and non-artistic, between literature and non-literature and so forth are not laid up in heaven, and not for ever. Every set of specific features (*usiakii spetsifikum*) is historical. The becoming of literature is not merely growth and change within the unshakeable boundaries of this set of specific features; it affects these very boundaries as well . . . Since the novel is a genre in becoming, these symptoms of change appear considerably more often, more sharply, and they are also more significant, for the novel is in the vanguard of this change. The novel may thus serve as a document for divining the lofty and still distant destinies of literature's future unfolding.

(EN, 33*)

What is really essential here is the elevation of the novel to the status of principal engine of literary change. The novel is an embodiment of mobility and it is through its development that the boundaries between literature and non-literature are modified and pushed back. Thus the

novel is recommended as the indisputable epitome of modernity; it is seen as the living Other of literature placed within literature itself. It is the built-in clock-work of change, which grafts its own temporality onto the body of literature. That which lies ahead and is ineluctably to be reached, is already present, dormant or manifest, recognized or excluded, in the novel.

(c) *The Origins of the Novel. Novel and Epic*

The extent of Bakhtin's indebtedness to the theoretical framework set by the preceding Russian tradition and by the 1934–5 discussions about the novel, and of his originality in relation to them, is especially evident when he comes to discuss the genesis of the novel and the relation between the novel and epic. His treatment of the issue of the epic and the novel is a continuation of his quest for the generic identity of the novel. From this perspective, it is highly significant that the original title of his paper 'Epic and Novel' was, as we have pointed out in the introduction, 'The Novel as a Literary Genre'.

Bakhtin's search for the origins of the novel is heavily compromised by the strong metaphysical tenor of his approach. As early as 1934–5 he poses the question of the origins of the novel and answers it in a profoundly contradictory fashion. The 'internal stratification present in every language at any given moment of its historical existence', Bakhtin stipulates, 'is the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as a genre' (DN, 263). If language is always already internally stratified, and if this process extends throughout its entire 'historical existence' to encompass 'any given moment' of it, how can the question of the origins of the novel have any relevance at all? The prerequisites for its existence seem to be eternally present, and this either aborts any projected inquiry into the origins of the novel, or automatically excludes language as a factor that could matter *historically*.

What, then, does matter? In a passage strongly reminiscent of Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*,⁶⁹ Bakhtin stresses the importance of what, paraphrasing Lukács, he calls 'a certain linguistic *homelessness* of literary consciousness, which no longer possesses a sacrosanct and unitary linguistic medium for containing ideological thought' (DN, 367, emphasis added). He goes on to try to offer a sociological interpretation of this otherwise abstract condition:

⁶⁹ 'the novel form is, like no other, an expression of this transcendental [human] homelessness' (TN, 41).

The decentralizing of the verbal-ideological world that finds its expression in the novel presupposes a fundamentally differentiated social group, which exists in an intense and vital interaction with other social groups. A sealed-off estate, caste or class existing within an internally unitary and unchanging core of its own, cannot serve as socially productive soil for the development of the novel unless they become riddled with decay and shifted from their state of internal balance and self-sufficiency.

(DN, 368*)

Bakhtin never becomes any more concrete than this. He seems to fall victim to the inertia of the prevailing sociological language of Soviet literary criticism at the time, with its presupposition that the novel should always be the expression of the condition and interests of a specific class. Yet he remains so vague and unspecific in his refusal to elaborate on historically concrete class constellations that one might infer that he opposes rather than accepts the official doctrine. What is certain, however, is that he does not find this to be a sufficient condition for the rise of the novel: 'But even this will not suffice. Even a social entity (*kollektiv*) torn by social struggle—if it remains isolated and sealed-off as a national entity—will be insufficient social soil (DN, 368*)'⁷⁰ for the novel.

One cannot fail to note Bakhtin's unacknowledged loyalty to the principles of cosmopolitanism championed by Veselovskii in this explanation of the genesis of the novel. Admittedly, Veselovskii remained apathetic to social differentiation as a possible agent in the history of the genre. But he suggested clearly that displacement and multiculturalism both stood at the cradle of the novel.⁷¹ Thus it transpires

⁷⁰ The existing English translation chooses to render '*kollektiv*' as 'community'. Ever since F. Tönnies, 'community' has enjoyed the strong and positive colouration of something opposing 'society'. The recent use of 'community' in the works of Habermas and Rorty modifies and retains this central meaning. The Russian '*kollektiv*', especially in the Stalinist era, had the overtone of unconditional consent and harmony between group(s) and society. For that reason I prefer the more neutral 'social entity'.

⁷¹ In the 1940 version of *Rabelais*, Bakhtin acknowledged his debt to Veselovskii more explicitly: 'A. N. Veselovskii govoril, chto epos voznikaet "na mezhe dvukh plemen". Pro roman novogo vremeni mozno skazat', chto on voznik na *mezhe dvukh iazykov*' (M. M. Bakhtin, 'Fransua Rable v istorii relaizma', IMLI [RAN], Rukopisnyi otdel, opis' 1, No. 19a, p. 640). Bakhtin dropped this sentence in the 1965 edition of his book; more likely than not, Bakhtin was urged to do this and similar changes only after the Party campaign against 'cosmopolitanism' (1947–8), in which Veselovskii was one of the main targets (cf. V. Alpatov, 'VAKovskoe delo M. M. Bakhtina', *DKH*, 1999, No. 2, p. 37; N. Pan'kov, "'Rable est' Rable. . .'", *DKH*, 1999, No. 2, pp. 96–7, n. 13 and 15; for a very good historical examination of the campaign against 'cosmopolitanism', see K. Azadovskii and B. Egorov, "'Kosmopolitizm'", *Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1999, Vol. 36, pp. 83–135); in any case, in October 1945, a year before the public defence of his doctorate on Rabelais, Bakhtin was still reading Veselovskii

that all three factors that Bakhtin analyses have already been part of the theoretical purview of Russian literary criticism: the concept of the social (class) determination of the novel had been defended by the sociological method; the idea that the novel is born in the process of exceeding the narrow limitations of a single nation was Veselovskii's bequest; finally, the notion of interaction between languages is reminiscent of the impact of one language on other languages as a factor of evolution and change first formulated by the Formalists. Bakhtin's newness consists not so much in the way in which he qualifies and re-arranges these factors as in the fact that he recognizes previously overlooked connections between them. Not in the sense that the results of each factor's autonomous action are linked to one another, but in the sense that each of these factors has a complex dual nature: the social is discursive and the discursive is social. The stratification of social groups is also a stratification in language and vice versa, in as much as cosmopolitanism has both social and linguistic dimensions. The extent to which Bakhtin deems these factors to be mutually interlocking is evident from his inability to offer a clear hierarchy of their importance. While at times he stresses—as in the example above—the significance of cosmopolitanism as a final condition for the rise of the novel, in other instances he redresses the balance in favour of the social factor again. His discussion of the chivalric prose novel is a case in point. 'It is not of course only the bare fact of a free translation of alien texts, nor the cultural internationalism of its creators', Bakhtin argues, that determines the specificity of the chivalric prose novel, but 'above all the fact that this prose already lacked a unitary and firm social basis, possessed no assured and calm self-sufficiency associated with the life of fixed social strata' (DN, 379*).⁷²

When in 1940 Bakhtin writes 'From the Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse', he seems finally to attempt a higher degree of historical substantiation and referentiality. In this text Bakhtin, like Rohde and Veselovskii before him, suggests that the processes responsible for the rise of the novel first occurred in the Hellenistic period (FP, 63–4; see also EN, 15). This location of the novelistic, however, is to remain the sole historically concrete reference point in Bakhtin's model of the

(cf. *LH*, 133–34, n. 29). On other aspects of Bakhtin's debt to Veselovskii, see N. Tamarchenko, 'M. M. Bakhtin i A. N. Veselovskii (Metodologiya istoricheskoi poetiki)', *DKH*, 1998, No. 4, pp. 33–44.

⁷² The existing English translation renders 'no prezhdé vsegó tot fakt, chto. . .' as 'of great importance also was the fact that. . .'

origin of the novel. When he proceeds to analyse the factors shaping the genesis of the novel, he once again has recourse to grand metaphysical hypotheses which come to confirm the impression that he favours complex intuitions over verifiable statements. The first of these factors, not surprisingly, is polyglossia, stripped in Bakhtin's presentation of any additional historical or sociological determinations. The other factor, introduced here for the first time with such rigour and brilliance, is laughter. It is at this stage of Bakhtin's argument that his indifference to historical reasoning appears most striking. Laughter, Bakhtin contends, 'organized *the most ancient* forms for representing language' (FP, 50, emphasis added). Tied up together, laughter and language appear here as deeply inherent anthropological constants of human culture. By endowing laughter with the marked status of a primordial form for conveying universal attitudes, Bakhtin cements its role as an exemplary metaphysical force attending the life of mankind at all times. Bakhtin's picture of laughter in ancient Rome hardly alters this magisterial line of his argument. His vision of the culture of laughter in Rome is as essentialist and ahistorical as one would expect from his premises. He reduces laughter to an epistemological instrument designed to secure full, adequate and, in this sense, timeless knowledge of the world in its contradictoriness: 'The serious, straightforward form was perceived as only a fragment, only half of a whole; the fullness of the whole was restored only upon adding the comic counterpart to this form' (FP, 58*). It is hardly a coincidence that Bakhtin uses precisely the word 'restore' (*vosstanovlialas*) here:⁷³ it implies an even stronger sense of the passivity of knowledge, whose destiny is seen as one of uncovering already existing truths rather than attaining new ones.

Of all forms of laughter, Bakhtin is most passionately attracted by parody. In representing the process of its unfolding, he is heavily indebted to Tynianov without ever acknowledging this. Before becoming a genre or merging into one, parody is a discursive tendency, or in Tynianov's parlance, an 'orientation' (*ustanovka*). In a passage recalling both Lukács and Tynianov, Bakhtin writes: 'In ancient times the parodic-travestying word was homeless. All these diverse parodic-travestying forms constituted, as it were, a special extra-generic or inter-generic world' (FP, 59).⁷⁴ Following Tynianov's model, Bakhtin's

⁷³ The English translation's preference is 'achieve' instead.

⁷⁴ The relevant passage in Tynianov, which Bakhtin evidently modifies and 'continues', is from his 1924 article 'Promezhutok': 'Genre is the realization, the condensation of all roaming [...] powers of the word' (*Arkhaisty i novatory*, p. 574).

parodying word soon ceases to be homeless and to roam between different genres. Since this inter-generic world is held together by a common purpose—‘to provide the corrective of laughter and criticism to all existing straightforward genres, languages, styles, voices’—it is ‘internally unified and even appears as its own kind of totality’ (FP, 59). For Bakhtin, the outlines of this unified world gradually turn out to be those of the novel: ‘But I imagine this whole to be something like an immense novel, multi-generic, multi-styled, mercilessly critical, soberly mocking, reflecting in all its fullness the heteroglossia and multiple voices of a given culture, people and epoch’ (FP, 60). The source of disturbance here is not Bakhtin’s conclusion that parody finally takes on generic shape. It lies in the arbitrariness of his belief that this genre should necessarily be the novel. It seems that at this crucial point of his narrative Bakhtin makes use of *petitio principii*, an old and convenient rhetorical device for concealing a missing link in one’s argument. The existence of the novel as genre, which needs to be shown to follow with compelling logic from Bakhtin’s initial premises (the existence of laughter and parody), is now posited as a rightful and unconditional reality: the novel does not originate in parody or laughter; it simply becomes the generic name that designates an already existing ‘extra-generic or inter-generic world’ (FP, 59).

Beyond this inconsistency, Bakhtin’s argument is extremely important. Confirming the viability of Tynianov’s approach to genre, Bakhtin himself sees the novel as the focal point where the wandering powers of different discourses intersect. Setting out to trace the destiny of parody, he ends up formulating the idea of the novel as the heir to various discourses and, therefore, a ‘multi-generic genre’. We can now appreciate the deeper roots of Bakhtin’s claim that the novel is a genre that maintains its identity by constantly shedding it. Being the meeting point of the parodied and the parodying, the straightforward and the inflected, the novel is inherently self-contradictory, doomed to eternal unrest and self-criticism.

As Bakhtin takes this step towards revealing the novel as accommodating its own otherness inside itself, he also painstakingly examines the differences between the epic and the novel, thus taking a step towards identifying the Other(s) of the novel beyond its confines. If, under the pressure of the theoretical field established by the Formalists, Bakhtin’s exercise in defining the novelistic necessarily had to go through its differentiation from poetry, the idea of juxtaposing epic and novel certainly comes from Lukács. Bakhtin, however, differs from

Lukács in two crucial respects. First, very much in line with the Russian theoretical tradition and with Rohde, he pleads for a continuous history of the novel. He does single out the Renaissance period as the time of the novel's maturity and perfection (DN, 415; FP, 80), but never severs its ties to antiquity and the Middle Ages. Second, he rejects the traditional deprecation of the novel as no more than a bad copy of the epic, a temporary substitute for the (suspended) epic condition of organicity and totality. Referring to Blankenburg and Hegel, Bakhtin only partially accepts their idea (shared unconditionally by Lukács) that the novel should become for the modern world what the epic was for the ancient. Bakhtin is intent on demonstrating that, in their comparability as aesthetic values, the epic and the novel are nevertheless non-interchangeable as pictures of the world. What is more, he is determined to establish the novel as the sole adequate representation of reality in the age of modernity. This task involves studying the epic under a dull museum light. It requires a strategy which, in a way, resembles Shklovskii's cavalier attitude to old artistic forms: 'The struggle for form—this is a struggle for new form. The old form has to be studied as one studies a frog. The physiologist does not study the frog in order to learn how to croak.'⁷⁵

In the 'Epic and Novel' essay, Bakhtin attempts for the first time a succinct inventory of those distinctive features that make the novel an irreplaceable artistic form and a genre representative of modernity. Along with the hallmarks already argued for in his previous essays (heteroglossia), here he places a particularly distinct accent on what he calls 'the zone of contemporaneity' as the true terrain of the novelistic. This new zone is defined by Bakhtin as 'the zone of maximal contact with the present (with contemporary reality in all its open-endedness' (EN, 11). Unlike the epic, which, following Goethe, Bakhtin defines as a genre of the 'absolute past', the novel seems to be a genre that rests on the idea of a boundless present. Bakhtin is especially concerned to make it clear that the 'present' of the novel is not a world that it finds ready and inviting mere reflection; it is a world that the novel itself *creates* as present. The novel, Bakhtin finally has to admit, is a specific genre only owing to the specific knowledge about the world it could furnish. Unlike the epic, which relies on 'national lore' (*natsional'noe predanie*), the novel subsists on the constantly changing experience of the self. Rooted in the instability of the momentary, the ephemeral,

⁷⁵ V. Shklovskii, *Gamburgskii schet*, Leningrad, 1928, p. 124.

that which is quick to vanish 'into thin air', the novelistic can even scoop up the past and reshape it into present. Notably, Bakhtin seeks to reformulate the essence of the historical novel so as to reveal its capacity for integrating the past into the world of the present: 'Characteristic for the historical novel is a positive modernizing, an erasing of temporal boundaries, the recognition of an eternal present in the past' (DN, 365-6). Highly indicative of Bakhtin's philosophy of the novel is the fact that he speaks here of an 'eternal present'. This comes to denote not the durability of the present, but rather its expandability in either direction. In the novel, both the past and the future can assume the mode of existence characteristic of the present, if they are viewed from the discontinuous, ever new and concrete perspective of personal 'experience, knowledge and practice' (EN, 15).⁷⁶ The 'absolute past', Bakhtin insists, 'is not to be confused with time in our exact and limited sense of the word'. It is, he suggests, rather 'a hierarchical time-and-value category' (EN, 18*).⁷⁷ What he omits, however, is the fact that in his theoretical intuitions not only the 'absolute past', but also the 'eternal present' is turned into a timeless 'time' and asserted as a value-laden attitude to reality.

Needless to say, Bakhtin's insistence on the unbreakable link between the novel and the 'eternal present' of modernity evokes the well-rehearsed themes of the low, the everyday, the unofficial. The reader is encouraged to remember that 'contemporaneity was reality of a "lower" order in comparison with the epic past' (EN, 19), that the origins of the novel lie in the folklore culture of familiarization through laughter (EN, 20), that, finally, the novelistic emphasizes the "'today-ness" of the day in all its randomness' (EN, 26).

It is very important to realize that in differentiating between the epic and the novel, Bakhtin, like Lukács, operates from a Hegelian conceptual framework. He regards the rise of the novel as a rise of attention to the private life of men and women (FP, 108). If for Lukács this is a token of decay and resignation *vis-à-vis* a waning organicity, for Bakhtin it is a natural process that requires close dialectical analysis rather than a mourning of the irretrievably lost. In a passage that unmistakably resembles Hegel's dialectic of private and public in his *Philosophy of Right* and Marx's account of the internal contradiction

⁷⁶ That this is a matter of a specific 'form of vision', and not of the depicted content itself, is repeated explicitly by Bakhtin later on in his 'Epic and Novel' essay (EN, 30).

⁷⁷ The existing English translation's choice is to render the Russian 'tsennostno-vremennaia kategoriia' as 'a temporally valorized hierarchical category'.

between the public nature of production and the private form of appropriation and consumption under capitalism, Bakhtin has the following to say about the reasons for the birth of the novel in antiquity:

[In the Hellenistic era] *a contradiction developed between the public nature of the literary form and the private nature of its content*. The process of working out *private genres* began. [...] This problem was especially critical in connection with larger epic forms (the 'major epic'). In the process of resolving this problem, the ancient novel emerged.

(FP, 123, emphasis original)

Surprising as this might sound, Bakhtin proves here to be more of a dialectician than Lukács himself. But unlike Lukács, he embraces the Hegelian approach only as long as it can serve to offer a hypothesis concerning the emergence of the phenomenon, not the direction of its development. If Lukács anticipates the demise of capitalism and with it the rebirth of the epic, Bakhtin prefers to watch sympathetically the growth of the novel until this process reaches the equally utopian stage of complete novelization of literature. After all, for both Bakhtin and Lukács, the epic and the novel appear to be species that cannot 'get on well together'. The regime of competition obtaining between them seems to be reflected even in the symmetry of their definitions: for Bakhtin, the epic is the genre of 'the absolute past'; for Lukács, the novel is the genre of 'absolute sinfulness'. The actual focus of the disagreement turns on the question of which of the two genres should determine the course of artistic development and reflect the direction of social evolution.

Bakhtin's Hegelian framework has one more significant dimension. By claiming that the generic specificity of the novel is built on and dominated by epistemological features, he comes close to a rigorous Hegelian identification of the various cultural forms as stages of a progressive (self)consciousness. The novel is said to mark a new phase in this progress: 'When the novel becomes the dominant genre, epistemology becomes the leading philosophical discipline' (EN, 15*). This togetherness of the novel and cognition is further emphasized in the analysis of the Socratic dialogues which, Bakhtin opines, make us witnesses to the 'simultaneous birth of the scientific concept and of the new artistic-prose novelistic image' (EN, 24*).⁷⁸

⁷⁸ The Russian 'nauchnoe poniatie' is translated in the existing English translation as 'scientific thinking', while 'novogo khudozhestvenno-prozaicheskogo romannogo obraza' is rendered as 'of a new artistic-prose model for the novel'.

Justified or not, Bakhtin's desire to attach to novelistic discourse various forms of consciousness that follow a line of perfection in harmony with the rise of the novel to the status of dominance reflects the typical, if misplaced, belief of modernity that science and epistemological awareness are signs of the liberation and autonomy of mankind. The ever-searching spirit of the novel and the constantly striving human mind are intended to emerge from Bakhtin's narrative as a well-matched couple.

All this seems to present sufficient grounds for celebrating Bakhtin as a defender of modernity who resists the temptation either to glorify the past or to put too much trust in the great narratives of a future that will come to terminate history. One must not, however, close one's eyes to the forces that work toward a dismantling of the *episteme* of modernity in Bakhtin. To discuss them, we need to give closer examination to Bakhtin's concept of the 'chronotope'.

(d) *Chronotope and Modernity*

Bakhtin's initial definition of the chronotope stresses two moments: it is both a concept designed to express the intrinsic relationships between space and time represented in the work of art, *and* a category bearing equally on literary form and content (FTCN, 84). Further, he insists on the *generic* importance of the chronotope claiming for it power of distinction: genre and generic varieties (*zhanrovye raznovidnosti*) depend on the relevant chronotope. Within chronotope, although attentive in his particular analyses to both time and space, Bakhtin, in a recognizably modernist gesture, chooses to single out time as the 'leading category' (FTCN, 85). This choice is documented even in the title of Bakhtin's essay ('Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel'), in which time is specially emphasized, as if it is not implied in the concept of the chronotope and needs particular highlighting.

A couple of years later, in his 'Epic and Novel' essay, Bakhtin adds a significantly new element to this understanding of the chronotope. It is only at this point that the chronotope becomes a distinctly neo-Kantian category. Drawing on Cassirer—though without referring to him—Bakhtin points out that the definitions of time and value in the epic are inseparably linked 'as they are also fused in the semantic layers of ancient languages' (EN, 16). Here the immanent *axiological* dimension of the chronotope is for the first time clearly brought into relief. The same thought is then evolved in the 'Concluding remarks' to the Chronotope essay, written in 1973, and extended to cover not only the

epic but any chronotope: 'the chronotope in a work always contains within it an axiological (*tseennostnyi*) aspect that can be isolated from the whole artistic chronotope only in abstract analysis. . . . Art and literature are shot through with *chronotopic values* . . . ' (FTCN, 243). Later in the same essay, Bakhtin finally acknowledges Cassirer's role in the formation of his own views by referring to the *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* and rehearsing the vital proposition of its first volume about the chronotopicity of language as a 'treasure-house of images' (FTCN, 251).

Being a value-charged and in this sense a Kantian category, the chronotope for Bakhtin is nevertheless embedded in a Hegelian structure of reasoning. Indeed, it furnishes a splendid opportunity for transcending the recently established inclination to regard Bakhtin as either a neo-Kantian or a Hegelian (Marxist) thinker. His mode of thought is indebted to *both* neo-Kantianism and Hegelianism. The different value of each particular variety (sub-genre) of the novel is measured by the progression of human consciousness as it gradually moves towards a recognition of the historical and social nature of time. Thus, the discussion of the chronotope for Bakhtin becomes a discussion of the peregrinations of the novel as an instrument of a growing human awareness of time. Bakhtin's description of the different chronotopes appears to be the counterpart of Hegel's exploration of the various stages in the history of Spirit in his *Phenomenology of Mind*.

The first port of call in this journey is, of course, the Greek novel, especially the novel of adventures. Being the lowest point of time-awareness, adventure-time precludes any 'historical location'.⁷⁹ 'No matter where one goes in the world of the Greek romance', Bakhtin says in amplification of his argument, 'there are absolutely no indications of historical time, no identifying traces of the era' (FTCN, 91). Time is unlocatable not only for the reader; it is also absent as a dimension of the life of the character. In the Greek novel, human beings do not experience the flow of time and seem to remain unaffected by it. Hence the generous cover of infinitely long spans of time which do not entail any real change. The elapsing 'hours and days leave no trace [on the heroes], and therefore, one may have as many of them as one likes' (FTCN, 94). Thus the novel of adventure offers a case of complete suppression of time: nothing in the world it depicts is 'destroyed, remade, changed or created anew' (FTCN, 110), and all we get is a radical affirmation of identity.

⁷⁹ The relevant Russian sentence reads: 'Ne mozhet byt', konechno, i rechi ob istoricheskoi lokalizatsii avantiurnogo vremeni.' This sentence is omitted in the English translation.

The second distinctive chronotope that Bakhtin analyses, the chronotope of the 'adventure novel of everyday life' (*avantyurno-bytovyi roman*) represented by Apuleius and Petronius, is a higher stage in the consciousness of time. It is of great importance to underscore the role of everyday life in this progression. To be sure, this new chronotope cannot be conceived as the mere mechanical sum of the chronotopes of the adventure novel and the novel of everyday life. Bakhtin himself explicitly denies this possibility. But he does imply that it is precisely the awareness of the everyday aspects of life that constitutes a new and original focusing on the elusive and continuous flow of the 'eternal present'.

The essence of this new chronotope is metamorphosis. It encompasses human life in its 'crucial moments of transformation and *crisis* to show how *an individual becomes other than what he was*' (FTCN, 115*). With the chronotope of the adventure novel of everyday life we are finally transferred to the realm of otherness. The fantastic events in the *Golden Ass* mark the end of a long line of barren plots without transformation or shift. They celebrate non-identity and change in an exciting and flamboyant way. Here, Bakhtin qualifies, 'there is no becoming in the strict sense of the word, but [on the other hand] there is crisis and re-birth' (FTCN, 115*). A biographical life in its entirety cannot be found here, for the crisis-type of portrayal focuses on no more than one or two decisive moments. Unlike its predecessor, the chronotope of adventure and everyday life revolutionizes the life of the individual by exposing it to transformation and non-identity. But just like the chronotope of pure adventure, the 'order of time' at work in this new chronotope fails to produce a lasting effect on the surrounding world. The individual 'changes and undergoes metamorphosis completely independent of the world; the world itself remains unchanged' (FTCN, 119). Thus the degree and scope of change attained by this new chronotope are still limited. The process of transformation is rehearsed only within the confined domain of the life of the self. Society and nature remain excluded from the process of alteration.

There is little need to repeat the list of phenomena analysed by Bakhtin. His Hegelian pattern of reasoning discovers the value of the chronotope in its capacity to manifest ever-increasing degrees of consciousness of time and change. Thus Bakhtin appears to reconcile organically the neo-Kantian value-marked concept of the chronotope with a Hegelian phenomenology of progressive awareness of time.

But it is precisely here that the elements eroding Bakhtin's loyalty to the conceptual framework of modernity come to the surface. Again,

the problem can be recognised in Hegel's narrative of the stages in the evolution of consciousness. For Hegel, consciousness of life is also a separation from life, an 'opposing reflection'. A necessary phase in the history of consciousness is the long period of 'misfortune', which is finally transcended in the synthesis of being-for-itself and being-in-itself embodied by the Spirit. Before this stage is reached, however, human consciousness is profoundly 'unhappy' and this 'unhappiness', as we shall see in the last chapter of this book, is one of the underlying themes of Hegel's philosophy.⁸⁰ As Hegel asserts, consciousness of life is achieved at the cost of a crucial rupture of naïvety and innocent happiness. For this reason, consciousness of life remains for a long time 'merely pain and sorrow' (*PhM*, 252) over human existence and activity.

Characteristically, Hegel sees the naïve happiness of consciousness embodied precisely in the Greek life of the classical era. The well-known motifs about the Greeks remaining 'in the bosom of life', in a 'harmonious unity of self and nature, transposing nature into thought and thought into nature',⁸¹ which, as we have seen, organize Lukács's version of world history, are Schillerian and Hegelian in their origin. The Greeks do not as yet know the conflict between the immutable and the changeable, between essence and non-essence that comes to the fore in Judaism. In Greek life essence (God) is not yet posed beyond the existence of man. Time for the Greeks is still a feeling of a stable and unalterable natural rhythm rather than a concept describing the mutability of the world and the discontinuity of the self.

While for Hegel this condition of naïvety and happiness has to be abandoned in the name of a future that through grief and labour will gradually transform the condition of 'division, sin, torment . . . into one of reconciliation and beatitude',⁸² for Lukács, but also for Bakhtin, the loss of this state of organic happiness is far more painful. Sober-minded as it is, and determined to hail the modernist acceptance of transitoriness and change, Bakhtin's account of the different chronotopes at the same time articulates a nostalgic celebration of the ancient, the traditional, the venerable. A strong case in point is the obvious emphasis placed by Bakhtin on the so-called folkloric chronotope of the novel. Heavily indebted to Freidenberg and the on-going debates

⁸⁰ For an inspired analysis of the 'unhappiness of consciousness' in Hegel's philosophy, see the founding text of Jean Wahl, *Le Malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel*, Paris, 1929, and Jean Hyppolite, *Genèse et structure de la Phénoménologie de l'esprit de Hegel*, Paris, 1946 (all quotations from Hyppolite's book follow the English translation by S. Cherniak and J. Heckman, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, Evanston, 1974).

⁸¹ J. Hyppolite, *Genesis*, p. 191.

⁸² J. Wahl, *Le Malheur*, p. 29.

in Russian folkloristics in the early 1930s, Bakhtin sees in folklore a golden age of harmony and social cohesion. Moreover, like Freidenberg and Marr, Bakhtin assumes that later forms of culture can preserve the features of earlier stages by way of what he, following Marr and Freidenberg, calls 'sublimation' (*sublimatsiia*).⁸³ Thus, the ancient novel can be shown to have retained the features of folkloric unity in the folds of its generic memory. Bakhtin submits that the self-identity of the hero in the Greek novel is only a sedimentation of a universal human self-identity to be found in folklore:

This distinctive *self-identity* is the *organizing centre* of the human image in the Greek novel. And one must not underestimate the significance and the particular ideological depth of this moment of human identity. In this way the Greek novel . . . masters one of the essential elements of the folkloric (*narodnoi*) concept of man, one that survives to the present in various aspects of folklore, especially in folktales. No matter how impoverished, how denuded human identity in the Greek novel is, there is nevertheless always preserved in it a precious grain of folk humanity; it conveys a faith in the indestructible power of man in his struggle with nature and with all inhuman forces.

(FTCN, 105*)⁸⁴

The same excited glorification of antiquity can be sensed in Bakhtin's vision of life in the *agora*, a life which is said to dispel the difference between external and internal, essential and visible, theoretical and sensuous:

the square in ancient times—this was the state itself (and the entire state, with all its organs at that), this was the highest court, the whole of science, the whole of art, and on it—the whole of the people. This was a remarkable chronotope, where all supreme instances—from the state to truth—were concretely represented and embodied, were visibly available.

(FTCN, 132*)

The developments of the (auto)biographical novel that Bakhtin traces further in this essay are marked by an apprehensive awareness of the inevitable dwindling of organicity. It is no accident that both in

⁸³ See e.g. the interpretation of the image of children in the idyll as a 'sublimation' of coitus, conception, growth, and renewal of life (FTCN, 227), or the reading of characters such as Gargantua and Pantagruel as 'sublimation' of folkloric kings and *bogatyr*i (FTCN, 241). As late as 1958–9, almost ten years after Marr's doctrine had been debunked by Stalin, Bakhtin still referred to Marr respectfully as the 'founder of linguistic paleontology' and appeared to be in agreement with its principles (cf. *LH*, 89).

⁸⁴ The existing translation renders the original 'eto svoeobraznoe tozhdestvo s samim soboi' by 'this distinctive correspondence of an identity with a particular self'.

this essay and in his well-known book Bakhtin dwells so lovingly on Rabelais and his prose, for he sees in him the author who restores the folkloric chronotope and reinstates the condition of intimate overlap between public and private, nature and culture. Thus, the utopian spirit of the past, officially expelled by the negation of the epic, is surreptitiously called back in this extolling of folklore and antiquity.⁸⁵ In the chapter on Goethe, we will once again see Bakhtin's ambivalent attitude to modernity reflected in his analysis of the idyllic chronotope.

We hope to have supplied by now sufficient evidence that Bakhtin's agenda as a theorist of literature and culture is indeed largely predetermined by a powerful Russian theoretical tradition and an intellectual context reviving Hegelian approaches to art in the guise of Marxist historicism. Bakhtin's attempts to answer the questions of the origins of the novel and of its affinity for the unofficial, the everyday, the non-canonized draw on, and at the same time modify, the framework posited by Veselovskii and the Formalists, on the one hand, and by the Hegelian paradigm, on the other. Bakhtin's originality consists in the synthesis of already available explanatory hypotheses (multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism; social division and determination; the genre-bound nature of language and discourse) with a strong and serene belief that the novel is only the historically motivated and artistically fortunate expression of the work of a limited number of basic and eternal principles shaping human culture. The question of the origins of the novel becomes for Bakhtin an alibi for the celebration of an everlasting human consciousness which undergoes different stages in the perfection of its unalterable substance. The description of the novelistic genre implies a model of the workings of society and culture which is meant to remain valid beyond (and above) historical change. This compromises Bakhtin's disposition to see in the novel an embodiment of modernity, and this is what his observations on the folkloric chronotope reveal. While introducing and powerfully defending the idea of the novel as the Other of literature built in literature itself, Bakhtin is more traditionalist in his compromising view of the novelistic genre as endowed with timeless features and, therefore, with the capacity to revive surpassed stages of historical development.

⁸⁵ One should note that Bakhtin also recognizes the positive uniqueness of the epic, together with its limitations, in a more direct way: 'the epic, based as it is on the immanent unity of folkloric time, achieves a penetration of historical time that is in its own way unique and profound, but nevertheless localized and limited' (FTCN, 218).

III Heroes

In the previous part of this book I have outlined the transfigurations of the concepts of genre, form, and culture and their relevance for a theory of the novel as response to modernity. Yet Lukács's and Bakhtin's theoretical writings were focused not only on theoretical categories but also on the vivid and rich work of individual writers and thinkers. In analysing the *oeuvre* of Dostoevsky, Goethe, Hegel, and Rabelais, the two remained faithful to a historically specific regime of discourse which deemed literature and philosophy to be the materialization of the creative power of 'great individuals'. The theoretical propositions of Lukács and Bakhtin were refined, and—as I shall demonstrate in the case of Bakhtin—also substantially modified by their attention to these 'exceptional heroes'. The tone of admiration was, however, tempered, particularly in Bakhtin's writings, by growing reservations about the real significance of the individual talent in the face of superior agents such as genre, tradition, or Spirit.

DOSTOEVSKY

For both Lukács and Bakhtin, Dostoevsky was a life-long preoccupation. By considering the originality of his novels Bakhtin and Lukács arrived at questions which implicitly or explicitly addressed various aspects of the interaction between individual and society, author and hero, culture and civilization. A traditional attitude of veneration blended with a perceptive approach to the time-bound social dimensions of Dostoevsky's *oeuvre* (Lukács) or to his participation in timeless generic traditions (Bakhtin) to produce two of the most compelling accounts of his novels in this century. Here I offer an analysis of Lukács's and Bakhtin's responses to Dostoevsky in the light of their intellectual formation and development and in the context of their writings on aesthetics and social philosophy.

LUKÁCS: ETHICS AND REVOLUTION

Lukács's discussion of Dostoevsky comprises several texts spread over thirty years. The earliest one consists of his notes and drafts toward a never completed book on Dostoevsky, which he wrote in 1914–15 in Heidelberg.¹ Shortly after that Dostoevsky figured prominently in the concluding pages of Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*. Then followed two short but important essays ('Dostoevsky: Novellas' and 'Stavrogin's Confession'), both conceived as reviews, published in 1922 in *Die Rote Fahne*.² In the early 1930s Lukács again turned to Dostoevsky in a short essay entitled 'On Dostoevsky's Legacy'.³ Finally, in 1943 he wrote a longer piece ('Dostoevsky'), which for many readers has long been his best-known text on Dostoevsky.⁴ Although some of these texts were

¹ The drafts were first published by F. Fehér in his article 'The Last Phase of Romantic Anti-Capitalism: Lukács' Response to the War', *New German Critique*, 1977, No. 10, pp. 141–3. The notes and the drafts were then edited and published by J. C. Nyíri as G. Lukács, *Dostojewski. Notizen und Entwürfe*, Budapest, 1985.

² The texts are available in English translation in G. Lukács, *Reviews and Articles from Die rote Fahne*, trans. P. Palmer, London, 1983, pp. 49–51 and 44–8.

³ G. Lukács, 'Über den Dostojewski-Nachlaß', *Moskauer Rundschau*, 22 March 1931, p. 6.

⁴ N. Tertulian suggests that Lukács's essay was first published 'in an American journal' (N. Tertulian et al., 'Diskussion zur Lukács' *Ontologie*', in *Georg Lukács—Jenseits der Polemiken*, ed.

given special scholarly attention, the present book is the first to comment on them all.⁵

The early work (1914–1916)

Lukács's notes and drafts toward a book on Dostoevsky follow his lengthy work on the evolution of modern drama and his first Heidelberg aesthetic (1912–14), the latter of which focused his attention on the search for a stable and consecrated essence of art. The Dostoevsky notes and the ensuing essay on the *Theory of the Novel* took Lukács away from his *Aesthetics*, the second part of which was written only in 1916–18, and frustrated his aspirations (and his father's ambitions) for a habilitation at Heidelberg.⁶

The idea of a Dostoevsky book is first registered in a letter to Lukács's friend Paul Ernst, written in the Spring of 1915: 'Finally, I have started working on my new book on Dostoevsky (and have put the aesthetics aside for the time being). The book will go beyond Dostoevsky though; it will contain my metaphysical ethics and a significant part of my philosophy of history' (SC, 244). As is evident from the letter, Lukács's was an ambitious project and he embarked on it with passion and the sense of a mission to be fulfilled. Yet it was precisely the scope and complexity of the project, attempting as it did a synthesis of aesthetics and social philosophy, that led to its premature abandonment. On 2 August 1915 Lukács admits to Ernst: 'I have already given

R. Dannemann, Frankfurt am Main, 1986, p. 193), but he provides no evidence. Similarly, Tamara Motyleva, who knew Lukács during his long emigration in Moscow, asserts that the essay was 'initially designed for an American journal' and was commissioned by the Soviet *Informbiuro* (T. Motyleva, 'Vspominaia Lukacha', *Voprosy literatury*, 1998, No. 2, p. 216). To the best of our knowledge the article was originally published in Hungarian in 1946 in a volume under the title *Great Russian Realists (Nagy orosz realisták)*. The essay was republished several times in German and included in Lukács's life-time in his *Werke*.

⁵ The best work on Lukács's notes and drafts remains J. Nyíri's introduction to his 1985 edition (pp. 7–34). For two recent studies of the notes in the context of Lukács's early work and the activities of the *Sonntagskreis* see C. Machado, 'Die "Zweite Ethik" als Gestaltungsapriori eines neuen Epos', in *Lukács 1997*, ed. F. Benseler and W. Jung, Bern, 1998, pp. 73–115; E. Karadi, 'Lukács' Dostojewski-Projekt. Zur Wirkungsgeschichte eines ungeschriebenen Werkes', in *Lukács 1997*, pp. 117–32. The most detailed study of Lukács's reception of Dostoevsky was undertaken in Z. A. Fehér's 1978 PhD dissertation *Georg Lukács's Role in Dostoevsky's European Reception at the Turn of the Century*. Unfortunately, though, he does not refer to the essays from *Die rote Fahne*; on these see Z. B. Andersen, 'The Young Lukács and Dostoevsky', *Dostoevsky Studies*, 1987, Vol. 8, pp. 187–97.

⁶ For the best account of the history of Lukács's habilitation see J. Bendl, 'Zwischen Heirat und Habilitation', in *Lukács 1997*, pp. 17–45 as well as Marcus and Tar's 'Introduction' (SC, 23–5).

up my Dostoevsky book; it has become too big a project. Out of it emerged a large-scale essay, called "The Aesthetics of the Novel" (SC, 252–3).⁷ Lukács could afford to confide in Ernst about matters that he could not divulge to people like Max Weber, from whom he was looking for support for his habilitation plans. In a letter of December 1915, a typical example of the double standards Lukács was not embarrassed to apply, he tried to appease Weber's dissatisfaction with his 'Aesthetics of the Novel' and to reassure him that he was still working on the Dostoevsky project: 'For you see, the very much needed balance to the metaphysical beginning of the study shall be forthcoming only toward the end of the Dostoevsky book, in the form of a new, consciously felt, and articulated metaphysics. . . ' (SC, 253–4). Lukács's efforts, however, were misplaced. Weber's distaste for what was to become *The Theory of the Novel* had nothing to do with matters of exposition or argumentation. It was an outright rejection of the very idea of unsystematic theorizing. In August 1916 he voiced his reservations all too clearly and dampened Lukács's enthusiasm for a German academic career. Quoting Emil Lask's verdict on Lukács as a 'born essayist' who 'will not stick with systematic (professional) work' and 'should not, therefore, habilitate', Weber commented: 'On the basis of what you read for us from the brilliant introductory chapters of your *Aesthetics*, I sharply disagreed with this opinion. And because your sudden turn to Dostoevsky seemed to *lend support* to that (Lask's) opinion, I *hated* that work and still hate it' (SC, 264).⁸

Weber may have been right that Dostoevsky would not constitute the beaten track to the German academic establishment, but he was certainly wrong in characterizing Lukács's turn to Dostoevsky as 'sudden'. To start with, European intellectual life prior to the first world war was attended by a veritable Dostoevsky mania.⁹ In Germany, Dostoevsky was made into a symbol of unbridgeable cultural difference, simultaneously exemplifying traumatic experience and hopes for spiritual rebirth. Paul Honigsheim recalled the place of Dostoevsky in the

⁷ 'The Aesthetics of the Novel' was the provisional title of Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*.

⁸ Despite these comments, Max Weber remained supportive and it was only in 1918 that his lobbying for Lukács's habilitation seems to have lost its previous energy and dedication.

⁹ For contemporary accounts of the reception of Dostoevsky in the 1910s and 1920s in the West, see G. Gesemann, 'Dostojewski in Deutschland', *Slavische Rundschau*, 1931, No. 3, pp. 318–23; L. Löwenthal, 'Die Auffassung Dostojewskis in Vorkriegsdeutschland', *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 1934, No. 3, pp. 343–82; F. Riza-Zade, 'Dostoevskii i sovremennaia frantsuskaia literatura', *Pechat' i revoliutsiia*, 1927, No. 6, pp. 34–52; F. Riza-Zade, 'Dostoevskii na Zapade', *Literaturnaia Entsiklopediia*, Moscow, 1930, Vol. 3, pp. 408–10; see also the exhaustive analysis in the relevant chapters of Z. Fehér's dissertation.

life of the Weber circle, perhaps with a touch of exaggeration, but still plausibly capturing the spirit of intensive appropriation: 'I do not remember a single Sunday conversation in which the name of Dostoevsky did not occur'. He also spoke of the strong desire for a 'life in the spirit of Dostoevsky'.¹⁰

In Hungary, too, Dostoevsky enjoyed a degree of attention that went beyond what was usual among the cultural elite. Z. Fehér submits in his dissertation that an active Dostoevsky reception did not begin in Hungary before the 1920s when Western criticism was imported wholesale.¹¹ It is true that Hungarian intellectuals were caught up in the orbit of German philosophy and aesthetics, but there is enough evidence, partly provided by Fehér himself, that as early as the 1910s Dostoevsky was a major hero on the Hungarian cultural scene. Arnold Hauser, an active member of the Sunday circle which used to gather from 1915 onwards, first in Béla Balázs's house, calls Dostoevsky 'one of our guardian saints'.¹² Balázs himself in his diary *Soul in War* celebrated the Dostoevskian spirit. As A. Kadarkay warns, perhaps not many Hungarians liked this, for Hungary was after all at war with Russia.¹³

Against this background, it is hardly surprising that Lukács was contemplating a book on Dostoevsky. Before him, the young Károly (Karl) Mannheim signalled his desire to write a book on the remarkable Russian. His project, however, is very different from Lukács's. Mannheim seeks solutions in Dostoevsky's life and personality. 'Therefore', he confides to Lukács in January 1912, 'what I write about Dostoevsky must be a biography in the true sense of the word. [. . .] I want to know and I want to resurrect that frosty Petersburg sun in which Dostoevsky walked, which was right there and then, and the torture of the soul which he felt on a night that could only exist for him. I want to know those things as if they existed now and in me' (SC, 189). Like Lukács's, Mannheim's book was never finished.¹⁴

¹⁰ P. Honigsheim, *On Max Weber*, trans. J. Rytina, New York, 1968, p. 81.

¹¹ See Z. Fehér's dissertation, p. 126.

¹² See A. Hauser's recollections in *Georg Lukács, Karl Mannheim und der Sonntagskreis*, ed. E. Karádi and E. Vezér, Frankfurt am Main, 1985, p. 98.

¹³ A. Kadarkay, *Georg Lukács. Life, Thought, and Politics*, Oxford, 1995, pp. 155–6.

¹⁴ The marked difference between Lukács's and Mannheim's projects seems to be overlooked by Mary Gluck, who maintains that both Mannheim and Lukács intended to write a biography of Dostoevsky (see M. Gluck, *Georg Lukács and his Generation, 1900–1918*, Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1985, p. 27). The list of abandoned Dostoevsky books in Central Europe prior to World War I can be extended to include also Masaryk's plans for a book-length Dostoevsky study.

Apart from the stimulus of this external context, it is Lukács's own development up to 1914–15 that makes his turn to Dostoevsky predictable. As early as 1910, although he mentions him only once, Lukács places Dostoevsky in the centre of his essay 'Aesthetic Culture'. As we saw in Chapter 1, Lukács argued that modern culture is deprived of substance and totality: it is the product of either 'experts' or 'aesthetes'. The salvation of man, therefore, lies in the hands of people who 'create no culture, nor do they want to'. They are neither experts, nor aesthetes, and it is 'heroism' that gives 'sanctity to their lives'. Among them, Dostoevsky, whose name appears at the end of the essay, is the most striking embodiment of this new attitude. Explicitly evoking Kierkegaard, Lukács extols Dostoevsky in an emotionally excessive and typically grandiloquent fashion: 'And in fear and trembling, I write down here—as the only possible final chords after what has been said—the name of the greatest one of all, who was in my mind while I wrote this, our most sublime epic poet, the sacred name of Dostoevsky' (AC, 158). It is important to keep in mind the definition of Dostoevsky as an *epic* poet, for it will remain the pinnacle of Lukács's image of Dostoevsky in the *Theory of the Novel*.

The second early piece bearing even more directly on the Dostoevsky notes of 1914–15 is the dialogical essay 'On Poverty of Spirit' (1911). Here Lukács expands his reflections on the inauthenticity of modern culture and turns his attention more directly to problems of ethics. While recognizing the significance of this essay for Lukács's later work,¹⁵ commentators on Lukács seem nevertheless to have disregarded the fact that this is his first piece to show a vital move away from Kant. Relying on Georg Simmel, Lukács probes the sphere of ethics to find it infested by soulless and petrified conventions, the Kantian sense of duty being no more than one of them: 'Since every ethic is formal, duty is a postulate, a form'. The problem is not, of course, that forms of behaviour exist, but rather that they live a life of their own, separated from the content that gave birth to them. In a passage strongly reminiscent of Simmel, Lukács traces the process of the autonomous development of forms: 'The more perfect a form is, the more it assumes its own life, and, to that extent, it is the furthest removed

¹⁵ Lukács's biographers are unanimous as to the crucial position of this essay in his *oeuvre*. Kadarkay regards it as the end of Lukács's essayistic period and as the text that 'cleared the way to the Dostoevsky phase of his development' (Kadarkay, *Georg Lukács. Life, Thought, and Politics*, p. 146), while Lee Congdon considers it the indispensable text for the understanding of all subsequent writings of Lukács, non-Marxist and Marxist alike (L. Congdon, *The Young Lukács*, Chapel Hill and London, 1983, p. 67).

from any direct human relationship.' The nature of this process is evidently highly contradictory and the conclusion is correspondingly couched in a paradox: 'Form, then, is like a bridge that separates. . .' (OPS, 44). One should not, however, think that Lukács follows unreservedly in the footsteps of Simmel. While preserving Simmel's negation of petrified, conventional, and obstructive form, Lukács—unlike Simmel or Voloshinov and Bakhtin—is averting his gaze from everyday life which he regards as irretrievably dominated by forms.¹⁶ 'Real life', he asserts, 'is beyond forms, whereas everyday life lies on this side of forms.' Redemption can come only from outside the world of everyday life as 'goodness', detached from everything earthly and worldly: 'Goodness denotes the gift of grace to break through forms' (OPS, 44).

Goodness is the central category in this essay. It is sharply opposed to ethics,¹⁷ for ethics is considered a mechanistic regulation which disassociates people from 'living life'.¹⁸ With Kant's categorical imperative in mind, Lukács defines ethics as 'general, binding, and far removed from men'. Anticipating his beloved later topic of human alienation, Lukács seeks the roots of the problem in the unfortunate reversibility of norm and form. The imposition of duty as an ethical norm reduces it to mere form, constraining life and fostering alienation: 'Ethic denotes man's moving away from himself, and from his empirical condition. Goodness, however, is the return to authentic life, the true homecoming of man' (OPS, 46). Hence the conclusion precludes the option of reconciling goodness and Kantian ethics: 'Goodness is an abandonment of ethic. Indeed, Goodness is not an ethical category. . .' (OPS, 46).

Severing his bonds with a Kantian paradigm of dangerously reifiable duty and ethical norms, Lukács makes his first palpable steps towards Hegel in this essay.¹⁹ This approximation is detectable not so much in the emergence of the theme of alienation (one can perceive it in his *History of the Development of Modern Drama*, which dates from roughly the same time), as perhaps in the solution he offers. In an

¹⁶ At this point of his life Lukács registers clearly his increasingly complex attitude to Simmel. Following difficulties in their relations, the responsibility for which Lukács explores in a diary entry of 27 April 1910, he announces on 29 May in a brisk and indiscriminate manner: 'strong and interesting minds (Simmel, Bloch) give me almost nothing' (G. Lukács, *Tagebuch, 1910–1911*, Berlin, 1991, p. 19).

¹⁷ 'Genuine ethics is [. . .] inhuman; think only of Kant!' (OPS, 50).

¹⁸ 'Living life' (*zhivaiia zhizn'*) is a concept borrowed by Lukács from Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*.

¹⁹ This claim challenges F. Fehér's opinion that Lukács's turn to Hegel only began with his Dostoevsky notes of 1914–15 (see F. Fehér, 'The Last Phase . . .', p. 154).

unmistakably Hegelian move, Lukács envisages a future identity of subject and object which transcends alienation:

Goodness, however, is a knowledge of men that illuminates and makes transparent everything, a knowledge, wherein subject and object collapse into each other. The good man no longer interprets the soul of the other, he reads it as if it was his own; he has become the other. . .

(OPS, 46)

Needless to say, this remedy does not differ dramatically from what Lukács will be proposing some ten years later in *History and Class Consciousness*. The knowing subject and the object of knowledge change, yet the belief in cognisance as a privileged path to authenticity and liberation from the norms of reified existence remains unaltered.

That goodness is not of this world can be further gathered from the special value assigned to it. Goodness is valuable through its lack of use. In Lukács's account sharing in goodness means subscribing to a thoroughly gratuitous act: 'Goodness is useless, for it is without cause and foundation' (OPS, 45). It is precisely Dostoevsky's characters who exemplify this precarious and gratifying condition of goodness for Lukács. Evoking the names of Sonia, Prince Myshkin, and Alexei Karamazov, Lukács accords them several essential features in common: 'their Goodness is also fruitless, chaotic, and futile. It stands out like a great, lonely work of art—incomprehensible and misunderstood' (OPS, 45). We can see that a year after his criticism of 'aesthetic culture', Lukács is still bound by the spell of aestheticism and paradox. In a revealingly contradictory way, he prescribes that form be countered by rectifying its imperfection in an ideal communication modelled on the purposelessness of the work of art as the only perfect (and, for that reason, unique) embodiment of form.

If the essay on 'Poverty of Spirit' criticizes the traditional Kantian ethics of duty but leaves the possible solution still insufficiently articulated, the subsequent notes on Dostoevsky of 1914–15 already engage in a much deeper discussion and suggest a more lucid differentiation between formal ethics and an ethics grounded in the 'life of the soul'.²⁰

In the Dostoevsky notes, Lukács bases his discussion on an attempted distinction between what he calls 'the first ethic' and 'the

²⁰ Lukács's outline of the projected Dostoevsky book, of which two versions (A and B) are known, brings an indisputable testimony to the organic connection between the essay and the notes. In each of the two versions, one can find the heading 'poverty of spirit' as an element of what was to be Part Three of the contemplated book (NE, 37–8). In version A the concept of 'goodness' is also present.

second ethic'. In the event, due perhaps to the experimental and tentative nature of the notes, he fails to provide any substantial and fixed description of either of these two notions. All one can gather from the fragments is that 'the first ethic' is a domain that, initially, lacks metaphysical depth but could possibly regain it (*NE*, pp. 159–60). It is a field 'where everything is ruled (*geregelt*)' (*NE*, 82–3) in contrast to the 'second ethic' which 'has no narrower contents' (*NE*, 39). We also learn that the two are in conflict (*NE*, 125) and that Dostoevsky's work unambiguously represents the 'second ethic' (*NE*, 161).

The clearest and most succinct definition of these two terms is set out in a letter to Paul Ernst written in May 1915. Drawing on both Hegel and Simmel, Lukács speaks there of the constructs (*Gebilde*) of the Objective Spirit, above all of the state, and subjects their conversion into harmfully autonomous and material (*dinghaft*) substances to critical examination (*SC*, 247–8). Lukács's particular interest in the manifestations of the Objective Spirit heralds an intensified sensitivity for the problems of social life and politics. Objective Spirit and Absolute Spirit are held to have two different spheres of realization in each individual.²¹ The human being, Lukács implies in this letter, exists in two dissimilar modes: as a self and as a soul. It is only the self that can be made to partake of the manifestations of the Objective Spirit; the soul remains aloof and untouched by the limited, transitory, and contingent embodiments of the Objective Spirit. For this reason, the soul and the soul alone 'can possess metaphysical reality' (*SC*, 248). The problem with Lukács's letter and notes, again, is that most of these conclusions need to be reconstructed out of scattered allusions and intimations. They cannot be drawn directly from his discussion. Thus, the dichotomy of self and soul is implied in only an elliptical opposition: 'If you say the state is part of the self, that is correct. If you say that it is part of the soul, that is incorrect' (*SC*, 247). Later on, Lukács resorts to a partial disclaimer which stresses the rule by pointing to the exception: 'I certainly don't deny that there are people whose soul, at least in part, is ready and willing to enter into a relationship to the objective spirit and its *Gebilde*. I only protest against those who consider this relationship to be the norm and claim that everyone should associate the

²¹ As we established in Chapter 1, Lukács also discusses the differences between Objective Spirit and Absolute Spirit in his review of Croce's book on theory and history of historiography which dates from only a slightly earlier time (see G. Lukács, '[Review of] B. Croce, *Zur Theorie und Geschichte der Historiographie*', *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, 1915, Vol. 39, pp. 878–85, esp. pp. 879–80).

destiny of his soul with it' (SC, 248). This division of the personality along the lines of duty to a higher metaphysical reality or to reified social structures prepares the ground for the major division and the ever present conflict between the first ethic described as 'duties towards *Gebilde*' and the second ethic posited by the 'imperatives of the soul' (SC, 248).

One can already infer that with the problematic of the clash between the first and the second ethic, Lukács continues his own quest for 'authentic life' which informs his earlier essays of the 1910s. The issue of duty and freedom is an issue about the balance between norms imposed by the state and the law as institutionalized and alienated 'objectifications of culture', to use Lukács's own term,²² and the non-alienated demands of the 'soul', still amenable to the 'metaphysical reality' engrained in every human being. Small wonder, then, that his 1914–15 notes choose to focus precisely on Dostoevsky's novels. His characters, Lukács argues, seem to be entirely independent of the factors underlying the workings of various *Gebilde*. He observes, for example, that Dostoevsky never depicts marriages (NE, 48). Similarly, *Raw Youth* attracts his attention through its depiction of what Dostoevsky himself calls a 'fortuitous family' (NE, 84). Finally, profession, too, is a socially determined and, therefore, marginal factor in the lives of Dostoevsky's heroes. The theme of reification appears in an almost dialectical light at this point in Lukács's discussion. The marginality or strangeness of profession (NE, 51) reflects the ultimate extent of alienation and marginalization of man in society; but it also suggests a point where the balance will finally be redressed. In a world of complete alienation and subjection, the novel conceives the odd profession as a way for the self to free itself from social overdetermination and thus regain its expropriated essence.

Family, marriage, and profession do not, however, embody reified social conditions to the full. Lukács identifies the major problem of Dostoevsky's prose as the problem of the relation between the individual and the state. In the first version of his book draft (NE, 37), he vaguely states his ideal of an 'ethical democracy' which should bring about a rare union between the state and metaphysics. But in the second draft he already speaks of the state becoming 'second nature'.

²² Lukács advances the term 'objectification of culture' (*Kulturobjektivierung*) in his important text 'Zum Wesen und zur Methode der Kulturosoziologie', *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, 1915, Vol. 39, p. 218. Much in keeping with Simmelian usage, in this text the term remains sociologically descriptive rather than axiologically marked.

Clearly referring to Marx and his critique of Hegel's philosophy of right, this entry records an increasingly sober acknowledgement of the inevitability of alienation under capitalism, and a better understanding of the role of the state in this process. A poignant wording of the eventual incompatibility between the state and metaphysical life portrays them as the two horns of a 'dilemma of substantiality: soul or state (objective Spirit)' (*NE*, 90). The evil of the state is further exposed as an 'organized sin' (*NE*, 97) and a viable way out of the injustice is sought—in a silent reference to the Grand Inquisitor section of *The Brothers Karamazov*—in God: 'Only Christ can establish a just state' (*NE*, 97).

What seems to be intellectually a far more inspiring project is Lukács's endeavour to propose a solution which rests not on an other-worldly withdrawal into acquiescence, but rather on an active revision of the power of the state. Characteristically, this project originates in a growing awareness of Marx's significance for grasping the 'real structure of the objective spirit' (*NE*, 90), i.e. the historical limitations and transitory nature of its realizations.

For Lukács, the state is the nexus of a number of inextricably interwoven problems concerning the status of man in a 'world without God'. Nihilism and terrorism, among others, are human reactions he considers to be prompted by the new conditions of increasing alienation of the self through the workings of the constructs of Objective Spirit. In the Spring of 1915, in a letter to Paul Ernst, Lukács points to the origin of this renewed interest in the question of the state (*SC*, 244). He mentions the 1910 German translation of Ropshin's novel *The Pale Horse*, which motivated him to consider Dostoevsky's work in the light of the problem of terrorism as the ultimate opposition between the individual and the state.²³ Commentators on Ropshin's novel, first published in 1909 in *Russkaia Mysl*, were quick to point out parallels and connections between the central character, the terror-minded revolutionary George, and Dostoevsky's Ivan Karamazov.²⁴ The apocalyptic

²³ 'Ropshin' is the pseudonym of Boris Viktorovich Savinkov (1879–1925), who joined the Party of Socialist Revolutionaries in 1899. A poet, novelist, revolutionist, and terrorist, he took part in the assassinations of von Plehve, minister of the interior (July, 1904), and of the Grand Duke Sergius (February 1905).

²⁴ See e.g. T. G. Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia*, London and New York, 1919, Vol. 2, pp. 444–56. Lukács knew Masaryk's book and reviewed the German edition in a dismissive but well substantiated way (G. Lukács, '[Review of] Th. G. Masaryk, *Zur russischen Geschichts- und Religionsphilosophie*', *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, 1914, Vol. 38, pp. 871–5). While giving Masaryk credit for analysing Ropshin's novels (p. 873), Lukács rightly stresses the eclecticism of Masaryk's attempt to write a Russian intellectual history (pp. 871–2).

subtext of the title was suggestive of philosophical associations trying to reconcile crime and final salvation, destruction, and conception.²⁵ Not interested in the book as a work of art, Lukács's perception of Ropshin's novel was that of a document concerning 'the ethical problem of terrorism' (*SC*, 245). He remained torn between the appreciation of 'a new type of man' (*SC*, 245) and the sober judgement of terrorism as 'self-criticism of the revolution'.²⁶

Ropshin's novel sharpened Lukács's sensitivity towards the power of the state to shape the life of the individual and at the same time it reinforced his belief that this power should be resisted, even if this involves commitment to an irrevocably tragic act. In another letter to Paul Ernst, in a somewhat ironic tone, he readily admits 'Oh yes, the state is a power', but refuses to recognize its existence 'in the utopian sense of philosophy, that is, in the sense of true ethics acting at the level of essence' (*SC*, 246). The recognition of the omnipotence of the state at the practical level of institutions entails a gradual reassessment of violence and a growing awareness of its twofold nature. It is an abrupt and striking transgression both of long-established ethical norms and, more importantly, of the limitations of human nature. Those committing violence in the name of the others, while transcending the rules of the first ethic, tend to respond—in deeply problematic ways—to the appeals of the second. An act of violence in the name of goodness may hope to achieve a metaphysical sanctification of the power of man to retain the authentic life of the soul, regardless of the cost. However, violence demands that the price be the very soul of the revolutionary: 'Here the soul must be sacrificed in order to save the soul' (*SC*, 248).²⁷ This is how a paradox builds up, the way out of which is seen in the reliance upon the supreme being of God. In moving the whole way through from a view of violence as a 'self-criticism' of revolution to thinking of it in terms of a morally justified, though tragic act, Lukács has to argue for the necessity of violating what used to be 'the absolute commandment': 'Thou shalt not kill.' The reformulation of the ques-

²⁵ The title of the novel refers to the fourth horse of the Apocalypse. In his analysis, L. Congdon (*The Young Lukács*, pp. 103–5) correctly points out that this title was given to the novel by the prominent Symbolist poetess Zinaida Hippis, but he overlooks the fact that she, in turn, had to take into account the model provided by Valerii Briusov's poem of the same title in his book of poetry *Stephanos* (1903).

²⁶ G. Lukács, '[Review of] Th. G. Masaryk . . .', p. 873.

²⁷ Cf. also a similar entry from the Notes: 'The true sacrifice of the revolutionary is therefore (literally) to sacrifice his soul: to perform out of [the requirements of] a second ethic only [deeds which fall in] a first one' (*NE*, 127). The German text reads: 'Das wahre Opfer des Revolutionärs ist also (buchstäblich): seine Seele zu opfern: aus 2-ter Ethik nur 1-te tun'.

tion of duty and sin ushered in a phase of renewed interest in the work of Friedrich Hebbel.²⁸ Lukács quotes the question asked by Hebbel's character Judith, which remodels the strength of transgression into a legitimate and conciliating weakness of human nature before God's incontestable demands: '[A]nd if God had placed sin between me and the act ordered for me to do, who am I to be able to escape it?' (SC, 248). Thus, leaning on Hebbel, Lukács gives violence an acceptable human face by showing—in a radical transformation of Dostoevsky's own views in *The Brothers Karamazov*—that the act of infraction is not the product of hubris, but rather the fruit of humble submission to the ultimate orders of God.

As one can already see, Dostoevsky, Ropshin, and Hebbel all held a fascination for Lukács, who interpreted their work as a painfully scrupulous discussion of guilt, duty, and violence arising out of the individual's attitude towards the state and the other institutions alienating his existence. Behind this serious attention to Dostoevsky's work there was also a deep personal motivation: in 1914 in Heidelberg, despite the opposition of his family, Lukács married Elena Grabenko, an eccentric Russian revolutionary anarchist and painter who had had to flee her country. Béla Balázs, one of Lukács's close friends, describes her in a memorable way as 'a wonderful example of a Dostoevsky figure. Every single one of her stories, experiences, ideas, and feelings could have come from some of Dostoevsky's most fantastic passages . . .'; Ernst Bloch too recognized in her a decisive influence over the young Lukács: 'Through her Lukács married Dostoevsky, so to speak; he married his Russia, his Dostoevskian Russia.'²⁹

The Dostoevsky notes reveal Lukács's ambition to bring together and study ethical and social problems in their interrelatedness. They also constitute significant evidence for Lukács's endeavours to establish an organic connection between social and literary forms. In this respect, the notes should be regarded as a continuation of the sociological credo of the *History of the Development of Modern Drama* and as a link in a sequence leading to the *Theory of the Novel*. There is, however, a tangible difference between the notes and the drama book, the notes being far subtler in their approach to literary forms. While in the drama

²⁸ 'After years of neglecting him, I have been reading a lot of Hebbel again between breaks in my work', Lukács wrote to Paul Ernst in April 1915 (SC, 246). Hebbel was one of the three playwrights, along with Ibsen and Maeterlinck, to whom Lukács allocated a special chapter in his *History of the Development of Modern Drama*.

²⁹ Quoted in Z. Tar, 'Introduction' (SC, 22).

monograph the correspondence between social and literary phenomena is fairly straightforward, in the notes it is mediated through ethical phenomena. The first ethics, as we have already argued, is grounded in a reified social condition, in an alienated human existence torn from and opposed to social structures (family, marriage, state). The second ethics, on the contrary, presupposes the transcendence of this condition: it places the human being in the ideal environment of an utopian community where social conventions and markers are rendered inessential. Dostoevsky's *oeuvre*, Lukács submits, develops over time to become the ultimate exemplification of this new ethics. Dostoevsky's view of the nature of social connections inevitably changes with it: in the great novels, starting with *Crime and Punishment*, social relations become increasingly metaphysical (*NE*, 77). More importantly, Lukács attempts to draw an analogy between the two ethics and the genres of the novel and the epic. It is in this attempt that the clear distinction between the two, so characteristic of *The Theory of the Novel*, first appears. The very first section in the draft of the Dostoevsky book addresses this distinction (*NE*, 35). Later, Lukács equates the limits of each of the two ethics with the limits and the value of epic and novel: 'Where does the first ethic start to be metaphysic? (aesthetically: when does the novel become epic?)' (*NE*, 159–60). At the beginning of his notes, he provides an unambiguous answer that renders the issue of the novel's merit a foregone conclusion. In a note on Dostoevsky and Dante, Lukács asserts the second ethic as the only true *conditio sine qua non* (*Gestaltungsapriori*) of the epic (*NE*, 39). The novel, being the adequate literary form of the first ethic, is the inferior product of a disenchanted world of 'absolute sinfulness' (Fichte) which has eventually to be overcome. Before becoming the pinnacle of Lukács's philosophy of history in the *The Theory of the Novel*, Fichte's formula is to be found in the Dostoevsky notes where it describes Dostoevsky's own time (*NE*, 60).

The deficiency of the novel, burdened as it is by the foundations of the first ethics, prevents it from constructing the image of an ideal world without alienation. For that reason, Dostoevsky's art, insofar as it is considered the herald of this desired condition, has to be shown to differ significantly from that of other novelists. Dostoevsky, Lukács generalizes, 'depicts [the world], unlike the novel, *not genetically*' (*NE*, 62), i.e., he does not present his heroes' behaviour as necessarily bound to and conditioned by social strata and institutions. Rather, by showing the arbitrariness of family origins and the insignificance of class affiliation, he produces a picture of free and dignified human action.

It is important to stress once again the place the Dostoevsky notes occupy in Lukács's work: after a fully fledged theory of drama and in anticipation of an elaborated theory of the novel. In the Dostoevsky notes the novel compares unfavourably to epic and drama. (We saw in Chapter 3 that this parallel has not always been disadvantageous for the novel.) Compared to both drama and epic, the novel is seen to lose metaphysical power and even to sink to the level of 'entertainment' (*NE*, 48). The same reproach is couched in a more elegant way when Lukács accuses the novel of becoming submerged into the *durée* of life. That the novel rests on *durée* is not a problem; the issue lies in the fact that the novel depicts an unredeemed *durée*, a *durée* without 'elevation' (*NE*, 52). Drama is viewed as a genre which secures elevation by curtailing *durée*, while the epic (Dostoevsky is already listed on this occasion along with Homer and Dante as a representative of the epic art) is celebrated as the genre in which *durée* itself provides elevation (*NE*, 52). It is hard to reconcile this powerful verdict with the concession that the novel conveys the 'longing of the soul' (*NE*, 43–4). Lukács himself suggests no way out of this contradiction: he is inclined to conceive the novel as a historical product of modernity (the age of 'entertainment') and to ascribe to it—in the same breath—the vague yearnings of a supposedly eternal human soul.

Given all the criticism against the novel as genre, one should not be surprised by Lukács's preference for seeing Dostoevsky not as a novelist, but rather as an artist who stands somewhere between 'pure epic' and drama (*NE*, 136), though closer to the former. Lukács's conclusion that 'Dostoevsky hasn't written a novel' (*NE*, 58) clearly anticipates his interpretation of Dostoevsky's work in *The Theory of the Novel*.

The Theory of the Novel is a continuation of the Dostoevsky notes in a qualified sense only. It stems from the notes,³⁰ but adds few new ideas to their scattered propositions. Instead, the book furnishes an organized repetition of already existing fragments, enlarging on ideas which remained *in nuce* in the notes. The indisputable point of continuity between the notes and *The Theory of the Novel* has to be sought in the vital role Dostoevsky plays in both. When first publishing the essay in 1916 in journal form, Lukács appended an introductory note (dropped in the 1920 book edition) stating that 'the following presentation was written as an introductory chapter to an aesthetic and historico-philosophical work about Dostoevsky'. In the same prefatory note Dostoevsky is

³⁰ J. C. Nyíri seems to have every reason to maintain that *The Theory of the Novel* sprang from the 'wreck' of the Dostoevsky notes [J. C. Nyíri, 'Introduction' (*NE*, 25)].

introduced 'as the herald of a new man, the portrayer of a new world, someone who finds but also retrieves a new-old form (*als Finder und als Wiederfinder einer neu-alten Form*)'.³¹ This 'new-old form', as *The Theory of the Novel* argues, is the genre of the epic. The novel is the form of the epoch of absolute sinfulness, Lukács reiterates, and 'it must remain the dominant form so long as the world is ruled by the same stars' (*TN*, 152). A world that could 'spread out into a totality, would be completely inaccessible to the categories of the novel and would require a new form of artistic creation: the form of the renewed epic' (*TN*, 152).

The space allocated to Dostoevsky as such in the book amounts to less than a page, at the very close. Much like the essay 'Aesthetic Culture', where Dostoevsky's name appears only in the final sentence, *The Theory of the Novel* underscores his centrality as the symbol of a desired utopian world through the almost absolute expulsion of his name from the text. The few lines dealing explicitly with Dostoevsky reproduce the judgements of the notes. The state of the epic as a 'new-old form' occasions an overall uncertainty as to whether Dostoevsky's work should be regarded as 'merely a beginning or already a completion' (*TN*, 153). Yet this uncertainty cannot cancel the reinstated certainty that he 'did not write novels' (*TN*, 152).

As in the notes, Dostoevsky's originality is outlined against the background of Tolstoy's *œuvre*. Lukács can claim little originality in making this comparison. The entire scene of Dostoevsky criticism on the Continent after the translation of Merezhkovskii's *Tolstoy and Dostoevsky* into German and French in 1903 had been dominated by this rigid juxtaposition and by its resolution, as in Merezhkovsky's book, largely in favour of Dostoevsky. Nor does Lukács seem to be very original in his exclusive attribution of the epic to Dostoevsky. Before him, Julius Bab makes the same generic distinction: Tolstoy is still a novelist, whereas in Dostoevsky's novel the epic is reborn as the 'epic of Romanticism'.³² While adopting the opposition between epic and novel, Lukács rejects Bab's accommodation of Dostoevsky within a European Romantic tradition. Lukács's silent polemic with Bab can be detected at the end of *The Theory of the Novel*: 'the creative vision revealed in his [Dostoevsky's] works has nothing to do, either as affirmation or as rejection,

³¹ Georg von Lukács, 'Die Theorie des Romans', *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, 1916, Vol. 11, p. 226.

³² J. Bab, *Fortinbras oder der Kampf des 19. Jahrhunderts mit dem Geiste der Romantik: sechs Reden*, Berlin, 1914, p. 163. Lukács knew Bab; as early as 1911, Bab wrote him a letter offering to review *Soul and Form* (*BW*, 264); this letter is not included in *SC*.

with European nineteenth-century Romanticism or with the many, likewise Romantic, reactions against it' (*TN*, 152).³³

Regrettably, some of the compellingly perceptive comments on Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, provided in the notes, remained unpursued in the book. Discussing the status of ideas in Dostoevsky's and Tolstoy's novels in the notes, Lukács concludes that Dostoevsky assigns ideas an incomparably larger value than Tolstoy. Dostoevsky regards ideas 'as reality, as a foundation of reality' and for that reason his is a work of dialogue, whereas Tolstoy 'despises dialogue' (*NE*, 54). A whole tradition of Dostoevsky criticism appears to be foreshadowed in these astute comments. Bakhtin's own extensive praise of Dostoevsky as the first great dialogist in modern literature (and his relentless dismissal of Tolstoy as 'monolithically monologic') as well as Boris Engel'gardt's vigorously argued and influential view of Dostoevsky's novels not as 'novels with an idea, philosophical novels to the taste of the eighteenth century, but [as] novels about an idea'³⁴ equally cannot be fully appreciated without taking into account the succinct and penetrating remarks of the early Lukács.

Even when speaking of Tolstoy's proximity to the epic, Lukács still identifies problems with the state of the 'second ethic' in his works. The 'crisis of the second ethic' (*NE*, 57) accounts for Tolstoy's ultimate inability to complete the transition from novel to epic. This enigmatic explanation is rendered more comprehensible in the chapter on Tolstoy in *The Theory of the Novel*. There Lukács labels Tolstoy an author of 'great and true epic mentality, which has little to do with the novel form' (*TN*, 145). But he stresses that Tolstoy's achievement is to have made 'the novel form still more problematic, without coming concretely closer to the desired goal, the problem-free reality of the epic' (*TN*, 151). It is at this point of frustrated yet laudable endeavours that Dostoevsky appears in Lukács's narrative to attain the truly epic and thus to shake up a world sunk in 'absolute sinfulness'.

One cannot sufficiently stress Dostoevsky's significance for the early Lukács. In discussing his work, Lukács was urged to formulate his stance toward a wide range of essential social problems from alienation and the role of the state in the life of the individual to terror. Through Dostoevsky, social phenomena presented themselves to

³³ That Lukács was overlooking Dostoevsky's debt to Romanticism here is a fact that we do not need to discuss further.

³⁴ B. Engel'gardt, 'Ideologicheskii roman Dostoevskogo', in *F.M. Dostoevskii. Stat'i i materialy*, ed. A. S. Dolinin, Moscow and Leningrad, 1924, Vol. 2, p. 91.

Lukács's critical scrutiny as inextricably interwoven with developments in modern culture and with ripe ethical dilemmas. In analysing Dostoevsky's novels, Lukács was mastering approaches to literary form which did not seek to explain it by way of a premature reduction to social or economic categories, but rather heeded to its intricate meditations through issues of culture and morality. It would be fair to see in Dostoevsky a major challenge to the young Lukács, inciting him to attempt a social analysis of his time embedded in and voiced through a subtle cultural criticism.

AFTER THE THEORY OF THE NOVEL

Following the intense discussion of 1914–16, Dostoevsky seems to disappear from Lukács's writings for more than five years. His name is certainly absent from the *Heidelberg Aesthetics* (1916–18), just as it was from the *Heidelberg Philosophy of Art* (1912–14). The urgent prophetic spirit of Dostoevsky's novels appears to have been inimical to the requirements of systematic philosophizing. In Germany, even more than before, Dostoevsky is central to passionate conversations about the decay of the West or the ominous rise of revolution in the East, but his name is only rarely welcome in the pages of the well-disciplined books of philosophy, and it is left chiefly to essayistically minded thinkers to maintain the public circulation of his visions (Spengler, Ernst Bloch). Treated as dynamite that can destroy even the most carefully built edifice of thought, Dostoevsky's name enjoys an odd existence: neither clandestine, nor glamorously official.

Lukács's life was marked by a similar ambiguity after the failure of his application for a habilitation at Heidelberg (1918). Having been given to understand that he was considered unfit for a German academic career, based as it was on rigidly systematic research and presentation, and, moreover, embittered by undisguised xenophobia, Lukács settled in Budapest without any clear ideas about his future. In the middle of December (the time when he was drafting his reply to the official letter of rejection from Heidelberg) Lukács joined the Hungarian Communist Party. He seems to have believed that it was possible to solve the question of his own future by embracing ideas responsible for the future of the world.

The startling aspect of this crucial move is that only two weeks before his decision, Lukács had, as all his biographers eagerly attest,

renounced the Party and the revolution in his essay 'Bolshevism as a Moral Problem' (1918). Characteristically, the problematic of this article is recognizably Dostoevskian. Again, Dostoevsky's work is evoked to suggest an answer to a question which fuses together ethical and social dimensions: 'can the good be achieved by evil means, and freedom by tyranny' (BMP, 219). Lukács's outright rejection of this disputed possibility is very much at odds with the painful hopes expressed in the Dostoevsky notes that the sin of sanguinary revolt can eventually be justified and redeemed:

Bolshevism rests on the metaphysical assumption that good can issue from evil, that it is possible, as Razumikhin says in *Crime and Punishment*, to lie our way through to the truth. This writer cannot share this faith and therefore sees at the root of Bolshevism an insoluble ethical dilemma.

(BMP, 220)

It might be difficult to believe that it was only months later, in early 1919, that in his article 'Tactics and Ethics' Lukács approached the same moral problem and offered a diametrically opposed resolution to it. Drawing again on the Dostoevsky notes, he recalls Ropshin's novel and Hebbel's *Judith* to present the act of murder as moral in a tragic way: the revolutionaries sacrifice for the others not only their lives; more importantly, they sacrifice their moral purity, their soul (*W*: 2, 52–3). Thus the vagaries of Lukács's mind, against the revolution and back to unconditional support for it, prove to be invariably accompanied by the powerful impact of Dostoevsky. The need to give meaning to the new order of things confronts Lukács with the need to keep rediscovering Dostoevsky's work for himself.

As Lukács advanced in organized Party life to assume official functions as Minister for Education in the short-lived government of the Hungarian socialist republic, his vacillations regarding the sense of Dostoevsky's *œuvre* gradually subsided. Lukács was an ardent propagator of Dostoevsky's art³⁵ and planned to subsidize a complete translation and edition of his prose in Hungary.³⁶ Dostoevsky was to him the epitome of the heights of Russian culture, and Russia was, of course, an embodiment of resurrected hopes and new ideals.

³⁵ In the ferment of the Hungarian revolution and amidst the busy start to the Republic, Lukács is reported to have been engaged in constant conversations about Dostoevsky, to the point of unnerving his more action-minded Party comrades. On one such occasion Lukács was interrupted with the harsh 'Can't you stop your eternal prattle about Dostoevsky?' (A. Szélpál, *Les 133 jours de Béla Kun*, Paris, 1959, p. 201).

³⁶ See L. Congdon, *The Young Lukács*, p. 159.

With the collapse of the Hungarian republic, a radical change occurred. In the atmosphere of suspicion and pessimism in emigration, following the ban on the Party, Lukács again had to modify his image of Dostoevsky. The failure of the revolution resulted in reservations towards the writer whose work was utilized to furnish its moral justification. In the two short pieces of 1922, 'Dostoevsky: Novellas' and 'Stavrogin's Confession', one still can discern, against the background of an increasingly stern and direct treatment of class, Lukács's fascination with Dostoevsky. He denies Dostoevsky the credit of being a prophet of the proletarian cause or a forerunner of the Revolution, but he nevertheless concludes on a positive note: 'He was not those things. But the worker must at all costs learn to appreciate in him the titanic striving after inner truth . . .'³⁷

It is essential to demonstrate how some particular features of Dostoevsky's writing, previously the subject of veneration, now become a target of discontent and criticism:

Dostoevsky remained in the last analysis an *individualist*. He could not surmount the narrow limitations of the isolated self. He fathomed, dissected and illuminated this area as nobody else—but he always adhered to *man as an individual*, without examining the social roots of man's being and consciousness. True, he shows the position occupied by his characters in terms of social class, but for Dostoevsky this is an introductory or secondary point and does not serve as a motive or basis. [. . .] Although he describes their social existence, it is not in accordance with this that his characters think and feel, but often in line with an imagined, projected society of the future, a 'just society'.³⁸

Dostoevsky's distance from the manifestations of the Objective Spirit, his desire to portray a human being freed from the fetters of compulsory and reifying objectifications (class, family, state) and to allow the individual's soul to shine through in purity is now found wanting and incapable of providing the ground for a class-bound art. Dostoevsky is reproached here not for being insufficiently metaphysical; on the contrary, he is chastised for not being realistic enough in the sense of not dwelling on the social nature of human consciousness. The reality of the soul, which in the Dostoevsky notes is treated as the only worthy artistic concern, is here ruthlessly supplanted by the reality of class and social determination. Yet there remains one solid connection between this essay and the notes. Dostoevsky's merit is said to

³⁷ G. Lukács, 'Dostoevsky: Novellas', *Reviews and Articles from Die Rote Fahne*, trans. P. Palmer, London, 1983, p. 50.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

lie in his utopian visions, which detach him from creeping and reactionary naturalism. If anything, his value is, after all, of a moral nature (a 'titanic striving after inner truth'), and this seems to confirm that Lukács's understanding of art, while undergoing a dramatic transformation, was still far from primitive reductionism.

Lukács's other essay, 'Stavrogin's Confession',³⁹ though written in the same year, turns back to the Dostoevsky notes and identifies much more closely with their appraisal of Dostoevsky's distinctive ability to rise above the realities of the Objective Spirit. It is in this essay, written at the same time as some of the essays from *History and Class Consciousness*, that Lukács claims Dostoevsky for the battle against reification with greatest vigour:

Dostoevsky's greatness as a writer lies in his particular ability to strip without effort, through spontaneous vision, every character, human relationship and conflict of the reified shell in which they are all presented today and to pare them down, to reduce them to their purely spiritual core. Thus he depicts a world in which every inhumanly mechanical and soullessly reified element of capitalist society is simply no longer present, but which still contains the deepest inner conflicts of our age. This is also the source of his utopian outlook, the view that the saving principle for all hardship may be found in pure human relationships . . .

(Stav, 45)

One is tempted to interpret these lines as a metaphysical and a tentative, rather than orthodox, Marxist conception of reification, for what Lukács's gaze identifies behind the 'reified shell' is only another 'spiritual' layer which is taken by him to be the core of human relations. Lukács then performs a leap in his argument which brings him into sharp contradiction with his verdict from 'Dostoevsky: Novellas'. His charge that Dostoevsky did not penetrate into the social roots of human being and consciousness is easy to recall. Now his assessment swings in the opposite direction. Dostoevsky, Lukács argues,

was bound to fail in his desperate struggle to convert the social element of human existence into pure spirit. But his failure was transformed into an overwhelming *artistic triumph*, for never before him were precisely the social roots of tragedy in certain human types pursued so far to the purest spiritual utterances and discovered in them and brought to light.

(Stav, 47)

³⁹ Hereafter abbreviated as 'Stav', with page numbers given in the main text.

Willingly admitting the 'contradiction between political bias and poetic vision' (Stav, 45) and distinguishing between ideological failure and 'artistic triumph' in Dostoevsky's novels, 'Stavrogin's Confession' proves to be an early example of what will become one of the central tenets of Lukács's Marxist aesthetics in the 1930s.

It was in early 1931, with Stalin's regime increasingly dominating the cultural policy of the Left, that Lukács took a last dramatic turn in his Dostoevsky criticism. If Z. Fehér is mistaken in calling 'On Dostoevsky's Legacy' (1931) Lukács's first published statement devoted entirely to Dostoevsky, he is undoubtedly right to define it as a 'document of harsh self-criticism', and, we might add, an extorted one. Overlapping in time with the activities marking Dostoevsky's anniversary in 1931, Lukács's article is a sad example of disavowed views and values. Here Dostoevsky is blamed for lending 'ideological consecration' to the 'pusillanimous, defeatist vacillations' of the petty bourgeoisie in the face of the Revolution. The refinement of the 'soul' and the sharp picture of 'inner' (already placed in damning quotation marks) problems in Dostoevsky's novels, Lukács claims, facilitates the adoption of a 'salon-revolutionary' outlook by the 'wide strata of petty bourgeois intelligentsia'.⁴⁰ Ropshin, previously praised for laying bare the moral dilemmas of revolutionary violence, is now considered a decadent-terroristic betrayer of revolution. Art is sacrificed as an object of aesthetic pleasure and philosophical contemplation and is relegated to subservient political uses.

Lukács's essay of 1931 should not be regarded, however, only as a passive response to the changing climate in Soviet literary theory and aesthetics. In the early 1930s Lukács himself, though always haunted by a certain suspicion in the upper circles of the Moscow literary and political establishment, was beginning to shape energetically the Party line in literary criticism and theory. It was after a period of active involvement with the influential journal *Literaturnyi kritik* (closed down for 'political deviations' in 1940) that Lukács took the liberty, in 1943, of writing a less dogmatic piece on Dostoevsky.⁴¹ Ironically, as I have already pointed out (cf. n. 4 in this chapter), Lukács's last text on Dostoevsky was a manifestation of courage 'licensed' in the course of a dutiful performance of what was clearly a political assignment. Not surprisingly, then, the essay is perplexed and somewhat colourless,

⁴⁰ G. Lukács, 'Über den Dostojewski-Nachlaß', *Moskauer Rundschau*, 22 March 1931, p. 6.

⁴¹ G. Lukács, 'Dostoevsky', in *Dostoevsky: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. R. Wellek, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1962, pp. 146-58.

aimed at rectifying the ideologically primitive character of the 1931 piece rather than at providing fresh insight. On reading it, one can hear two different voices resonate. One is emphatically existentialist: Dostoevsky's heroes, Lukács submits, 'do not properly live in the present, but only in a constant tense expectation' of a situation of authenticity and essentiality which never arrives. 'Every situation is provisional' (D, 152) for them, their lives do not coincide with the ideal projections of a being-in-the-truth. The other voice is typically Marxist. In stark contradiction to his 1914-16 Dostoevsky notes (*NE*, 62), Lukács now argues that Dostoevsky is interested in the social genesis of his heroes' condition: 'The problem of genesis is decisive. Dostoevsky sees the starting point of the specific nature of his characters' psychological organization in the particular form of urban misery' (D, 153) and, for the upper strata, in 'life without work—the complete isolation of the soul which comes from idleness' (D, 155).

These two voices remain unreconciled. Not even the well-rehearsed slogan of the *voprekisty* about the eventually beneficial contradiction between false world view and correct artistic presentation, played out in a fresher form ('The poetic question, correctly put, triumphs over the political intentions, the social answer of the writer') (D, 156), can harmonize these two divergent analytical perspectives. The essay powerfully privileges the Marxist approach, to the point of almost obliterating the difference between Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, of which so much had been made in the Dostoevsky notes: 'Only in Russia, in Tolstoy and Dostoevsky' is the problem of the social basis of human life raised in all its depth (D, 154). Abandoning his early distinction between Dostoevsky and Tolstoy, Lukács is forced also to relinquish his original and influential view of Dostoevsky as the author of epic, and not of novels. Indeed, Dostoevsky is now declared 'the first and greatest poet of the modern capitalist metropolis' (the formula is literally reminiscent of Simmel's well-known article about the fate of man in the metropolis), an accolade which stresses his pre-eminence as a novelist.

We have thus seen that over a long period, and at different stages of his work and philosophical affinities or political affiliations, Lukács was invariably concerned with Dostoevsky's *œuvre*. From the ethical revolt of his youth, informed by a Simmelian cultural criticism, to the Marxist appropriation for the purposes of political action, Dostoevsky remained for Lukács an irreplaceable incentive for exploring literature in its broader ideological relevance and for theorizing its forms as mediated indices of social occurrences. It was largely through this

concentration on Dostoevsky that for Lukács literary criticism could blend with social philosophy and cultural theory.

BAKHTIN: THE SOCIOLOGICAL SUPPRESSED

Surprisingly, Bakhtin's work on Dostoevsky has not been subjected to thorough interpretation and we are yet to face its controversial multi-voicedness. Here I attempt an analysis of this work in the light of recently published Russian texts. My concern will be to reconstruct the dynamics of the notion of dialogue in Bakhtin's writings and to establish that the idea of dialogue, so insistently promoted in Bakhtin scholarship as an indisputable emblem of his thought, is a complicated construct, a compromise resulting from the work of several conflicting lines of argumentation within Bakhtin's Dostoevsky texts. I shall argue that Bakhtin's texts employ three main strategies of interpretation—the sociological, the phenomenological, and the metageneric (with an added line of philosophy-of-history interpretation in the 1929 and 1963 Dostoevsky books)—and will chart their changing fortunes as Bakhtin's Dostoevsky images alter from the 1920s into the 1960s. Through a close reading of Bakhtin's Dostoevsky texts I shall demonstrate that the sociological approach gradually fades and gives room to the phenomenological and metageneric approaches.

I will be equally concerned to prove that, regardless of the changes affecting the status of each of these three approaches over time, more than one of them can be found to co-exist and work in competition with the others in each of the texts discussed. Vitalii Makhlin, one of the most prominent Russian Bakhtin scholars, is certainly right to object against a neat division of Bakhtin's work into an early phenomenological (or 'individualistic', in Makhlin's words) and a later (starting in the late 1920s and extending into the 1930s) sociological stage.⁴² This division, however, is untenable not because Bakhtin never wrote from a sociological perspective, as Makhlin is trying to suggest, but because even in the late 1920s, in his Dostoevsky book, and also later, the sociological and the phenomenological perspectives were claiming his attention simultaneously and within the same text(s), thus contributing to the complex and controversial nature of his work. Thus I will be

⁴² See V. L. Makhlin, "Dialogizm" M. M. Bakhtina kak problema gumanitarnoi kul'tury XX veka', *Bakhtinskii sbornik*, 1990, Vol. 1, p. 110.

seeking to answer the question of how Bakhtin's Dostoevsky texts are 'made' and to argue that their underlying concept of dialogue has been not just unstable and dynamic, but also multilayered at each point of its evolution.

As the argument advances, it will become clear that one of the three approaches I will be discussing—the sociological—rests on Bakhtin's fluctuating and not very sharply outlined notion of what a sociological interpretation of literature should involve. As a telling example discussed later in this chapter shows, Bakhtin used 'social' and 'sociological' as synonymous descriptions of an approach to literature and culture which examines them in reference to the organization, functioning, and development of society. This rather broad understanding of the sociological approach accounts for the fact that Bakhtin's Dostoevsky texts accommodate, as I will demonstrate below, propositions that are couched in a stricter sociological parlance (class, social structure, crisis etc.), mainly of a Marxist provenance, along with others which address various social issues in a more oblique manner.

The corpus of Bakhtin's Dostoevsky texts comprises his 1929 book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*, the extensive notes towards its reworking (1961–3),⁴³ the 1963 book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, which was republished in Bakhtin's lifetime (1972),⁴⁴ and an interview on the polyphonic nature of Dostoevsky's novels granted in 1971 but only published

⁴³ So far, three portions of the notes have been published: (1) M. M. Bakhtin, 'K pererabotke knigi o Dostoevskom', *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*, Moscow, 1986, pp. 326–46 (The title is given by the compiler of the volume, S. Bocharov; originally these notes were published by V. Kozhinov in *Kontekst* 1976, Moscow, 1977, pp. 296–316). All references will be to Caryl Emerson's English translation 'Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky book' (*PDP*, 283–302), abbreviated as TRD, I; 2. M. Bakhtin, 'K pererabotke knigi o Dostoevskom. II', *DKH*, 1994, No. 1, pp. 70–82 (with notes by N. Pan'kov; the Russian title comes from V. Kozhinov who published the text); all references will be to this publication, abbreviated as TRD, II; 3. M. Bakhtin, 'Zametki 1962 g. — 1963 g.' (*SS*, 375–8), first published by V. Kozhinov in *Literaturnaiia ucheba*, 1992, No. 5–6, pp. 164–5; references are to the text in *SS*. Text No. 1 was also published in *SS* as part of a larger body of Bakhtin's notes of 1961 ('1961 god. Zametki', *SS*, 339–60). With the exception of a passage of three sentences (*SS*, the third paragraph on p. 345), this text reproduces the text from *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*. Text No. 2, too, was published in *SS* as 'Dostoevsky. 1961 g.' (*SS*, 364–374). Despite the claims of the editors of *SS* that their version is textologically more accurate, on two occasions (*SS*, 371 and 373) the text of *SS*, unlike that in *DKH*, does not indicate the alternative expressions used by Bakhtin in the manuscript; in addition, the obviously correct word 'tekstologicheskaiia' (*DKH*, 1994, No. 1, p. 76, paragraph 5) is replaced in *SS* by 'tekhnologicheskaiia', which scarcely makes sense (*SS*, 374, paragraph 2). The notes of 1961–3 are foreshadowed by a short note of 1941–2 (*SS*, 42–4).

⁴⁴ All references are to *PDP*, where the texts of *PDA* and *PDP* do not differ, reference will be made to both and to Caryl Emerson's translation. Whenever only one of the two abbreviations is used, this suggests that the text is only present in the respective book.

in 1975.⁴⁵ Contrary to the prevailing understanding of the 1963 book as a modified version of the 1929 text,⁴⁶ part of my subsequent argument is that these are two essentially different books rather than versions of the same text.

The Pre-History: Before 1929

Bakhtin's texts on Dostoevsky are preceded by an unkept promise. In his 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity', the reader is assured that the forms of confessional self-accounting will be considered as part of the examination of 'the problem of author and hero in Dostoevsky's works' (AH, 146). But apart from a few scattered references nothing more is said of Dostoevsky in the essay. The weight of these isolated pronouncements, however, should not be underestimated. Indeed, the germs of the 1929 book can be seen to lie in this early unfinished text. In a succinct typology of the relations between author and hero, 'almost all of Dostoevsky's main heroes' (AH, 20)⁴⁷ are included as illustrations of the case where, as Bakhtin writes, 'the hero takes possession of the author' (AH, 17). Moreover, Bakhtin describes this case as part of a process of 'crisis of authorship', whose symptoms are seen in the contest of 'the author's right to be situated outside lived life and to consummate it' (AH, 203). What distinguishes this early proposition from those in the 1929 book is Bakhtin's unwillingness to see Dostoevsky's novels as the only embodiment of these phenomena: in 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity', Tolstoy's Pierre and Levin are listed alongside Dostoevsky's characters as examples of the subordinate role of the author in relation to the hero (AH, 20).

If there can be no doubt that the 'Author and Hero' essay served as a preliminary to, or was a coterminous exercise in, outlining the problems posed in the Dostoevsky book of 1929, hypotheses about the precise content of other possible prototypes of the book should be

⁴⁵ M. M. Bakhtin, 'O polifonichnosti romanov Dostoevskogo', *Rossia/Russia*, Torino, 1975, Vol. 2, pp. 189–98; I will not discuss this text, for it does not feature any new directions of interpretation that are not already contained in Bakhtin's earlier texts on Dostoevsky.

⁴⁶ For strong arguments supporting this view see N. Bonetskaia, 'K sopostavleniiu dvukh redaktsii knigi M. Bakhtina o Dostoevskom', *Bakhtinskii chteniia*, Vitebsk, Vol. 1, 1996, pp. 26–32. For an earlier overview of the similarities and the differences between *PDA* and *PDP*, see O. Osovskii, 'M. M. Bakhtin: ot "Problem tvorchestva" k "Problemam poetiki Dostoevskogo"', *Bakhtinskii sbornik*, 1990, Vol. 1, pp. 7–60.

⁴⁷ The Russian 'pochti vse glavnye geroi Dostoevskogo' is rendered in the English translation simply as 'almost all of Dostoevsky's heroes'.

accepted *cum grano salis*. N. Nikolaev assumes that a prototype of the Dostoevsky book was written by Bakhtin as early as 1922 and that the ideas set forth in this prototype must have been reflected not only in the 1929 Dostoevsky book but also in 'Author and Hero' and in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*.⁴⁸ Since, however, no text has been preserved, Nikolaev's speculations about a possible correspondence between the prototype and Bakhtin's other works of the 1920s must remain an intriguing but so far unsubstantiated hypothesis.

Dialogue and Phenomenology: The 1929 Book

In addition to the prototypes in his *own* writings, Bakhtin's 1929 book is organically embedded in a long tradition of Dostoevsky criticism in Russia, which is selectively recorded in the introductory chapter of the work.⁴⁹ In the preface, Bakhtin sets out his approach, based on the belief that 'every literary work is internally and immanently sociological' (*PDA*, 3). It is not hard to establish that this is a principle underlying earlier texts of Medvedev⁵⁰ and Voloshinov,⁵¹ connected by a joint attack on Sakulin's *The Sociological Method in Literary Scholarship* (1925). The difficulty arises with the question of why Bakhtin sidelines the sociological approach stated by him in this study. As a way of offering an answer to this question, I shall examine the main arguments of the 1929 book and trace how they relate to the 1963 work.

From the outset, Bakhtin, much like Lukács, praises Dostoevsky for resisting the spirit of objectification in his prose: 'The consciousness of a character is given as someone else's consciousness, another consciousness, yet at the same time it is not turned into an object (*ne opredmechivaetsia*), is not closed, does not become a simple object of the author's consciousness' (*PDA*, 7/*PDP*, 7). Bakhtin supports this argument, much

⁴⁸ N. Nikolaev, "'Dostoevskii i antichnost'" kak tema Pumpianskogo i Bakhtina (1922–1963)', *Voprosy literatury*, 1996, No. 3, p. 117; see also N. Nikolaev, 'Izdanie nasledia Bakhtina kak filologicheskaiia problema (Dve retsenzii)', *DKH*, 1998, No. 3, p. 120. For further speculations on the continuity between the 1922 prototype, *AH*, and *PDA*, see S. Igeta, 'Ivanov-Pumpianskii-Bakhtin', in *Comparative and Contrastive Studies in Slavic Languages and Literatures. Japanese Contributions to the Tenth International Congress of Slavists*, Tokyo, 1988, pp. 84–6.

⁴⁹ For a very good analysis of Bakhtin's early work on Dostoevsky in the context of contemporary Russian Dostoevsky criticism, see D. Segal, 'Dostoevskij e Bachtin Rivisitati', in *Bachtin: teorico del dialogo*, ed. F. Corona, Milano, 1986, pp. 336–76.

⁵⁰ P. Medvedev, 'Sociologism without Sociology' [1926], in *Bakhtin School Papers*, ed. A. Shukman, Colchester, 1988, pp. 70–2; and *FM* (pp. 32–3).

⁵¹ V. Voloshinov, 'Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry' [1926], in *Bakhtin School Papers*, pp. 6–7.

in the way Lukács did in his Dostoevsky notes, by celebrating Dostoevsky's remoteness from the world of the Objective Spirit: 'In Dostoevsky's world generally there is nothing thing-like (*nichego veshchnogo*), no matter (*net predmeta*), no object (*ob'ekta*)—there are only subjects' (*PDA*, 134/*PDP*, 237*). In a passage from the conclusion, dropped in the 1963 book, Dostoevsky's ultimate merit is to have created works of art in which 'the person loses its brute external substantiality, its thing-like plainness' (*PDA*, 172).

One can argue, then, that Bakhtin's apology of Dostoevsky is steeped in the same spirit of Romantic anti-capitalism which we can sense in Lukács's notes,⁵² and lacks foundation in a sober analysis of the real factors underlying reification. Bakhtin's revolt rests on the representation (and glorification) of Dostoevsky as a writer who reformulates social conflicts into moral dilemmas. Bakhtin's Dostoevsky emerges as an author who challenges social evil by seeking to demonstrate that its roots do not lie in the constitution of society but rather in the elevated and dignified realm of human consciousness. As Bakhtin approvingly puts it, 'even in the earliest "Gogolian period" of his literary career, Dostoevsky is already depicting not the "poor government clerk" but the *self-consciousness* of the poor clerk' (*PDA*, 39/*PDP*, 48). Much in line with existing trends in Russian Dostoevsky criticism, Bakhtin locates Dostoevsky's uniqueness in the fact that in his thinking 'there are no genetic or causal categories', 'no explanations based on the past, on the influences of the environment or of upbringing' (*PDA*, 32–3/*PDP*, 29). The sole reality worthy of artistic examination proves to be the reality of mental life. By praising Dostoevsky for sticking to this choice, Bakhtin tries to defend him against the attacks of the sociological school while failing to recognize the inadequacy of Dostoevsky's outright rejection of the sociological accounts explaining phenomena such as criminality, for example. It is with reference to the same 'poor characters' (Devushkin, Goliadkin) of Dostoevsky's early writings and to his almost exclusive preoccupation with their consciousness that Pereverzev, in another classic study of Dostoevsky, vehemently accused him of ignoring the actual earthly aspects of the human predicament: 'Under the metaphysical froth he does not notice the gloomy waves of poverty and real humiliation, on whose crest this froth seethes.'⁵³

⁵² Bakhtin's debt to Lukács can be attested on a more particular level as well. Characteristically, both Bakhtin (*PDA*, 34–5/*PDP*, 30–1) and Lukács (*TN*, 152) refer to one and the same artistic predecessor of Dostoevsky (Dante).

⁵³ V. Pereverzev, *Tvorchestvo Dostoevskogo*, Moscow, 1922, p. 241.

On the other hand, contrary to the conclusions that one might expect to follow from his observations, Bakhtin also takes pains to redress the balance and celebrate Dostoevsky as an artist who offers 'something like a sociology of consciousness' and, therefore, 'material that is valuable for the sociologist as well' (*PDA*, 36/*PDP*, 32). In the closing pages of the 1929 book Bakhtin goes so far as to declare that the dialogue between humans in Dostoevsky's novels is a 'highly interesting sociological document' (*PDA*, 170). In explaining what precisely this document stands for, Bakhtin claims that 'family, group (*soslovnye*), class and all kinds of such determinations have lost [for Dostoevsky's heroes] authority and form-building force' (*PDA*, 171). Man asserts himself 'as if unmediated by any social entity. "Dostoevsky's heroes are the heroes of accidental families and accidental social entities (*kollektivov*)."' They are propelled by the dream of 'forming a community beyond the existing social forms' (*PDA*, 171).⁵⁴ While for Lukács this going beyond the established forms is an unambiguously positive act, for Bakhtin it is no more than the sublimated artistic expression of the predicament of a particular social class: 'All this is the deepest expression of the social disorientation of the non-aristocratic (*raznochinskaiia*) intelligentsia, which was [. . .] finding its bearings in the world in loneliness, at its own fear and risk' (*PDA*, 171).

By the same token, intense human intercourse, Bakhtin submits, need not be thought of as a sign that alienation has been overcome in Dostoevsky's novels; it could well be the manifestation of a crisis point in society. Monological discourse, Bakhtin implies, is fading because of the lack of a 'solid social group, a "we"' (*PDA*, 171). A revealing episode in Bakhtin's hesitation as to whether the new artistic forms resting on non-authoritative and non-direct authorial discourse should be regarded as the outcome of a positive or a negative social development, is his discussion in the chapter 'Types of prose discourse. Discourse in Dostoevsky'. Direct authorial discourse is said to express the author's intentions without inflection and obliqueness, and without refraction in another's discourse. Turgenev is the example of such direct authorial discourse, the use of which precludes double-voicedness (*PDA*, 85/*PDP*, 192). At the same time, however, Bakhtin, as we have seen in Chapter 4, seems to mourn the loss of the time when direct authorial discourse thrived: 'Direct authorial discourse is not possible in every

⁵⁴ Bakhtin's 'po tu storonu sushchestvuiushchikh sotsial'nykh form' clearly evokes the title of Voloshinov's article of 1925 'Po tu storonu sotsial'nogo'.

epoch, nor can every epoch command a style . . . Where there is no adequate form for the unmediated expression of an author's thoughts, he *has to resort* to refracting them in someone else's discourse' (*PDA*, 84/*PDP*, 192*).⁵⁵ His conclusion, which was left out of the 1963 book, is rather ambiguous and by no means optimistic: 'Direct authorial discourse is at present undergoing a socially conditioned crisis' (*PDA*, 85).⁵⁶

With this we are reaching a central proposition of Bakhtin's analysis: indirect discourses and dialogue are the result of a state of crisis in society. In his account of contemporary Dostoevsky criticism Bakhtin singles out Otto Kaus's book *Dostojewski und sein Schicksal* (1923) and joins him in finding the social prerequisites of Dostoevsky's prose in capitalist modernity. 'At some earlier time', Kaus's and Bakhtin's argument goes,

those worlds, those planes—social, cultural, and ideological—which collide in Dostoevsky's work were each self-sufficient, organically sealed and stable; each made sense internally as an isolated unit. There was no real-life, material plane of essential contact or interpenetration with one another. Capitalism destroyed the isolation of these worlds, broke down the seclusion and inner ideological self-sufficiency of these spheres.

(*PDA*, 21/*PDP*, 19)

Thus Bakhtin equates crisis and modernity and conceives capitalism as a critical state of society marked by a healthy yet unsettling process of mutual opening up of various fields of life. While accepting Kaus's conclusion that 'Dostoevsky is not the funeral dirge but the cradle song of our contemporary world, a world born out of the fiery breath of capitalism',⁵⁷ Bakhtin is eager to stress the particular propitiousness of the Russian circumstances:

The polyphonic novel could indeed have been realised only in the capitalist era. The most favourable soil for it was moreover precisely in Russia, where capitalism set in almost catastrophically, and where it came upon an untouched multitude of diverse worlds and social groups which had not been weakened in their individual isolation, as in the West, by the gradual encroachment of

⁵⁵ Italics mine; in the 1929 book instead of 'of an author's thoughts' (*avtorskikh myslei*) Bakhtin uses 'of an author's intentions' (*avtorskikh intentsii*).

⁵⁶ The problem of the crisis of authorship and authorial discourse was addressed as early as 1921 in Pumpianskii's 'Dostoevskii i antichnost', and this may well have been one of Bakhtin's inspirations to pose the problem in the Dostoevsky book of 1929.

⁵⁷ O. Kaus, *Dostojewski und sein Schicksal*, Berlin, 1923, p. 63.

capitalism. [. . .] In this way the objective preconditions were created for the multi-leveledness and multi-voicedness of the polyphonic novel.

(*PDA*, 22/*PDP*, 19–20)

These quotations offer sufficient and clear evidence of Bakhtin's desire to give meaning to the genre of the novel and to Dostoevsky's prose in the framework of a (Marxist) sociological analysis. As we have demonstrated, he identifies capitalism as the necessary social environment of Dostoevsky's novels and the uprooted, free-floating intelligentsia as their main hero. The problem is not that such a desire was absent from Bakhtin's book, but that it was eventually outweighed and frustrated by other competing lines of interpretation.

The first of these lines can be described as a philosophy-of-history direction. It does not appear often in Bakhtin's pre-1930s work and for this reason its presence in the 1929 book is even more significant. This interpretative approach establishes a closer connection between Bakhtin and Lukács, on the one hand, and Bakhtin and an influential tradition of Russian Dostoevsky criticism on the other.

One can detect this line of reasoning in Bakhtin's distinction between what he terms the 'monologic' and the 'dialogic' worlds. The essential principles which govern the monological world, Bakhtin argues, are not confined to the realm of art. They 'go far beyond the boundaries of artistic creativity' and are 'the principles behind the entire ideological culture of modern times' (*PDA*, 54/*PDP*, 80*). Monologism is seen here as the underlying cultural principle of modernity at large. Responsible for both philosophical idealism and European utopianism, monologism is not the creation of great thinkers: 'no, it is a profound structural characteristic of the creative ideological activity of modern times, determining all its external and internal forms' (*PDA*, 56/*PDP*, 82). Although in the 1963 book Bakhtin attempts a concretization of this too general proposition by specifying the role of the Enlightenment in the consolidation of rationalism and monologism (*PDP*, 82), his conclusion remains rather indiscriminate. By allowing monologism to function as an all-embracing cultural force, Bakhtin suppresses the germs of his own historical analysis. Rather than appear as the product of specific capitalist developments affecting the fate of a particular class in Russia, Dostoevsky's *œuvre* has now to be interpreted as the rejection of an all-pervasive and vague cultural pattern. If in Lukács's narrative this pattern is given an ethical name and Dostoevsky proves destined to challenge an age of absolute sinfulness,

Bakhtin attaches a mixed epistemologically-ethical designation to the same pattern, and Dostoevsky becomes the denouncer of an age of absolute monologism. In each case, he is seen in the light of an epic clash between enduring cultural principles, rather than as a precisely locatable historical phenomenon.

The other line of reasoning opposing a sociological analysis can be termed phenomenological.⁵⁸ As suggested at an earlier point of our argument, Bakhtin acclaims Dostoevsky for privileging his heroes' consciousnesses as the only noteworthy subject for the artist. A quintessential manifestation of the spirit of phenomenological contemplation comes in a passage where Bakhtin attempts to describe the process of 'purification' of consciousness:

The author retains for himself, that is, for his exclusive field of vision, not a single essential definition, not a single trait, not the smallest feature of the hero himself, he casts it all into the crucible of the hero's own self-consciousness. In the author's field of vision, as an object of his visualisation and representation, there remains only this pure self-consciousness in its totality.

(PDA, 39/PDP, 48*)⁵⁹

Bakhtin's description here appears rather ambiguous. To start with, it is not quite clear whose consciousness remains 'pure' as the result of this mental procedure: is it the author's, which is freed from all definitions and features of the character, or is it the hero's own consciousness, as the text intimates through the demonstrative pronoun 'this'? But, then, how can the hero's self-consciousness be 'pure' after incorporating the elements and the features of his/her life? Nevertheless, 'this' self-consciousness is pure, Bakhtin insists, because, or when, it is grasped by the author 'in its totality'. The implication is that consciousness should be defined not in relation to (the elements of) its content, but rather in relation to its functions, to its capacity for melting down all elements in the 'crucible' of self-reflection. This is the only

⁵⁸ The early Bakhtin's interest in German phenomenology is attracting growing scholarly interest. The best study of Bakhtin's debt to Max Scheler remains B. Poole, 'Rol' M. I. Kagana v stanovlenii filosofii M. M. Bakhtina (ot Germana Kogena k Maksu Sheleru)', *Bakhtinskii sbornik*, 1997, Vol. 3, pp. 162–81. Here I explore other aspects of Bakhtin's affiliation with phenomenology.

⁵⁹ There are two problems with the existing English translation here: the crucial 'this' (*eto chistoe samosoznanie*), contributing to the resolution of ambiguity in the last sentence, has been omitted; and the difficult term *videnie*, with a recognizably Husserlian origin (*Wesensschau*), is translated with the more general 'visualization'. In a special section on *videnie* in his monograph about Bakhtin, M. Freise leaves this term throughout untranslated (M. Freise, *Michail Bakhtins philosophische Ästhetik der Literatur*, Frankfurt am Main, 1993, pp. 117–23), only sporadically rendering it with the neutral 'Sehen'.

viewpoint enabling the author to contemplate it *in toto*. Indeed, as Bakhtin suggests earlier in his text, 'the function of this [the hero's] self-consciousness becomes the subject of the author's *videnie* and representation' (*PDA*, 39/*PDP*, 48*).⁶⁰ The primacy of *videnie* over cognition, argued for by Bakhtin in the 1924 text on 'The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art',⁶¹ is reconfirmed here by attributing to *videnie* the status of source for all creative activities. Intimately interwoven, *videnie* and phenomenological purity are the principles constituting the basis of Bakhtin's reading of Dostoevsky as a writer who institutes the consciousnesses of his heroes as supreme artistic reality. (*Videnie* is also of crucial importance to Bakhtin's analysis of Goethe in the 1930s.)

The phenomenological purity of *videnie*, its nature as almost other-worldly knowledge, is further exacerbated by Bakhtin's belief that the reader cannot really *visualize* Dostoevsky's characters. 'Dostoevsky's hero', Bakhtin argues, 'is not an objectified image but an autonomous discourse, pure voice; we do not see him, we hear him' (*PDP*, 53).⁶² This struggle of the senses, enacted by Bakhtin, seems to reflect his embeddedness in a particular tradition of thought which couches the intellectual processes of approaching and evaluating the literary work in phenomenological terms. Bakhtin's is a rhetoric of elevating and 'humanizing' these senses by pronouncing them to be the foundation for the higher activities of aesthetic imagination.

The phenomenological orientation of Bakhtin's analysis is entirely responsible for the way in which he construes the relation between author and hero. The option to focus on author and hero, which had been characteristic of Bakhtin's aesthetics since the 'Author and Hero' essay, is a sign of shift in the repertoire of interpretative paradigms after the rise of phenomenology in Europe. Rather than following the prevailing tradition of interest in the relation between subject and object,⁶³

⁶⁰ The Russian text of 1963, which differs from the 1929 one only in the italicization of 'function' ('predmetom zhe avtorskogo *videniia* i izobrazheniia okazyvaetsia samaia *funktsiia* etogo samosoznaniia'), is given a radically different rendition in the English edition: 'the subject of the author's visualization and representation turns out to be in fact a *function* of this self-consciousness' (*PDP*, 48).

⁶¹ 'The cognitive act proceeds from an aesthetically ordered image of an object, from a vision of that object' (*PCMF*, 275).

⁶² 'Objectified' (*ob'ektnyi*) is an addition to the 1963 book. In the 1929 book, the sentence reads 'Geroi Dostoevskogo ne obraz, a polnovsesnoe slovo . . .' (*PDA*, 45).

⁶³ Cf. Lukács's essay on the relation between subject and object in aesthetics (1918) which, as M. Freise suggests, Bakhtin must have known from *Logos* (M. Freise, *Michail Bachtins philosophische Ästhetik*, 58–61).

which would still allow ample room for sociological reasoning, Bakhtin chooses to ponder a transformed version of this relation—the bond between author and hero—in a way that distills and purifies it of any social dimension.

Bakhtin's argumentation, despite all its repetitions and digressions, turns on three underlying concepts which relate to each other in a hierarchical fashion. The nucleus from which the whole body of his theory grows is the contact between the author's and the hero's consciousnesses. Once the author has delegated the right of self-reflection to the hero, the second step in Bakhtin's interpretation emerges: the hero begins a dialogue with himself and, only on the basis of this, with others. When analysing the function of dialogue in *The Double*, Bakhtin reaches a conclusion which seems best to exemplify his phenomenological credo: '*dialogue permits the substitution of one's own voice for that of another person*' (PDA, 107/PDP, 213*).⁶⁴ Dialogue, then, appears not to be about increasing the number of distinct human voices and expanding the space of their resonance in society, but rather about a widening of the internal capacity of the self.⁶⁵ The dialogue of the self with himself is a celebration of the internal variety and self-enclosed range of faculties an individual human being might possess or achieve, but it is not a proposal addressed to society. Bakhtin promotes dialogue as an instrument of individual perfection, not of social rationalization. In his view, dialogue provides, above all, a chance for the human being to develop sensitivity to his own inner life. A follower of Plato rather than a predecessor of Habermas, Bakhtin's concern in this early text is with the self, not with society.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ The existing English translation has added a 'him' (non-existent in the Russian text) after 'allow' to denote Bakhtin's reference to Goliadkin. While I find this to be a correct decision, I still prefer a rendition which stresses the element of generalization in Bakhtin's statement.

⁶⁵ The suspicion that Bakhtin's notion of dialogue 'does not welcome real others at all' has also been acutely voiced by Natalia Reed (cf. N. Reed, 'The Philosophical Roots of Polyphony: A Dostoevskian Reading', in *Critical Essays on Mikhail Bakhtin*, ed. C. Emerson, New York, 1999, p. 140).

⁶⁶ In an interview in Russian, Habermas emphasized Mikhail Bakhtin's importance as a thinker and chose to highlight Bakhtin's theory of culture as formulated in *Rabelais and his World* and the theory of language set forth in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, a book Habermas assumed to be indisputably and exclusively Bakhtin's own; interestingly, Habermas found *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* to be 'more or less a Marxist interpretation of Humboldt's views' ('Filosof—diagnost svoego vremeni', J. Habermas in conversation with Iu. Senokosov, *Voprosy filosofii*, 1989, No. 9, pp. 80–3). In another text, Habermas recognized the importance of *Rabelais and his World* as an example of how popular culture can shape the public sphere (see Habermas's foreword in his *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit*, Frankfurt am Main, 1990, pp. 17–8); for an intriguing attempt to see in Bakhtin's 'public square' a prototype

The objection might be raised, of course, that *The Double* is too particular a case (and not even a novel at that) to be treated as a source of generalizations. Even the most prejudiced reader, though, will have to admit that no other work by Dostoevsky holds more of Bakhtin's attention than *The Double*, both in the 1929 and the 1963 books.⁶⁷ What is more, the conclusion he reaches with reference to *The Double* is repeated in only slightly modified fashion also with reference to the novels: 'almost all of Dostoevsky's major heroes [. . .] have their partial double in another person or even in several other people (Stavrogin and Ivan Karamazov)' (*PDA*, 111/*PDP*, 217). Ivan, like Goliadkin, admittedly undergoes the same process of 'dialogic decomposition' (*dialogicheskoe razlozhenie*) of his consciousness, a process 'more profound and ideologically complicated than was the case with Goliadkin, but structurally fully analogous to it' (*PDA*, 118/*PDP*, 222). Evidently, Bakhtin's chapter on dialogue in the novels does not furnish new arguments for differentiating the mechanisms of dialogue in the five novels from the rest of Dostoevsky's *œuvre*. The heroes' 'dialogue' with other characters is only the external manifestation, or consequence, of the truly 'dialogic decomposition' of their selves. Thus Bakhtin's promise to reveal a higher and more sophisticated level of dialogism in the novels, different from that in the short novels, remains unrealized. Apart from unsubstantiated and at times inflated declarations ('[Raskolnikov] does not think about phenomena, he speaks with them' [*PDA*, 135/*PDP*, 237]), Bakhtin does not go any further than what he had already claimed to be the nature of dialogue in *The Double*: 'All the

of Habermas's sphere of public communicative action, see K. Hirschkop, 'Heteroglossia and Civil Society: Bakhtin's Public Square and the Politics of Modernity', *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, 1990, No. 1, pp. 72-3. (Hirschkop, in a later essay, criticizes both Bakhtin and Habermas for trying to 'derive the social and political values bound up in the idea of dialogism' simply and only from the nature of language, see K. Hirschkop, 'Is Dialogism for Real?', in *The Contexts of Bakhtin*, ed. D. Shepherd, Amsterdam, 1998, p. 187.) It is very important, however, to underline the fact that Habermas never commented on the two Dostoevsky books nor did he see his theory of communicative action in any way connected with Bakhtin's understanding(s) of dialogue. Against this background, cf. Greg Nielsen's challenging claim that Habermas's discourse ethics is a 'virtual instance' of what Bakhtin calls in *PDP* 'great dialogue' (see G. Nielsen, 'Bakhtin and Habermas: Towards a Transcultural Ethics', *Theory and Society*, 1995, No. 6, p. 811); for an earlier interpretation of dialogue as a social phenomenon in both Bakhtin and Habermas, see M. Gardiner, *The Dialogics of Critique*, London and New York, 1992, p. 123. For an early example of criticism of the analogies between Habermas and Bakhtin, see R. Grüttemeier, 'Dialogizität und Intentionalität bei Bakhtin', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 1993, Vol. 67, No. 4, pp. 764-83, esp. pp. 766-7.

⁶⁷ Bakhtin himself points to this fact in his notes (SS, 365).

voices that Raskolnikov introduces into his inner speech come into a peculiar sort of contact, *one that is impossible among voices in an actual dialogue. Here, thanks to the fact that they sound within a single consciousness, they become, as it were, reciprocally permeable*' (*PDA*, 137/*PDP*, 239*, *italics mine*).

Note that 'actual dialogue', i.e. dialogue between people in society, is thought here to be incompatible with the truly dialogical conversation of the self with himself, which proves feasible only on the ground of a 'single consciousness'. Instead of interpreting Bakhtin as inspired by a Buberian perspective of intimate I-Thou relations,⁶⁸ one has to admit that the sources of his excitement lie in a notion of dialogue which glorifies the capability of the human consciousness not to emit signals to the outer world and other humans, but rather to internalize various alien voices (discourses) and to process them for the purpose of self-enrichment. A glorification of the omnipotence of the 'single' human consciousness, Bakhtin's early notion of dialogue, as we find it in the 1929 book on Dostoevsky, has indeed a strong, but so far misconstrued humanistic appeal.

Bakhtin's fascination with dialogue can be sensed in his vague but nevertheless fervent declarations that dialogue, 'by its very essence, cannot and must not come to an end' (*PDA*, 153/*PDP*, 252). He claims for Dostoevsky's dialogue the status of an end in itself: 'All else is the means, dialogue is the end.' Yet contrary to Bakhtin's enthusiastic, if scarcely meaningful slogans, dialogue in Dostoevsky is not an end in itself, and it is in Bakhtin's own analysis that the instrumental nature of dialogue is revealed.

Above all, dialogue is an instrument of self-construction. This transpires with particular clarity from Bakhtin's discussion of instances when dialogue fails to perform this role. Occasionally, Bakhtin speaks of 'the vicious circle (*durnoi beskonechnosti*) of dialogue which can neither be finished nor finalized' (*PDA*, 127/*PDP*, 230). In contrast to his frequently expressed demand for never-ending dialogues, this admonition reveals an underlying current in Bakhtin's understanding of dialogue. True dialogue should be resolved, at the end of the day, into

⁶⁸ See, e.g. the otherwise elegant and seminal comparison between Buber and Bakhtin in N. Bonetskaia, 'Bakhtin v 1920-e gody', *DKH*, 1994, No. 1, pp. 16–62; for a recent and well-grounded objection against interpreting the early Bakhtin in a Buberian clef, see B. Poole, 'Rol' M. I. Kagana v stanovlenii filosofii M. M. Bakhtina', p. 168; the most concise attempt to outline the dis/similarities between Bakhtin's views of dialogue and the German-Jewish school of dialogical philosophy can be found in V. Makhlin, 'Bakhtin i zapadnyi dialogizm', *DKH*, 1996, No. 3, pp. 68–76.

a monologue. The task of dialogue is to enact a cathartic deliverance from the plurality of voices besetting the inner world of the characters, so that they can arrive at adequate self-knowledge. The unhappiness of the Underground Man rests precisely on this inability to find himself through a salutary reduction of the voices inside him: 'He cannot merge completely with himself in a unified monologic voice, with the other's voice left entirely outside himself' (*PDA*, 131, *PDP*/235*).⁶⁹ The same is also true of Nastasia Filippovna's predicament in *The Idiot*: 'Her entire inner life [. . .] is reduced to a search for herself and for her undivided (*neraskolotogo*) voice beneath the two voices that have made their home in her' (*PDA*, 131/*PDP*, 234–5). A vain search, Bakhtin bitterly implies.

Dialogue, then, can easily be the battlefield of dark forces, and will remain itself a destructive power, unless it is enlightened and ennobled by the saving grace of monologue. The perfect coincidence with oneself is to be sought in the harmony of monologue, not in the polyphony created by the competing voices of a never ending dialogue.⁷⁰

Given all this, dialogue in Bakhtin's interpretation should not be taken to be necessarily a synonym for harmony. One should meet with caution the assurance that the different consciousnesses, with their individual fields of vision, 'combine in a higher unity, a unity, so to speak, of the second order, the unity of a polyphonic novel' (*PDA*, 17/*PDP*, 16).⁷¹ This view of the novel as an abode of polyphonic unity may or may not be true in the unverifiable sense of aesthetic harmony, but it is

⁶⁹ The Russian 'vsetselo ostaviv chuzhoi golos vne sebia' is translated in the existing English translation with the equally adequate 'simply by leaving the other's voice entirely outside himself'. Our translation stresses the completed aspect of the act designated by 'ostaviv'.

⁷⁰ For a very good recent study of Bakhtin's notion of polyphony in the context of Nietzsche's and Viacheslav Ivanov's ideas of culture, see A. Kazakov, 'Polifoniia kak zhivoe poniatie', *Bakhtinskie chteniia*, Vitebsk, 1998, Vol. 3, pp. 104–15; see also J. Kursell, 'Bakhtin liest Dostoevskij—zum Begriff der Polyphonie in Bachtins "Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo"', *Wiener Slawistischer Almanach*, 1997, Vol. 40, pp. 149–73. While Bakhtin noted that in an article about *Podrostok* of 1924 Komarovich had already used the 'analogy with polyphony' (*PDA*, 23; *PDP*, 21), he appears to have been unaware of the fact that the émigré critic Georgii Adamovich, too, had spoken in 1925 of polyphony in the context of a short review of Leonov's *Barsuki*, praising Leonov's talent to 'conduct a "polyphonic" narrative on the model of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy' (G. Adamovich, "'Barsuki" L. Leonova—Chernoviki L. Tolstogo', *Zveno*, Paris, 7 September 1925, No. 136, p. 2).

⁷¹ 'Of the second order' (*utorogo poriadka*) appears to be a recurrent means for the designation of a hierarchically higher level; in precisely the same meaning it is used to stress the primacy of the hero's consciousness over external reality: 'the author no longer illuminates the hero's reality but the hero's self-consciousness as a reality of the second order' (*PDA*, 40/*PDP*, 49).

certainly untrue in the sense of serene communication between consciousnesses whose encounter is guarded by the spirit of love and mutual edification. Rather, the consciousnesses that meet in Dostoevsky's novels are loaded with internal contradictions, they are bifurcated and dismantled, and only as such do they act as welcoming hosts of dialogue.

We can thus see that the notion of crisis casts its shadow even over the phenomenological layer of Bakhtin's interpretation and leads it to oscillate between the celebration of the self-sufficient omnipotence of the single human consciousness and the concession that this omnipotence can be fully attested only by the healthy transition from the 'vicious circle' of decomposing dialogue to the surreptitiously desired stability of monologue. To be sure, Bakhtin desperately denies 'that the reconciliation and merging of voices even within the bounds of a single consciousness' can be a monologic act. What he proposes, however, does not look very dialogic at all. Bakhtin demands that the hero's voice be attached to the 'chorus' of shared values and perspectives. For this to happen, he grants, one should entrust one's voice to the guiding force of monologue. Attaining authenticity and salvation by merging with the chorus presupposes a process of purging: one has to 'subdue and muffle the fictive voices that interrupt and mock a person's genuine voice' (*PDA*, 149/*PDP*, 249). Interestingly, this is the only point of Bakhtin's argumentation at which he explicitly transcends the confines of textuality and attempts conclusions that would apply his concepts of dialogue and monologue to social reality. In Bakhtin's interpretation, the aesthetic appeal for joining the chorus is expressed at the level of Dostoevsky's 'social ideology' as a demand for the intelligentsia 'to merge with the common people'.

One final point should be made regarding Bakhtin's phenomenological approach. The domination of a 'single consciousness' which can be seen through the enthusiastic defence of dialogue is paralleled by the eventual supremacy of the author over the hero. The freedom of a character is, after all, only 'an aspect of the author's design' (*moment avtorskogo zamysla*) (*PDA*, 51/*PDP*, 65); the hero's discourse 'does not fall out of the author's design, but only out of a monologic authorial field of vision'. Ultimately, the hero's autonomy proves to be negotiated and compromised by an engendering act of authorial mercy. The alleged dialogue between author and hero, both said by Bakhtin to occupy positions of equal value, turns out to be a kind of spiritualist séance in which the author gives birth to a character who has to cope with its own

inner split rather than 'talk' and contest the positions of the author. Exposed to decomposition, the hero's self struggles to reach a point of stability. Thus his 'freedom' is strongly eroded and the dialogue between him and the author dwindles to mere metaphoricality. The 'author's intention' (*intentsiia avtora*) remains the ultimate authority, however bound and limited by what Bakhtin calls the 'logic' of artistic construction. (*PDA*, 80/*PDP*, 188).

We may thus conclude by emphasizing the prevalence of the phenomenological line of reasoning in Bakhtin's 1929 book. Together with the philosophy-of-history dimension, it stifles the germs of any sociological analysis. Sidelined by arguments nurtured by interest in the timeless patterns of human consciousness, this aspect surfaces only in the guise of promises or declarative pronouncements, the validation of which is not considered a burning issue. Thus, despite appearances, Bakhtin's book does not depart far from the main trends in Russian Dostoevsky criticism of the time. It remains under the spell of ethical and psychological views of literature. Dostoevsky is once again (after Merezhkovskii and also after Lukács) presented as a complete innovator. The creator of the unprecedented genre of the polyphonic novel, he is nevertheless utilized by Bakhtin as an argument for the necessity of solving the inherited problems of moral thought: how is man's (the hero's) inner freedom possible, and how far can it stretch; how can the human being preserve the state of peace with himself; what is at stake in the recognition of other voices in one's own voice or outside of it? Under the rhetoric of dazzlingly new concepts, Bakhtin reproduces the questions and trepidations of an established tradition of Russian existentialist reading of Dostoevsky. This largely determines the scope and the flavour of his idea of dialogue in the 1929 book. Although it remains the product of the competing interaction between three divergent lines of reasoning (the sociological, the phenomenological, and that concerned with philosophy of history), in the 1929 text dialogue is still—owing to the marked preponderance of one of these lines (the phenomenological)—a concept with relatively clear limits; it is only in the 1963 book that its semantic compass will become disturbingly inclusive.

For those wont to see in Bakhtin the great promoter of communication between people, the 1929 book may thus prove a disappointment. Rather than being a metaphor of plurality, dialogue in it is a metaphor of the power of consciousness to domesticate its own and other consciousnesses' alien voices.

Sociological vs. Ethical Argument: The Notes Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book (1961–1963)

As we move into the 1960s, Bakhtin's notes toward a reworking of the 1929 book reveal his changing agenda in discussing Dostoevsky's prose. They are suggestive of Bakhtin's growing suspicion of a rigorous theoretical style. One can see him subscribe to a rule which gives little consideration to disciplined theorizing and replaces it with loose perceptiveness instead: 'Not theory (transient content), but a "sense of theory"' (TRD, I, 294). Even more significant than before, his digression from consistent argumentation can be traced in the clash between incompatible directions of thought. Certain allowance should be made for the inevitably provisional and, in a way, private character of the notes. Nevertheless, they clearly testify to the process of revision and substantial alteration to which the 1929 book was subjected.

Let us start by examining the sociological dimension. It seems that Bakhtin sincerely intended to expand the sociological element in his analysis. Capitalism is for the first time flatly accused by Bakhtin of creating 'the conditions for a special type of inescapably solitary consciousness' (TRD, I, 288), a gesture that may well have been provoked by Bakhtin's desire to compensate for the absence from both his old and his new project of an elaborate account of the epoch which prepared the ground for Dostoevsky's novels.

The notes also reveal enhanced attention to the problem of reification. But at the same time they demonstrate Bakhtin's uncertainty as to how and where exactly this question should be addressed (TRD, II, 71). Bakhtin's difficulties in finding a suitable section for developing his ideas of reification stem from not knowing where to break and suspend his predominantly phenomenological line of reasoning. The topic of reification remains beyond this line, an important but almost unas-similable outsider to both the 1929 and the 1963 books.

Despite all this reification figures prominently in the notes of the 1960s. Bakhtin is seeking to establish a direct causal relation between capitalism and reification, once again in a much more radical and unequivocal way than in the 1929 book. Characteristically, this confronts him with the problem of violence for which he, much like Lukács, finds moral vindication as long as human personality remains the ultimate and sacred goal:

The reification of man in class society, carried to its extreme under capitalism. This reification is accomplished (realized) by external forces acting on the

personality from without (*vozne i izvne*); this is violence in all possible forms of its realization (economic, political, ideological), and these forces can be combated only from the outside and with equally externalized forces (justified revolutionary violence). . .

(TRD, I, 298*)⁷²

In the notes, a new moment emerges in Bakhtin's understanding of reification. Or, rather, the previously insufficiently stressed connection between reification and dialogue (*PDA*, 153/*PDP*, 251–2) is now explicitly foregrounded in that the dialogic attitude to man is considered to be the true remedy against reification (TRD, I, 291–2; TRD, II, 72) and the only practice which precludes an objectifying finalization of the Other. '[R]eification', Bakhtin hopes, 'can never be realized to the full, for there is in the authorial *surplus* love, compassion, pity and other purely human reactions to *the other*, impossible in relation to a pure thing' (TRD, II, 72). However, this does not seem sufficient. Taking up his previous critique of *Einfühlung* (*PDA*, 153/*PDP*, 252), Bakhtin enlarges on it to formulate a more radical humanistic programme which is not satisfied with mere reliance on love and compassion. Struggle against reification should result in nothing less than the formation of true individuals: 'The sentimental-humanistic de-reification of man, which remains objectified: pity, the lower forms of love (for children, for everything weak and small). A person ceases to be a thing, but does not become a personality' (TRD, I, 297). Despite the insight into the socio-economic foundations of reification, Bakhtin avoids commitment to collective ideals and identities and persists instead in an abstract moral vision of men become personalities. Evoking once more the external forces of reification,⁷³ Bakhtin sees the damage they produce mainly as a negative impact on human consciousness: 'Consciousness under the influence of these forces loses its authentic freedom, and personality is destroyed' (TRD, I, 297). Essentially and originally free, perfect and authentic, consciousness needs to be liberated rather than reformed. For Bakhtin, then, what is at stake in the overcoming of reification is not so much a change in existing social and material conditions, as a reinstatement of the original power and dignity of individual human consciousness.

⁷² The existing English translation renders the Russian 'oveshchestvlenie' as 'materialization'; we prefer the term 'reification'.

⁷³ Surprisingly, Bakhtin also lists the subconscious ('*ono*') among the forces exotopical to human consciousness. His plans (TRD, I, 297; TRD, II, 70) to engage in the second chapter of the 1963 book in a polemic with the psycho-analytical trend in Dostoevsky studies, above all with P. Popov's study of 1928 "Ia" i "ono" v tvorchestve Dostoevskogo, never materialized.

Alterations can also be observed as regards Bakhtin's idea of dialogue. For a start, in the notes it becomes palpably more Buberian, regarding the conversation of consciousnesses as evidence for communication between people, between I and Thou. More insistently than before, Bakhtin declares here the impossibility for a single consciousness to exist in isolation. From this premise, however, he produces a leap in his argument to establish direct correspondence between the non-sufficient nature of any single consciousness and the urgent need for *sociality*. If what Bakhtin claims is that the consciousness of an I cannot exist without the consciousness of a Thou, then this still does not mean that the I-Thou relation should be identified with sociality in general, let alone pronounced the 'highest degree of sociality' (TRD, I, 287). Although calling consciousness *pluralia tantum* (TRD, I, 288), Bakhtin certainly does not mean by sociality a We or any other form of plurality; on the contrary, in the world he constructs there is room only for a dual communion of elective affinities. But even as far as the Other (Thou) is concerned, Bakhtin speaks of a connection which is 'not external, not material, but internal' (TRD, I, 287), i. e. lodged in the field of the psychological and the ethical. He seems constantly to be insuring himself against a profane and too material grasp of sociality. Instead, he emphasizes the refinement and moral exclusiveness of dialogue. He even goes so far as to state—contrary to evidence—that Dostoevsky's novels assert 'the impossibility of solitude, the illusory nature of solitude' (TRD, I, 287). This exemplary instance of wishful thinking can leave few doubts about Bakhtin's analysis being saturated with a utopian desire to transcend reality; he strives to process the materiality of Dostoevsky's world into an incorporeal and unearthly bond of purified and elevated consciousnesses.

Another significant change is the expansion of the scope of dialogue to the point that one loses sight of its boundaries. Bakhtin's notion of dialogue in the notes becomes overtly Romantic; he insists on the cosmic nature of dialogue and presents a fascinating, almost hypnotic, picture of it. Every pronounced word 'enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium' (TRD, I, 293). The dialogue in which Dostoevsky's heroes participate is 'the world dialogue' (TRD, II, 73), and this ineluctably changes their nature. In the 1929 book the characters are able to enter into dialogue due only to their split and tormented self-consciousness. In the notes, Dostoevsky's heroes seem to have already been cured of their painful internal divisions. Man in Dostoevsky's novels gives himself over to dialogue 'wholly and with his

whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds' (TRD, I, 293).⁷⁴ Reminiscent of the ecstatic bodily frenzy of carnival, this description of dialogue succeeds in stressing its universal and cosmic scope but seems to compromise its privileged spiritual standing, so much insisted upon by Bakhtin.

A point should also be made regarding Bakhtin's idea of the author-hero relations in the notes. As we argued in the previous section, for all his revolutionary ambitions to revise the connection between author and hero in the direction of an absolute equilibrium between them, Bakhtin ends up reluctantly recognizing the dependence of the hero on the author's mercy. In the 1961 notes this view is found in Bakhtin's suggestive, if theologically rudimentary, comparison between the author's activity and that of God. The author's activity, Bakhtin maintains, is 'the activity of God in relation to man, a relation allowing man to reveal himself utterly (in his immanent development), to judge himself, to refute himself' (TRD, I, 285). This particular advantage of the author receives only a vague explanation: 'The author is a participant in the dialogue (on essentially equal terms with the characters), but he also fulfills additional, very complex functions; ([he is] the driving belt between the ideal dialogue of the work and the actual dialogue of reality)' (TRD, I, 298*).⁷⁵ Apart from the banal truth that the author mediates between reality and his own work, Bakhtin says very little about why this traditional status of the author should be regarded as the source of additional power. Although the problem of the correlation of life and art was examined in Voloshinov's 'Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry' (1926) and also in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Bakhtin now fails to pose it with distinct reference to dialogue. He does not differentiate clearly between dialogue in reality and in art, and this is why the supposed responsibilities of the author, bestowed on him by virtue of his mediating position, cannot really explain his surplus power.

In anticipation of the 1963 book, in the notes Bakhtin raises for the first time the problem of deliberately chosen death in Dostoevsky's novels as a confirmation of the dignity and strength of his heroes' consciousnesses. In Dostoevsky's world, Bakhtin notes, 'there are no deaths as objectified and organic facts in which a person's responsively

⁷⁴ The Russian 'vseiu zhizn'iu' is rendered in the English translation as 'throughout his whole life'.

⁷⁵ The Russian '[on] privodnoi remen' mezhdru' is rendered in the existing English translation as 'he holds the reins between'.

active consciousness takes no part' (TRD, I, 300). There are only murders and suicides, for they are means by which 'man finalizes himself from within' (TRD, I, 296). In a manner which is characteristic of his desire to domesticate difference and otherness at all costs, Bakhtin supplements the list of 'responsively conscious' death acts with insanity (TRD, I, 300). A comparison with Foucault's insight into the discursive-institutional status of insanity inevitably throws Bakhtin's philosophy of insanity into relief as personalistic and uninterested in the social dimensions of the phenomenon.

Thus the notes, as we have seen, preserve the contradictory trends in Bakhtin's interpretation of Dostoevsky. Their struggle for the upper hand sees the sociological analysis challenged or very often conquered from within by personalistically-ethical arguments, as is the case with the theme of reification. Although some directions indicated in the notes are left out or only sporadically taken up in the 1963 book, others prove to be of foremost significance. Of the latter, we have explored Bakhtin's evolving ideas of dialogue in detail. Such is also the direction of what can be called *metageneric* analysis, which I have deliberately left to be considered at length in the next section.

FROM THE SOCIOLOGICAL TO THE METAGENERIC: THE 1963 BOOK

Our exposition so far has attested to the high degree of overlap between the 1929 and the 1963 texts. On the other hand, even on the textological level, there are substantial differences that should not be overlooked. These alterations can be classified as changes within the confines of the existing structure,⁷⁶ cuts,⁷⁷ and, most importantly, additions.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ The preface and the conclusion were entirely rewritten; the title and the beginning of chapter four and pp. 57, 95-7, and 126 from *PDA* changed. Some ideas and phrases from pp. 71-3 (*PDA*) appear in a modified version in pp. 60-2 (*PDP*).

⁷⁷ From *PDA* the following cuts of relevant passages, sentences, words, or footnotes were made in *PDP*: pp. 36-7; 55; 57; 71-3; 85; 87; 95; 123; 151-2; 168; 169-71. The preface of the 1929 book and the passages on pp. 71-3 and 169-71 appeared in Caryl Emerson's English translation as an appendix to *PDP*. While we normally reproduce her translation in these three instances, we still give page reference to *PDA* only, so that it remains clear that the Russian text of *PDP* did not include these passages.

⁷⁸ The following additions of relevant passages, sentences, words, or footnotes were made in *PDP*: pp. 6; 7; 32-43; 57-63; 65-75; 82; 85-92; 95; 97; 99; 105-78; 181-5; 192; 211; 224; 227; 264.

It is possible to argue that the principal alteration in the 1963 book is the even stronger suppression of the sociological line of reasoning. Bakhtin's changed attitude makes itself felt as early as the preface to the 1963 book, which establishes a very different tone for the whole project. Gone are his earlier idea that every literary work is 'intrinsically sociological' and should be studied as the meeting point of 'living social forces' (*PDA*, 3). Despite the general, albeit very cautious, approval of Lunacharskii's 'historical-genetic' approach (*PDP*, 35), the cuts and the changes to the main body of the 1929 book reveal a systematic and ruthless weakening and even elimination of the explicit elements of sociological analysis. A case in point is the deletion of a comparatively large portion from the end of the chapter 'The hero's discourse and narrative discourse in Dostoevsky' (*PDA*, 151–2), in which Bakhtin attempted a sociological analysis of Dostoevsky's style. In this subsequently omitted part, Bakhtin reiterates his belief that discourse is 'a social phenomenon, and an intrinsically social one' (*PDA*, 151). Evoking Voloshinov's understanding of discourse, he asserts that it is not the word-thing (*slovo-veshch*) that underlies his analysis of Dostoevsky's style, but rather 'discourse as communicative milieu (*slovo-sreda obshcheniia*)' (*PDA*, 151). Bakhtin unambiguously states that the main question to be addressed by the sociology of style is the question of the 'historical socio-economic conditions for the birth of the respective style' (*PDA*, 152). He eventually has to abandon this intention, for the material for it appears 'unprepared'; but he nevertheless offers his own strong hypothesis in explanation of the rise of dialogic discourse. The formulation in this deleted part seems to summarize and radicalize the scattered observations of the 1929 book. Dialogic discourse only could arise in an 'environment seized by a process of acute social differentiation, a process of decomposition and of separation from previously closed and self-sufficient groups' (*PDA*, 152). Even more concretely, Bakhtin asserts that dialogic discourse is the discourse of the 'socially disorientated or as yet not orientated intelligentsia' (*PDA*, 152). These statements appear in an extended form once again at the end of the chapter on dialogue (*PDA*, 170–1), and they, too, are left out of the 1963 book.

Besides direct cuts, the suppression of the sociological analysis in the 1963 book follows a different and much more sophisticated path. As we have suggested towards the end of the previous section, the 1963 book makes use of radically new metageneric and metalinguistic approaches, which were altogether absent from the 1929 study. Indeed, one can argue that what makes the 1963 text a book in its own right and

not just a variation of another earlier text is this vital shift in approach from the sociological to the metageneric and metalinguistic.

The background to this crucial break with the paradigms of the 1929 book should be seen in Bakhtin's essays on the novel of the 1930s where Bakhtin argues the case for an unbroken historical tradition of the genre. The hypothesis of the continuous rise of the novel from antiquity up to modern times serves Bakhtin's changing perspective on literature: from still being inclined to view it as the responsible act of great authors to seeing in it the continuous workings of supra-individual patterns.⁷⁹

Not surprisingly, then, in the 1963 book Dostoevsky's position as a great innovator is seriously undermined. Dostoevsky is still credited with having made important artistic discoveries (*PDP*, 3; 7), but his glory and uniqueness are challenged by being inscribed within the laws of a supposedly universal *poetics*. Characteristically, Bakhtin's choice of title for his new book changed from *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* to *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Thus Bakhtin seems to be joining in a long Russian tradition of 'poetics'. However, unlike the historical poetics of Veselovskii or the overtly synchronistic poetics of the Formalists, Bakhtin embarks on a project which I prefer to designate as metageneric poetics. Its foundation is the belief in the existence of certain universal cultural principles underlying the generic division and growth of literature. Across the centuries, Bakhtin claims to be seeing the seeds of the polyphonic novel far removed in time and reaching back to Menippean satire and carnival. Bakhtin's poetic is metageneric in the sense of disregarding the particular historical parameters of the phenomena described; instead, it promotes the understanding of genre as a fundamental and stable cultural principle which is bound to realize its essence at some point in time. For the principle of polyphony, this point coincides with Dostoevsky's novels which seem to give flesh to an inevitable process. Thus, in Bakhtin's interpretation, Dostoevsky is less an original author than the mouthpiece for impersonal powers dormant in human culture.

Bakhtin borrows three characteristics of the novelistic directly from his essays on the novel of the 1930s: contact with the living present, reliance on experience and free invention, and deliberate multi-styled

⁷⁹ A brief discussion of ideology and form from the chapter 'The idea in Dostoevsky' reveals the early seeds of this anti-individualistic trend in the 1929 book: 'the deeper layers of this form-shaping ideology are of social nature and cannot be at all ascribed to authorial individuality. . . [I]n ideology, acting as principle of form, the author comes out only as the representative of his social group' (*PDA*, 57).

and hetero-voiced nature (*PDP*, 108). There is, however, a new moment: he no longer speaks of two stylistic lines in the development of the novel (monologic vs. dialogic), but of three lines:

Speaking somewhat too simplistically and schematically, one could say that the novelistic genre has three fundamental roots: the *epic*, the *rhetorical*, and the *carnivalistic*. Depending on the prevalence of any one of these roots, three lines in the development of the European novel are formed: the *epic*, the *rhetorical*, and the *carnivalistic* (with, of course, many transitional forms in between).

(*PDP*, 109*)⁸⁰

Dostoevsky's novel, predictably, is located entirely in the realm of the carnivalistic. What is more, Bakhtin's ahistorical metageneric poetics presents Dostoevsky's novel and the *menippea* as essentially identical: 'This is in fact one and the same generic world, although present in the *menippea* at the *beginning* of its development, in Dostoevsky at its very *peak*' (*PDP*, 121). The explanation for this sameness is sought in what Bakhtin calls 'generic memory', a special Hegelian faculty of consciousness ascribed to genre: 'we know that the beginning, that is the archaic stage of genre, is preserved in renewed form at the highest stages of the genre's development. Moreover, the higher a genre develops and the more complex its form, the better and more fully it remembers its past' (*PDP*, 121). Dostoevsky's work, then, is the result of efficient generic memory, not of individual talent nor, despite all the assurance Bakhtin gives, of historically specific conditions (on whose description, as we have seen from the brief review of the cuts, the 1963 book does not insist anyway). The metageneric poetics severs the connection between generic structures and individual performance, for it is always a pre-coded generic programme that is ineluctably realized by whoever happens to 'link up with the chain of a given generic tradition'. In Bakhtin's own words, '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*' (*PDP*, 121). But metageneric poetics also disrupts the bond between genre and history. Genre is to Bakhtin the means by which eternal principles underlying and underwriting human culture (carnival, dialogue) acquire a material existence in a continuous movement toward their self-realization. The *Menippean* satire and Dostoevsky's novel both appear as embodiments of the principle of carnival; they are in the grip of a relentless *entelechy*, the actors of a pre-designed scenario in which the voice of history is suppressed by an Aristotelo-Hegelian trust

⁸⁰ In the existing English translation the underlined text is omitted.

in the productive force of artistic reason. This reason (or 'memory') defies social determination and transcends historical settings: its activity constitutes a series of sublations through which the acme preserves its unity with the beginnings.

The metageneric line of reasoning exercises a twofold effect on the sociological argument of the 1929 book. On the one hand, it clearly enfeebls this argument; on the other hand, however, it rewrites it by displacing its meaning. Taking carnival as his starting point, Bakhtin asserts that it lends human existence a new form of sociality. In a typical manifestation of a wishful abolition of the boundary between text and social reality, Bakhtin claims that 'carnivalization made possible the creation of the *open* structure of the great dialogue, and permitted social interaction between people to be carried over into the higher sphere of the spirit and the intellect, which earlier had always been primarily the sphere of a single and unified monologic consciousness' (*PDP*, 177). In a word, the 'carnival sense of the world helps Dostoevsky overcome ethical as well as gnoseological solipsism' (*PDP*, 177). Thus, contrary to expectations and received opinion, the 1963 book undermines the position of dialogue and no longer takes it to be an absolute value. In its stead it places carnival as the precondition and the great progenitor of real dialogue. The insufficiency of dialogue as such and its inferiority to carnival can also be seen in an added footnote placed at the end of the last chapter. Discussing the independence of Dostoevsky's dialogue of various social forms (*PDA*, 168/*PDP*, 264), Bakhtin concludes in the 1929 book: 'This abstract sociality is characteristic of Dostoevsky and is determined by sociological conditions' (*PDA*, 168). This conclusion is cut from the 1963 book and replaced by a footnote which qualifies the positioning of dialogue beyond social forms as 'a departure into carnival and mystery-play time and space, where the ultimate event of interaction among consciousnesses is accomplished in Dostoevsky's novels' (*PDP*, 269). Dialogue is shown here to be ultimately dependent on carnival for its full realization.

We can thus observe the insidious workings of the metageneric analysis. While designed to enforce a new and broader understanding of dialogue, it functions against this. By establishing links between dialogue and carnival, Bakhtin can no longer uphold the privileged position of dialogue as the sole, unitary, and ontologically sufficient principle of Dostoevsky's artistic (and our real) world. Dialogism emerges from the added chapter on the carnival roots of Dostoevsky's novel challenged and weakened in its foundations. Its presumed

'history' does not bestow autonomy on it; on the contrary, it undermines its claims to unshared supremacy.

Alongside the metageneric direction, there is another line of reasoning in the 1963 book which Bakhtin himself terms 'metalinguistic'. The subject of metalinguistics is described as 'the word not in the system of language and not in a "text" excised from dialogic interaction, but precisely within the sphere of dialogic interaction itself, that is, in the sphere where discourse lives its authentic life' (*PDP*, 202*). At first sight, one should expect this programme to be entirely compatible with sociological analysis. In actual fact, however, Bakhtin opposes it: his formulation of the tasks of metalinguistics appears in the place of two deleted sentences from the 1929 book which profess the necessity of sociological reasoning: 'The problem of the orientation of speech to someone else's discourse is of the greatest sociological importance. Discourse, by its nature, is social' (*PDA*, 95).⁸¹ The metalinguistic approach, then, is designed to cancel sociological analysis; the former appears only in the wake of the latter's extinction. It would be very instructive to undertake a textological comparison of the relevant passages from *PDA* and *PDP* with a view to demonstrating Bakhtin's systematic erasure of any traces which might take the reader back to the sociological. Within the same passage, he methodically replaces the 'problems of the sociology of discourse' (*PDA*, 95) with those of its 'metalinguistic study' (*PDP*, 202); 'social situation' becomes 'historical situation', while the phrase 'importance for the sociology of artistic discourse' (*PDA*, 96) is reduced and reshaped to a mere 'importance for the study of artistic discourse' (*PDP*, 203). Even more striking are two instances of complete change of the meaning due to suspiciously easy replacements. Thus the sentence 'Every social group in every epoch has its own special sense of discourse and its own range of discursive possibilities' (*PDA*, 95) becomes 'Every [artistic] trend in every epoch has [. . .]' (*PDP*, 202*);⁸² similarly, in the phrase 'If there is at the disposal of a given social group some authoritative and stabilized medium of refraction [. . .]' (*PDA*, 96), 'a given social group' is reformulated into 'a given epoch' in the 1963 book (*PDP*, 202).

⁸¹ This quotation is a particularly clear example of the co-existence and the synonymous use of 'social' and 'sociological' in Bakhtin's text. 'Social' remains for him the broader term, through which he often implies 'sociological'.

⁸² The existing English translation renders the Russian 'Kazhdomu napravleniiu v kazhduiu epokhu svoistvenny' as 'Every social trend in every epoch has [. . .]'. We believe that the context and the established usage of Russian literary theory at the time require the reading of the implied adjective to be 'artistic' rather than 'social'.

All the substitutions in the above-quoted examples point to the deliberate suppression of the sociological dimension for the benefit of either abstract historicism ('a given epoch', 'every [artistic] trend') or a metapoetic ahistoricism ('metalinguistic study'). By rewriting his own text of 1929 and purging it of the slightest intimations of social determination, Bakhtin introduced profound semantic changes which made for a totally new text.

So far we have discussed the suppression of the sociological dimension to the advantage of the newly introduced directions of meta-generic and metalinguistic analysis in the 1963 book. Before we close this investigation into the ways in which it differs from the 1929 book, we need to cast a glance at what happens to the phenomenological approach in the 1963 study. We have already observed the contradictory effect of metageneric analysis on the idea of dialogue. However, in the 1963 book Bakhtin inserts some new material immediately concerning dialogue, and by so doing seeks to change the predominantly phenomenological credo of the 1929 book, in which dialogue, as we have seen, is conceived as the morally constructive conversation of the self with itself within the infinitely expandable boundaries of self-consciousness.

Bakhtin's additions to the 1963 book are intent on rendering the idea of dialogue less Socratic and more Buberian. A crucial change in this respect can be seen in Bakhtin's interpretation of the status of the idea in Dostoevsky's novels. In the 1963 book he inserts a new passage which equates the dialogic nature of discourse with the dialogic essence of the idea and thus tries to ward off the misinterpretation, lodged in the 1929 book, of Dostoevsky's novel as traditionally ideological:

The idea—as it was seen by Dostoevsky the artist—is not a subjective individual-psychological formation with 'permanent residence' in a person's head; no, the idea is inter-individual and inter-subjective—the realm of its existence is not individual consciousness but dialogic communion *between* consciousnesses. The idea is a *live event*, played out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or several consciousnesses. In this sense the idea is similar to the word, with which it is dialectically united.

(PDP, 88*)⁸³

Seeking to stress the dialogic encounters between divergent ideas as Dostoevsky's unique artistic achievement, Bakhtin had to face the necessity of explaining the presence of residual monologic elements in Dostoevsky's prose. Bakhtin points to 'the conventionally monologic'

⁸³ The existing English translation renders the Russian 's kotorym ona dialekticheski edina' as 'with which it is dialogically united'.

epilogue to *Crime and Punishment* as a convincing example, but is only too quick to dismiss it with a surprisingly conservative Marxist argument. He does not undertake a full assessment of the weight of what he calls the 'publicistic' layer in Dostoevsky's novel; instead, he prefers a convenient formula which originated in Lenin's articles on Tolstoy and was embraced and developed in the 1930s by Lukács: 'Dostoevsky the artist always triumphs over Dostoevsky the publicist' (*PDP*, 92*). By giving up the opportunity of seriously examining the evidence for the interaction in Dostoevsky's novels between two different regimes of artistic representation of ideas (monologic assertion vs. dialogic trial), Bakhtin fails to argue his case for a triumphant dialogism in Dostoevsky's prose.

In summary, then, the 1963 book is at pains to correct the phenomenological line of reasoning and to assert the insufficiency of self-consciousness. But these efforts appear as efficacious only on the surface. Bakhtin's pointed conclusion 'Dostoevsky overcame solipsism' (*PDP*, 99), added to the final paragraph of the chapter 'The idea in Dostoevsky', is based solely on insertions to Chapters 2 and 3 ('The hero and the position of the author' and 'The idea in Dostoevsky'). Nothing is changed, however, in the crucial analytical part of the study (Chapter 5) where Dostoevsky's novels remain neglected in favour of the shorter prose, especially *The Double*. Thus the Buberian spirit of the new passages clashes with the prevailingly Socratic idea of dialogue as an enhancement of self-knowledge and a cathartic removal of the forces eroding the inward unity of the self. The 1963 book proves to be an ill-disciplined work, in which various incompatible voices resonate and affect each other without ever blending into harmony.

Thus the sociological interpretation in Bakhtin's work on Dostoevsky proves to be outweighed by approaches based on phenomenology, philosophy of history (culture), and metapoetics. They come to bear on the sociological argument and on each other by modifying the meanings of dialogue. But they never manage to constitute an uncontradictory whole. In this combination of approaches, the sociological one remains an inchoate and undeveloped option, especially in the 1963 book. Bakhtin implies it as either an ideal interpretative horizon, as in the case of the 1929 book, or, in the 1963 book, as a residual (and declarative) alternative, yet never as a working strategy. Recalling Macherey's analysis of Balzac's *Les Paysans*,⁸⁴ we can probably insist on

⁸⁴ See P. Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. G. Wall, London and Boston, 1978, pp. 258-98.

the necessity of reading Bakhtin's work on Dostoevsky as a document of ideology, where the unspoken (the line of sociological analysis) could have suggested truths of its own which, however, remained muffled in the contest of the dominant interpretive voices. By suppressing the sociological line of interpretation and according priority to the phenomenological and the metageneric approaches, Bakhtin's Dostoevsky texts seem to have been domesticating rather than promoting difference and otherness.

GOETHE

In this chapter I shall not be offering an exhaustive treatment of all aspects of Lukács's and Bakhtin's writings on Goethe. I have chosen instead to analyse Bakhtin's and Lukács's critical appropriations of the idea of *Bildung* and its social implications. Through Goethe's art both Lukács and Bakhtin were stimulated to test hypotheses about the broader implications of a theory of the novel, and, by so doing, to give mature formulation to views they had been advancing for a long time. A vital characteristic of Lukács's and Bakhtin's preoccupation with Goethe is the fact that in studying and interpreting his personality and work they were drawing on a substantially shared context of German Goethe criticism in the years immediately preceding the first World War. This is a further justification for a comparative perspective on Lukács and Bakhtin, though space does not allow a full discussion of their indebtedness to that critical tradition.¹

LUKÁCS: THE SOCIAL DIALECTICS OF *BILDUNG**Before the 1930s*

Although the first of Lukács's texts dealing exclusively with Goethe appeared in 1932, Goethe engaged Lukács's thought from the earliest

¹ It was precisely in the decade preceding the journal publication of Lukács's *Theory of the Novel* (1916) and Bakhtin's first published article (1919) that three influential studies of Goethe in Germany decisively altered the prevailing direction of Goethe interpretation. These were W. Dilthey's *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung* of 1906, and Simmel's (1913) and Gundolf's (1916) books on Goethe. For a general overview of the trends in German Goethe criticism before the First World War and the place of Simmel and Gundolf in it see K. R. Mandelkow, *Goethe in Deutschland. Rezeptionsgeschichte eines Klassikers*, Vol. 1, Munich, 1980; and G. Tihanov, 'Dilthey, Gundolf, Simmel: On the Genesis of a New Paradigm in the German Goethe Cult at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century', *Acta Germanica*, 2000, Vol. 28. A comprehensive but by no means exhaustive treatment of Lukács's Goethe criticism can be found in N. Vazsonyi, *Lukács reads Goethe: from Aestheticism to Stalinism* (Columbia, SC, 1997). Unfortunately Vazsonyi does not examine Lukács's contradictory relation to the tradition of philosophically inspired German criticism on Goethe (he mentions the names of Dilthey and Simmel only in passing, without analysing how their writings influenced Lukács even when he was at variance with their views). For earlier studies of Lukács's Goethe criticism, see C. Cases, 'Georg Lukács und Goethe', *Goethe-Jahrbuch*, 1986, Vol. 103, pp. 138–51; E. Bahr, 'Georg Lukács's "Goetheanism": Its Relevance for his Literary Theory', in *Georg Lukács: Theory, Culture, and Politics*, ed. J. Marcus and Z. Tar, New Brunswick, 1989, pp. 89–95.

stages of his career, starting with *History of the Development of Modern Drama* (written 1906–8; book publication 1911) and the essays included in *Soul and Form* (written 1907–10; book publication in German 1911). Lukács's publications on Goethe remain an unresolved textual problem, mainly because of the lack of a critical edition. Some of these texts were published in Russian, others in German, and they first appeared in a book edition in Hungarian.² The book was published more than once in German, and was incorporated in Lukács's *Werke*.³ Here all references will be to these two volumes, as they document Lukács's final decision about the form and content of his texts. I shall also refer to the existing English translation.⁴ Outside the *Werke*, there remain eight texts on Goethe, which will be quoted (excepting the text from *Die rote Fahne*) in my translation.⁵ Finally, it is worth mentioning that Lukács spent a long time preparing a Goethe monograph, the material for which was lost during the second World War (*W*, 7: 51).

In his interpretations of Goethe before the *Theory of the Novel*, Lukács shares the prevailing neo-Romantic attitude of German Goethe criticism. In the *History of the Development of Modern Drama*, for example, he sees in him the performer of 'the isolated and forceful experiments of

² G. Lukács, *Goethe és kora (Goethe and his Age)*, Budapest, 1946.

³ G. Lukács, *Werke*, Vol. 7, Neuwied and Berlin, 1964. (This volume includes the book *Goethe und seine Zeit* consisting here of the following texts: (1) 'Vorwort' (1947); (2) 'Die Leiden des jungen Werther' (1936); (3) 'Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre' (1936); (4) 'Der Briefwechsel zwischen Schiller und Goethe' (1934); (5) 'Schillers Theorie der modernen Literatur' (1935); (6) 'Hölderlins Hyperion' (1934).); G. Lukács, *Werke*, Vol. 6, Neuwied and Berlin, 1965. (This volume includes the *Faust Studien* (1940) comprising: (1) 'Zur Entstehungsgeschichte'; (2) 'Das Drama der Menschengattung'; (3) 'Faust und Mephistopheles'; (4) 'Die Gretchen-Tragödie'; (5) 'Stilfragen: Das Ende der "Kunstperiode"'.)

⁴ G. Lukács, *Goethe and His Age*, trans. R. Anchor, London, 1968. The English edition incorporates indiscriminately under this title all eleven texts from Vol. 6 and Vol. 7 of the *Werke* and contains in addition the article 'Minna von Barnhelm', which is included in Vol. 7 of the *Werke*, but not as part of the book on Goethe. What is more, in two instances ('Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship' and 'The Correspondence between Schiller and Goethe') the English version does not indicate the dating.

⁵ (1) G. Lukács, 'Lessing's *Nathan* and Goethe's *Tasso*' [1922], *Reviews and Articles from Die rote Fahne*, trans. P. Palmer, London, 1983, pp. 20–4; (2) G. Lukács, 'Der faschisierte Goethe', *Die Linkskurve*, Goethe-Sonderheft, June 1932, pp. 32–40; (3) G. Lukács, 'Goethe und die Dialektik', *Der Marxist. Blätter der marxistischen Arbeiterschule*, 1932, No. 5, pp. 13–24; (4) G. Lukács, 'Goethes Weltanschauung', *Illustrierte Neue Welt*, 1932, No. 2; (5) G. Lukács, 'Goethe und die Gegenwart', *Arbeiter-Sender*, 1932, No. 2; (6) G. Lukács, 'Was ist uns heute Goethe?', *Linksfrente*, 1932, Nos. 5 and 6 (this text was also published in Russian as 'Chem iavlietsia dlia nas Gete?'), *Oktiabr*, 1932, No. 4, pp. 130–7; (7) G. Lukács, 'Unser Goethe' [1949], *Goethe und seine Zeit*, Berlin, 1950, pp. 330–65; (8) 'Marx und Goethe' [1970], in *Revolutionäres Denken*, ed. F. Benseler, Neuwied and Berlin, 1984, pp. 154–62. Texts Nos. 4, 5, and 6 were republished as part of the appendix to A. Klein, *Georg Lukács in Berlin. Literaturtheorie und Literaturkritik der Jahre 1930–32*, Berlin and Weimar, 1990, pp. 423–44.

a genius' (*W*, 15: 179). In adopting this set of attitudes, Lukács, like Gundolf after him, borrows from Schiller's vocabulary to declare Goethe 'the most "naïve"' among modern artists. Similarly, in *Soul and Form* he stresses in a clichéd way Goethe's heroic and extraordinary nature and the 'monstrous' dimensions of his soaring solitude.⁶

With *The Theory of the Novel*, written in 1914–15 shortly after Simmel's study of Goethe had appeared and published in a journal version in the same year as Gundolf's book (1916), Lukács's interpretation of Goethe altered noticeably. Above all, we can see the problem of *Bildung* looming into view for the first time. It is no accident that a whole chapter of Part II deals with Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* as an attempted synthesis between the novel of 'abstract idealism' and the novel of 'disillusionment'. Lukács's reading retains Simmel's idea of *Bildung* as a twofold process of education and practice and sees Goethe's ideal in 'the widening of the soul which seeks fulfillment in action, in effective dealings with reality, and not merely in contemplation' (*TN*, 133). The active role of the self is, however, combined with reconciliation and acceptance of reality as it is. Consequently, the theme of *Wilhelm Meister* is formulated as 'the reconciliation of the problematic individual, guided by his lived experience of the ideal, with concrete social reality' (*TN*, 132). This idea of *Bildung* as reconciliation originates in Hegel's understanding of the novel as a genre portraying the inevitable necessity for the individual to accept that he is dominated by the laws of bourgeois reality. Thus the *Bildungsroman*, and *Wilhelm Meister* in particular, are taken to exemplify the double effect of modernity: the hero constantly reinvents the outer world by acting upon it, but he is also continuously redefined by the already existing patterns of social reality. The hero's self, then, is the result of both activity and reconciliation, of transformative actions and submissive adjustments. The productive spirit of the new is compromised by the weight of already established norms and stratifications. Lukács himself is not opposed to these pre-given social divisions. What is more, he conceives 'the organization of the outside world into professions, classes, ranks, etc.' as the 'substratum' of the social activity of the hero in the *Bildungsroman* (*TN*, 133). The life of the individual in society has nothing to do with a 'natural solidarity of kinship (as in the ancient epics)', nor is it the result of 'people being naïvely and naturally rooted' in specific social conditions. Rather, it is 'the crowning of a process of education',

⁶ See Georg von Lukács, *Die Seele und die Formen*, Berlin, 1911, pp. 96–7.

the fruit 'of a rich and enriching resignation' (*TN*, 133), in the course of which one brings personal vocation and social demands into harmony.

If there is a seed of revolt against the status quo in the *Theory of the Novel*, then it is couched in the broad and somewhat abstract terms of a *Lebensphilosophie* akin to Simmel's. The structures of social life are only 'an occasion for the active expression of the essential life substance', necessary instruments 'of aims which go far beyond them'. However, when Lukács argues that social structures should not be viewed 'in their rigid political and legal being-for-themselves' (*TN*, 134), this is a humanist critique of the limitations exercised by definition by all political and legal forms of social life, rather than a discontent with particular forms of social organization.

The 1932 Articles

In Lukács's Goethe criticism of the 1930s the *Bildungsroman* retains its central position. In contrast to *The Theory of the Novel*, however, the articles of the 1930s shift the focus and the language of interpretation noticeably towards the discussion of social problems. The first symptom of this change is Lukács's increasingly polemical tone. Whereas in his earlier discussions of Goethe he never engaged in open controversy, the article 'Der Faschisierte Goethe' (1932) clearly commences the unmasking of what Lukács perceives to be the 'Goethe legend (*Goethelegende*) of the German bourgeoisie' (FG, 33). This article already contains the germs of Lukács's wholesale and rather primitive rejection of German liberal thought as a herald of fascism, which in the 1950s will make up the core of his large-scale project *The Destruction of Reason*. Both Simmel and Gundolf are flatly accused of having played 'a great role in the construction of the fascist Goethe image' (FG, 33), but when Lukács spells out the ingredients of the reactionary Goethe legend—'God, Kaiser, and Fatherland' (FG, 35)—his accusations of Simmel and Gundolf as forefathers of the fascist Goethe cult⁷ prove to be insufficiently backed up. Indeed, all he has to say about Simmel is that his interpretation of Goethe is marred by 'sceptical mysticism' (FG, 37) and, like Gundolf's, by a residual Nietzscheanism (FG, 38).⁸

⁷ As far as Gundolf is concerned, Lukács was not alone in his criticism; Karl Löwith, too, thought that the circle around George played a significant role 'as an intellectual precursor of National Socialist ideology' (K. Löwith, *My Life in Germany Before and After 1933*, trans. E. King, London, 1994, p. 20).

⁸ We can also find an attack on Gundolf in Lukács's article of the same year 'Was ist uns heute Goethe?' (see the republication in A. Klein, *Georg Lukács in Berlin*, p. 424).

If 'Der Faschisierte Goethe' is part of the polemics taking place throughout the Goethe anniversary in 1932,⁹ the other major piece of the same year, 'Goethe und die Dialektik', seems to provide a positive programme for rethinking Goethe's legacy without recourse to contemporary debates.¹⁰ The aim is to create a bridge between Goethe's work and the historical development of dialectics. In 'Der faschisierte Goethe' Lukács clearly warns that despite the mutual respect and even friendship between Goethe and Hegel, Goethe's ideas are not dialectical, for he declines to accept the law by virtue of which quantity turns into quality (FG, 38). In 'Goethe und die Dialektik', Part IV of which is wholly devoted to a comparison between Goethe and Hegel, a concession seems to be made: Lukács argues that Goethe recognizes the contradictions in particular phenomena (especially in nature), but remains incapable of grasping the general regularities which govern the connections and the course of development of these phenomena (GD, 23). In spite of his generally critical estimate, in this text Lukács for the first time links together dialectics and *Klassik* and establishes a strong parallelism between them, which proves to be fundamental to his later attempts to ground the doctrine of realism and the new Left art in the values of the classical past. 'The struggle for the establishment of dialectics is the central theoretical problem of the classical epoch of German philosophy and literature, the epoch from Lessing to Hegel' (GD, 13). Goethe's place in this struggle is marked by ambiguity and limitations, but they are largely attributed to Germany's backwardness at the time: since underdevelopment of economic forms precluded the clear division between materialism and idealism, Goethe had to concentrate on philosophical problems (Lukács's example is pantheism), the solution to which could follow either principle (GD, 15).

I have taken this seemingly uncalled-for detour through Lukács's Goethe articles of 1932 in order to present the dominant direction of his thought at the time. He was actively seeking to debunk the interpretative strategies informing the work of two of the most influential Goethe critics in the 1910s and the 1920s (Simmel and Gundolf) and to

⁹ For more on the Goethe jubilee in 1932 as the context of Lukács's article, see Hans-Dietrich Dahnke, 'Humanität und Geschichtsperspektive. Zu den Goethe-Ehrungen 1932, 1949, 1982', *Weimarer Beiträge*, 1982, No. 10, pp. 66–89; D. Schiller, 'Goethe in den geistigen Kämpfen um 1932. Über die Goethe-Nummern der Zeitschriften *Die Neue Rundschau* und *Die Linkskurve* im April 1932', *Goethe-Jahrbuch*, 1986, Vol. 103, pp. 54–72.

¹⁰ K. R. Mandelkow's thorough study of the German Goethe reception, while mentioning in passing 'Der Faschisierte Goethe', appears to be even less concerned with the far more important 'Goethe und die Dialektik'.

promote in their stead a Hegelian-Marxist approach. It is only against this background that we can evaluate the thrust of his later interpretations of the problem of *Bildung* in Goethe's *oeuvre*. Characteristically, the rift between Goethe and Hegel is further bridged in Lukács's later writings. In the *Faust Studies* (1940), Hegel's *Phänomenologie* and Goethe's *Faust* are said to be among the greatest artistic and philosophical achievements of the classical era (*W*, 6: 544); and in the 1947 preface to *Goethe and his Age*, we already find both Hegel and Goethe presented as the thinkers who—within the confines of bourgeois thought—'lifted the dialectical method to its highest possible point' (*W*, 7: 47). The same spirit of reconciliation prevails in Lukács's *The Young Hegel* (completed in 1938, but published only in 1948) which draws abundant, and positive, parallels between Goethe and Hegel.¹¹

The Problem of Bildung in the Texts after 1932

In the 1930s Lukács, unlike Simmel and Gundolf, sees the value of Goethe's art not in transcending the contradictions of social reality, but in their exposure. Goethe's *oeuvre* gains significance by virtue of its power of disclosure; it reveals the contradictory nature of *Bildung* and helps us to see behind its dialectic the dialectic of historical determinants. Thus, Lukács unambiguously places the whole problem within the framework of capitalist modernity: the dialectic of *Bildung* becomes the mirror image of the dialectic of bourgeois life.

In Lukács's mature texts, the idea of *Bildung* is the result of his Marxist reformulation of both Schiller's division of literature into naïve and sentimental, and Simmel's vision of the tragic development of culture. As early as 1914–16 in *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács offers his own version of Schiller's general division by setting up the no less inclusive opposition between integrated and problematic cultures, or, in other words, between a totality that is given (*gegeben*) and one that is set as a task (*aufgegeben*). In 1935, in 'Schiller's Theory of Modern Literature', he turns once again to Schiller's sweeping distinction between antiquity, where man and nature, reason and sensibility were allegedly one, and modern times, where they have drifted apart. Schiller's explanation of this process is read by Lukács in the light of Simmel's later philosophy of the inevitably tragic course of culture, following which culture enfeebles both itself and its producers: 'Schiller's conception of

¹¹ In the late 1940s the *Faust-Phänomenologie* parallel also occupies Ernst Bloch (cf. his 'Das Faustmotiv in der *Phänomenologie des Geistes*', *Neue Welt*, 1949, No. 4, pp. 71–86).

the fundamental difference between the two periods is that culture engenders the capitalist division of labour and the dissociation of reason and sensibility, and thus estranges man from nature' (*W*, 7: 145; *GHA*, 119).¹²

What Lukács is keen to show in his Goethe texts is that while it remains possible to deduce capitalist division of labour from the general patterns of cultural development, it is nevertheless more justified to see this division as reflecting the contradictory growth of capitalism as a particular social and historical formation. Simmel's pathos of the tragic evolution of culture is not cancelled, but is redirected to bear on the development of capitalism. In the *Werther* article, Lukács summarizes the controversial role that capitalist advance plays in the life of the individual: 'While the capitalist division of labour, the indispensable foundation of the development of the productive forces, forms the material basis of the developed personality, it simultaneously subjugates the human being and fragments his personality into lifeless specialization' (*W*, 7: 58; *GHA*, 40).

Arguably, then, the idea and practice of *Bildung* are opened up as historical possibilities at a definite point in time and as the effect of objective social developments. The meaning of these developments is rationalized by Lukács as a challenge to deep-seated notions of human unity and balance between self and society. Seen in this perspective, *Bildung* is a virtue born of necessity; it refers to a state of perfection that is hard to (re)gain. *Bildung* emerges as the field of necessary (though often doomed) attempts to re-establish the unity of man in an age of fundamental splits and to renegotiate his harmony with society. It is this burning need to redefine the status of man in the era of capitalist transformations that makes *Bildung* a central and indispensable idea in Lukács's interpretations of Goethe. The absolute centrality of *Bildung* to Lukács's analysis of Goethe is evident in the fact that all his readings of particular Goethe works (*Die Leiden des jungen Werther*, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, and *Faust*) see them as variations of the genre of the *Bildungsroman*. The same viewpoint is extended to cover Hölderlin's *Hyperion*, albeit in a rather rhetorical and flimsy parallel (*W*, 7: 183).

¹² The English translation is wrong at this point. It translates the German 'Die Schillerische Fassung des grundlegenden Unterschiedes der beiden Perioden ist, daß die Kultur die kapitalistische Arbeitsteilung, die Trennung von Vernunft und Sinnlichkeit hervorbringt . . .' as 'Schiller's conception of the fundamental difference between the two periods is that the culture of the capitalist division of labour engenders the dissociation of reason and sensibility . . .' Thus the English translation obscures the Simmelian substance of Lukács's reading of Schiller and gives it a straightforwardly Marxist interpretation.

Lukács's Marxist analyses of Goethe's work present *Bildung* as a struggle for the creation of a free human being who is capable of 'universal activity' while still accepting, in a Hegelian move reminiscent of the *Theory of the Novel*, the laws of reality as it is (*W*, 7: 61; *GHA*, 43). His notion of *Bildung* is close to the 'universal' (*allseitig*) ideal adopted from Schiller's *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*; yet it is deliberately kept as far as possible (though often it is not too far) from utopianism. The interpretation of *Werther* is a case in point. The hero of Goethe's novel is subjected to *Bildung* in that he must learn to reconcile his passions with the laws of bourgeois existence. Werther's suicide is the mark of an uncompromising adherence to ideals which should have been moderated through *Bildung*; his failed *Bildung* excommunicates him from a world based on reconciliation with reality. Werther's example, then, is heroic in itself but hardly to be recommended in an era dominated by the sobriety of bourgeois social relations. In the early—and romantic—age of the great French Revolution, now gone for ever, Werther's act, Lukács implies, was a powerful protest against undesirable social limitations; in the subsequent periods of established capitalism, however, it would amount to no more than private resignation. While reconciliation through *Bildung* gives us a chance to perform activities that could gradually transform the world, resignation is a personal moral act that gives up all chances to affect reality.

A similar view of *Bildung* underlies the interpretation of *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (*W*, 7: 72, 76; *GHA*, 53). Lukács praises Goethe's novel for depicting the real development of 'actual people in concrete circumstances', an achievement which remained no more than a utopian desire in most of bourgeois art. The concreteness of this representation is facilitated by Goethe's understanding that 'the human personality can only develop in and through action (*handelnd*)' (*W*, 7: 75; *GHA*, 56*). Lukács generously declares Goethe's novel a 'classic accomplishment' of realistic art, higher than Balzac's or Stendhal's (*W*, 7: 87; *GHA*, 66). This obviously inflated appreciation has its roots in Lukács's equation of realism with totality and essentiality. Because he claims that it is only the cognate processes of *Bildung* and labour that constitute human development and can determine our true position in society, those novels which give attention to these two processes inevitably appear most realistic.

Lukács, to repeat, sees the substance of *Bildung* in *Wilhelm Meister* in 'the education of man for the practical understanding of reality' (*W*, 7: 79; *GHA*, 59). At the heart of this preparation lies the abandonment of

romantic interiority and the gradual socialization of the individual in more practical terms.¹³ Taking up his earlier polemic against Kant's ethical theory at the time he was drafting his uncompleted Dostoevsky book, Lukács predicates *Bildung* on the rejection of abstract moral regulation (*W*, 7: 77; *GHA*, 57). Some thirty years later, in his article 'Minna von Barnhelm' (1963), he dwells once again on how unsuited Kant's ethics are to produce people capable of appreciating the complexity of real life. The distinction here is especially clear: Lukács speaks of the 'dialectic of morals and ethics', of the 'constant turn of abstract morals into human-concrete and individualized ethics which springs from the respective particular situation' (*W*, 7: 25). Overcoming Kant's general and over-rigorous moral imperatives means accepting reality as it is and soberly acknowledging the more pressing calls of the day.

Lukács, of course, is far from denying Goethe's novel a utopian potential. But he tries to construct an order in which the utopian flows necessarily from the realistic. Since the state of desired harmony that the process of *Bildung* should bring about cannot be depicted simply through realistic reference to the normal course of life in bourgeois society, utopian elements crop up of necessity in any genuinely realist prose under capitalism. In 'The Correspondence Between Schiller and Goethe' (1934) Lukács builds on Schiller's comments to ponder the distribution of utopian (Lothario) and realistic (Wilhelm Meister) characters in Goethe's novel, and he measures their specific weight for a narrative concerned with the realistic depiction of bourgeois life (*W*, 7: 117; *GHA*, 93–4). From this dialectic of real and utopian, which is so characteristic of the problematic of *Bildung*, he infers that in its *Weltanschauung* Goethe's novel is poised between two ages: 'it expresses the tragic crisis of bourgeois humanist ideals and the beginning of their growth—temporarily utopian—beyond the framework of bourgeois society' (*W*, 7: 84; *GHA*, 64). Locating thus *Wilhelm Meister* between realism and social utopia, Lukács appears to continue a tradition of Left appropriations of the *Wanderjahre* and the *Lehrjahre* in Germany,¹⁴ which in the Goethe year (1932) was strongly reasserted by Thomas Mann.¹⁵

¹³ For Goethe's movement from the *Lehrjahre* to the *Wanderjahre* as a movement from the ideal of many-sided *Bildung* to an awareness of the usefulness of practical *Ausbildung* see T. J. Reed, *The Classical Centre. Goethe and Weimar 1775–1832*, Oxford, 1986, pp. 228–9.

¹⁴ See e.g. G. Radbruch, 'Wilhelm Meisters sozialpolitische Sendung. Eine rechtsphilosophische Goethe-Studie', *Logos*, 1919/20, No. 8, pp. 152–62.

¹⁵ For a brief comment on Thomas Mann's Berlin Goethe speech of 1932, in which he speaks of 'the self-overcoming of the bourgeois' to the point of 'transition to the communist',

Lukács' idea of *Bildung* has its origins not only in Schiller's aesthetic education and Simmel's philosophy of culture, but also, as suggested earlier, in Hegel's philosophy of history. Of primary importance in this respect is Hegel's concept of 'becoming'. For Hegel, the subject of becoming is the consciousness which goes through the twofold process of estrangement and embodiment in particular historical formations (tribes, states, nations) representing various facets and degrees of advance of the human race. This view is anticipated in Herder's *Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung der Menschheit* and especially in his later *Ideen*, two works which struggle to grasp the history of the universal body of the *Menschengattung* in its irreducible local heterogeneity.

It is this blend of *Bildung* and becoming, applied to the history of mankind rather than to that of the individual, that supports Lukács's interpretation of *Faust* as a *Bildungsroman* 'on a grand scale' (*W*, 6: 604; *GHA*, 237). Predictably enough, Lukács compares *Faust* to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (*W*, 6: 544–5; *GHA*, 176–7). But at the same time he insists on the crucial difference between them: unlike the *Phenomenology* which is preoccupied with the evolution of Spirit, *Faust* is a book about becoming and growth in the process of social praxis and labour. Taking his lead from Marx's *Paris Manuscripts*, Lukács identifies the central problem of *Faust* as the formation and realization of 'all generic powers' of the individual:

How these generic powers are engendered in the individual, how they develop, what obstacles they surmount, what fate they encounter, how the given natural and socio-historical world acts on him as a reality independent of him, how it is at the same time the product or (in the case of nature) the object of his self-creating activity, whence this process takes its point of departure and whither it leads—this is the theme of *Faust*.

(*W*, 6: 545–46; *GHA*, 177)¹⁶

The individual's *Bildung* keeps step with the potential of the species as this is realized in proportion to the appropriation of nature in

see K. R. Mandelkow, *Goethe in Deutschland*, Vol. 2, p. 73. Thomas Mann's views on *Bildung* underwent a significant evolution: in his *Betrachtungen des Unpolitischen* he still champions *Bildung* as a 'specifically German' idea originating in Goethe's work and underpinning 'the deeply unpolitical, anti-radical, anti-revolutionary essence of the Germans' (Th. Mann, *Betrachtungen des Unpolitischen*, Berlin, 1919, p. 517–18).

¹⁶ While the *Manuscripts* help Lukács to formulate the key problems of *Faust*, it is precisely *Faust* that supplies Marx with one of the most felicitous rhetorical images in the *Manuscripts* (the man who runs as if he had twenty-four legs), which unmasks the power of money to distort human relations and shape judgements of what is true, beautiful etc. Lukács also includes this example in the third section of his analysis (*W*, 6: 566; *GHA*, 198).

human labour.¹⁷ Thus *Bildung* is the focal point where self-creating practices intersect with objective determinations. The balance between the two is hard to maintain. Even if we silence nature and succeed in relegating it to a passive object which human activities are exercised upon without restraint, one cannot escape the irony entailed in these acts of appropriation. Referring explicitly to Hegel, Lukács touches on the idea of the discrepancy between intention and result in human activity: 'The result of human action is always objectively something other than what men intended in their passion' (*W*, 6: 571; *GHA*, 203). The outcome of our actions is always contaminated with subversive folly: they cancel our individual will and make us dependent on the ensuing results. Lukács seeks support for this dispiriting conclusion in Mephisto's words:

Am Ende hängen wir doch ab
Von Kreaturen, die wir machten.

An early predecessor of Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*, Lukács's analysis of the implicit dangers of human activity for the freedom of the human species questions the very foundations of the humanistic ideal of *Bildung*. How is it possible for man to emerge as a free-acting personality, once the educating process of production and appropriation leads into the impasse of misconceived objectifications? Since the products of human practice are untrustworthy and rob man of his essence, one is left with little hope that self-creation through active appropriation of the outer world can bring fruits unadulterated with the bitter taste of a secondary enslavement.

Thus *Faust* is seen as a triumph of realism founded on an investigation into the contradictory nature of human activity as the material content of *Bildung* and becoming. The contradictions lie not only in the fact that the maintenance of the economic basis of free and universal *Bildung* in bourgeois society is possible 'only in a capitalist way'—a way that restricts both freedom and universality (*W*, 6: 582, *GHA*, 215)—, but also in the resulting condition of perplexity and loss of autonomy *vis-à-vis* the overpowering nature of objectifications that tragically reproduce the symptoms of man's initial subjugation.

So: Lukács's idea of *Bildung* emerges as the outcome of his dialogue with the aesthetic and social thought of Schiller and the philosophy of

¹⁷ It is this notion of Goethe's work as facilitating the process of attaining one's *gattungs-gemäße Existenz* that underpins Lukács's last text on Goethe ('Marx und Goethe') written simultaneously with the extensive notes towards his *Ontologie*.

Hegel and Simmel, and is the coping-stone of his interpretation of Goethe. All the major novels he discusses are placed in this philosophically rich perspective and construed with the social relevance of *Bildung* in mind. Lukács is especially concerned to explore the intimate connection between *Bildung* and social practice and the limitations imposed on the process of *Bildung* and its results under capitalism. The outcome is a social dialectic of *Bildung*, placing equal emphasis on its potential and its restrictions. *Bildung* is grasped in its complexity both as a stimulating, at times utopian, corrective to bourgeois social conditions, and as a process that suffers from and involuntarily multiplies the constraints inherent in bourgeois reality.

BAKHTIN: THE PHENOMENOLOGY OF *BILDUNG*

Goethe in Bakhtin's Intellectual Career

Goethe's place in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin is comparable with his significance for Lukács on more than just a superficial level. As early as the 1920s Goethe was a cult figure in the Bakhtin Circle: Pavel Medvedev always kept Goethe's portrait on his writing desk,¹⁸ and Valentin Voloshinov aspired to translate a selection of the *West-östlicher Divan*.¹⁹ The published interpretations of Goethe are only a small part of what Bakhtin produced on his work and on the *Bildungsroman*. In 1936–8 Bakhtin was working on a book entitled *The Bildungsroman and its Significance in the History of Realism*, which in 1938 was accepted for publication by the *Soviet Writer* publishing house.²⁰ During the Second World War the manuscript shared the fate of the materials for Lukács's Goethe monograph. A prospectus and numerous preparatory notes were preserved. One highly anecdotal and unverifiable story ascribes the loss of the conclusion to the surviving body of the text to Bakhtin's chain-smoking habits (*SG*, xiii). Parts of the prospectus and a section on

¹⁸ Iu. P. Medvedev, 'Na puti k sozdaniiu sotsiologicheskoi poetiki', *DKH*, 1998, No. 2, p. 13.

¹⁹ Little, though, appears to have been materialized; on Voloshinov's interest in Goethe (and Novalis), see Dmitrii Iunov's 'Glavnye trudy V. N. Voloshinova. Rekonstruktsiia' [1999], Unpublished Manuscript, p. 1.

²⁰ Cf. S. S. Konkina and L. S. Konkina, *Mikhail Bakhtin. Stranitsy zhizni i tvorchestva*, Saransk, 1993, p. 231; note, however, Brian Pool's doubts that the book was ever finished and sent to the publisher (cf. K. Hirschkop, *Mikhail Bakhtin. An Aesthetic for Democracy*, Oxford, 1999, p. 113). A source of inspiration for Bakhtin's work may have been Matvei Kagan's interest in and work on *Faust* in 1936–7, when Bakhtin and Kagan resumed their friendship during Bakhtin's visits to Moscow (cf. Iu. Kagan, 'People not of Our Time', in *The Contexts of Bakhtin*, ed. D. Shepherd, Amsterdam, 1998, p. 7).

time and space in Goethe were published in 1979 by S. Bocharov in *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*, and in 1994 B. Poole published a general outline of the prospectus and a portion of the introductory part.²¹ Alongside these texts, Goethe also occupied Bakhtin in his essays on the novel (1935–41) and in *Rabelais*, work on which extended over thirty years from the early 1930s to the mid-1940s and then once again in the first half of the 1960s.

In addition to this, two lists of Bakhtin's published and forthcoming scholarly work, compiled by Bakhtin himself,²² mention a book-length manuscript with the title *Roman vospitaniia v Germanii* ['The *Bildungsroman* in Germany'] completed in 1938 and consisting of 189 type-written pages. The fact that the year of completion and the internal evaluator, L. Timofeev, are the same for this manuscript and for the one with the title *Roman vospitaniia i ego znachenie v istorii realizma* ['The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism'] suggests that these two different titles refer to the same text. A third list, prepared by Bakhtin in 1946, lists a book-length manuscript of 1943 entitled *Khudozhestvennaia proza Gete* ['Goethe's Literary Prose'].²³ It is regrettable that nothing seems to be known of this work, if indeed it was ever written. There are also data indicating that in 1948–50 Bakhtin was considering a comparative study of Goethe and Dostoevsky (SS, 383). At this time, his enduring interest in Goethe was further strengthened by Boris Pasternak's translation of *Faust*, the first part of which he read and discussed in the presence of Bakhtin and other people in the Spring of 1949 (BD, 262, 325, n. 48).

A serious point of convergence between Lukács's and Bakhtin's texts on Goethe is their rootedness in a common intellectual tradition. As early as 1929, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* furnishes clear evidence that the major propositions of Dilthey's psychology and hermeneutics, Gundolf's books on Goethe and George as well as Simmel's Goethe book and his articles on the philosophy of culture were all known in the Bakhtin Circle.²⁴ In the same year, Bakhtin's *Problems*

²¹ See B. Poole, 'Mikhail Bakhtin i teoriia romana vospitaniia', in *M. M. Bakhtin i perspektivy gumanitarnykh nauk*, ed. V. L. Makhlin, Vitebsk, 1994, pp. 71–2.

²² The first list falls somewhere in the period 1941–5, closer, more likely than not, to 1945; the second list was written apparently in 1945. For the dating of these lists, cf. S. Bocharov's general introduction (SS, 382).

²³ Cf. S. Bocharov's comments (SS, 383); some of the information contained in these lists was first published by N. Pan'kov in his article "'Ot khoda etogo dela. . .'", *DKH*, 1993, No. 2–3, p. 38.

²⁴ Cf. *MPL* (pp. 26–8, 32, 40). One should, however, note an odd lapse: the author(s) have mistaken Gundolf's first name and call him Wilhelm instead of Friedrich (p. 27).

of *Dostoevsky's Art* shows signs of familiarity with the first edition (1916) of Gundolf's *Goethe* and with the Russian translation (1928) of Simmel's *Goethe* study.²⁵ Dilthey is the target of polemics in Bakhtin's late studies on the methodology of the human sciences of 1974 (*SG*, 161–2), and Gundolf, coming through the failures of an old man's memory, figures in his conversations with Duvakin (*BD*, 252). As we shall establish later on, Bakhtin's work on Goethe bears clear marks of a debt to Gundolf's *Goethe*.

But, most crucially, both Lukács and Bakhtin place the problem of *Bildung* and the significance of the *Bildungsroman* for the growth of realistic literature at the centre of their work on Goethe. Bakhtin's recurring use of 'realism' and 'realistic' in his texts on Goethe of the 1930s might take the commentator on his earlier texts unawares, since the two terms are almost completely absent from his previous work (they are not to be found even in the explicitly sociological analysis of Tolstoy's *Resurrection* of 1930). It is beyond doubt that it was precisely after the problem of realism in the novel became a central preoccupation of Soviet criticism in the wake of Lukács's contributions to the discussion on the novel (1934–5) that Bakhtin had to respond to the pressure and give realism primary importance. One can see clear signs of this pressure at the point where he succumbs to the rather trivial explanation of Goethe's evolution as a gradual 'crowding out' of the romantic, leading to the final victory of realism (*BR*, 36). A further legible trace of Lukács's impact refers the reader back to his *Theory of the Novel*, in which he considered the novel a part (albeit a distorted one) of the great epic tradition. Similarly, in the essay on the *Bildungsroman*, Bakhtin, unlike the Bakhtin of the four major essays on the novel, but like the Bakhtin of 'Author and Hero' and 'The Problem of Content, Material, and Form', is bent on subsuming the novel under the epic. The boundary between the epic and the novel is effaced: both serve the primary task of literature which is, in Hegelian-Lukácsian terms, the depiction of the totality of the world: 'The large epic form (the large epic), including the novel as well, should provide an integrated picture of the world and life, it should reflect the *entire* world and *all* of life' (*BR*, 43). The same thought appears in a condensed form once again (*BR*, 45), and later in the text *Wilhelm Meister* is defined, in much the same

²⁵ Cf. *PDA* (p. 31). Bakhtin read and made excerpts from Gundolf's *Goethe* once more in 1936–8 and in 1940–1, obviously in connection with the preparation of the above-mentioned book-length manuscripts on Goethe of 1938 and 1943. For the conspectus of 1940–1, cf. the comments on Bakhtin's "“Slovo o Polku Igoreve” v istorii epopei" (*SS*, 416).

way as Dostoevsky's novels in Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*, as lying 'on the border between the novel and the new large epic' (BR, 50). Thus in Bakhtin's essay we can hear reverberating Lukács's ideas about realism and his view of the novel as ultimately flowing back into the current of the epic.

The outline of the prospectus to *The Bildungsroman and its Significance in the History of Realism* assigns Goethe and his fiction a central position. Out of five projected chapters, one (the fourth) is entirely devoted to Goethe; another one (the fifth and final chapter) bears the suggestive title 'Development of the *Bildungsroman* after Goethe'. The lack of balance in the internal distribution of the material is apparent in the scope of each of these two chapters. In the Goethe chapter Bakhtin singles out four sections: (1) 'Distinctive features of the construction of the image of man in Goethe'; (2) *Dichtung und Wahrheit*; (3) *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*; (4) *Wilhelms Meisters Wanderjahre*; the fifth chapter, in turn, is subdivided into: (1) 'The *Bildungsroman* in the 19th and the 20th century'; (2) 'The Russian *Bildungsroman*'; (3) 'Gor'kii and the *Bildungsroman*'; (4) 'Socialist Realism and the *Bildungsroman*'.²⁶ As can be seen, the design of the book suggests the unique place occupied in it by Goethe. The entire history of the *Bildungsroman* falls into two equally dependent parts: before him and after him. Thus Goethe seems to be placed at the top of Bakhtin's canon of writers, in which Dostoevsky and Rabelais occupy an equally distinguished position.

Goethe and Dostoevsky: How Do They Co-Exist in Bakhtin's Oeuvre?

In the essay on the *Bildungsroman*, Bakhtin undertakes an overview of the various types of the novel. This overview stands between two similar attempts: that of 1934–5 in 'Discourse in the Novel', and the one in 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel', written at the same time (1937–8) as the study of the *Bildungsroman*.²⁷ This typology spells out the place Bakhtin assigns to his main heroes: Dostoevsky, Goethe, and Rabelais. If the 1963 study of Dostoevsky does enough to bring his novels closer to the type of literature of which the perfect emblem is Rabelais, and if in *Rabelais* the same procedure, albeit on a

²⁶ M. M. Bakhtin, 'Roman vospitaniia i ego znachenie v istorii realizma (fragmenty prospekta)', in B. Poole, 'Mikhail Bakhtin i teoriia romana vospitaniia', pp. 71–2.

²⁷ Indeed, the only text preserved in Bakhtin's archive, and serving as the basis for the edition of the article on Goethe in *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*, bears the title 'Roman vospitaniia i ego znachenie v istorii realizma' ('The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism') and incorporates 338 pages (about half of the whole manuscript, most of the other part of which was to become known, with some changes, as FTCN).

lesser scale, is successfully applied to Goethe, the tension between Dostoevsky and Goethe reveals unexpected ruptures in the edifice of Bakhtin's *oeuvre*.

Both 'Discourse in the Novel' (DN, 391-2) and the text on the *Bildungsroman* (BR, 16) present Dostoevsky as a novelist whose work unambiguously falls within the genre of the novel of ordeal. However, both the biographical novel and especially the *Bildungsroman*, together with their respective chronotopes, are placed in these two texts above the novel of ordeal as superior forms allowing the depiction of man in the process of developing. The problem, then, arises as to how it is possible to accommodate Dostoevsky's great artistic innovations, so much insisted upon by Bakhtin, within a general account which views his novels as occupying a lower position in the historical typology of the genre. Bakhtin appears to have remained unperturbed by this issue. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* of 1929 Dostoevsky's predilection for spatial co-existence, which Bakhtin considers to be at the core of the polyphonic novel and in contrast with Goethe's bent towards becoming and temporal order, is attributed to the features of the historical moment:

The epoch itself made the polyphonic novel possible. [. . .] [T]he objective contradictions of the epoch determined Dostoevsky's creative work. . . on the plane of the objective seeing of these contradictions as forces coexisting simultaneously.

(PDA, 30)

If this answer is justified, and it was Dostoevsky's epoch that proved so benign for the immense advance of the novel towards its polyphonic type, then it is rather confusing less than ten years later to see Goethe, writing as he was much earlier in time than Dostoevsky, crowned as the master of a type of novel which is celebrated as more advanced, more complex, and closer to reality than the novel of ordeal practised by Dostoevsky.

It is vital to note that Bakhtin's tacit placing of Goethe above Dostoevsky remains enclosed in time by acts of well-tempered reconciliation of the two as equally great if dissimilar authors. In the 1963 Dostoevsky book, Bakhtin insists that the plot and, by implication, the chronotope of the biographical novel, which in the 1938 book he demonstrates to be closer to the *Bildungsroman* than to the novel of ordeal, 'is not adequate to Dostoevsky's hero' (PDP, 101); he insists that 'Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel is constructed on another plot-compositional base, and is connected with other generic traditions in the development

of European artistic prose' (*PDP*, 102). We can infer from this that the criteria Bakhtin uses in identifying the various types of novel in the two books on Dostoevsky and in the text on the *Bildungsroman* are divergent. Evidently, there is no inherent and necessary connection between the quality of polyphony and any of the chronotopes, i.e. any of the historically observable types of novel. Bakhtin's belief that polyphony belongs to the magnificent artistic *discoveries* of Dostoevsky suggests that new developments in the genre can and do arise without necessarily enjoying the underlying prop of new chronotopes. If this is true, then one might conclude that the two main vectors in Bakhtin's theory of the novel—the classification based on chronotope and the typology that rests on the opposition between monologue and dialogue/polyphony—hardly intersect. Even when Bakhtin makes a bold attempt to uncover the roots of Dostoevsky's dialogism in the 'memory of genre' (*PDP*, 106), and takes his study back to the literature of antiquity and of the Middle Ages, he fails to link the 'uniquely original and innovative form of the polyphonic novel' (*PDP*, 178) with a specific (new) novelistic chronotope; the former proves not to be deducible from the latter.

For all these reasons, the tension in the evaluation of Dostoevsky and Goethe remained unresolved throughout Bakhtin's life and thus no victor emerged from the comparison between them, despite the fact that Goethe was privileged for a short time in 1936–8 due to Bakhtin's use of an evolutionary approach which he subsequently abandoned. The oddest element in this picture of changing methodologies is the inconsistency of Bakhtin's thought even over a quite short period of time. In the introductory passages of 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel' (1937–8), he shows that he is fully aware of the heterogeneous nature of literary history. Chronotopes arising at various stages of human history are confirmed here in their co-existence (FTCN, 85). At precisely the same time, by presenting literary history in the text on the *Bildungsroman* as the drama of transitions leading to ever more appropriate chronotopes rather than as the product of a merciful, unjudgemental, and all-preserving memory, Bakhtin seems willy-nilly to have had to declare some authors more progressive and more relevant to the contemporary state of art than others. It seems to me that having to adapt his own writings to the ever more strongly imposed doctrine of realism championed by Lukács was a vital element in this episode of Bakhtin's career. However, this is not to say that the inconsistency manifested in the evaluation of Goethe and Dostoevsky

was not also grounded in the internal contradictions that mark Bakhtin's thought at this stage of his development.²⁸

This long detour has focused our attention once again on the problem of chronotope, whose relevance for Bakhtin's response to modernity we have stressed in Chapter 6. Chronotope is a vital point of departure, for, according to Bakhtin, it determines generic variations and the diverse literary images of man alike (FTCN, 85). In the following sections I try to analyse the relation of the ideas of time and space to the idea of *Bildung* in Bakhtin's discussion of Goethe.

Bildung and the 'Production' of Time and Space

For Bakhtin, Goethe's *Bildungsroman* means above all 'the destruction of the idyll' (FTCN, 229), both as chronotope and as *Weltanschauung*. He insists—at least on the surface—that this process is inescapable, whatever sacrifices and losses it involves. The overcoming of something as obsolete and limiting as the idyll should be welcome, and yet the 'wholeness of idyllic life, its organic link with nature' and the 'unmechanized nature of idyllic labour' (FTCN, 233) all deserve, if not nostalgic appreciation, then a sober appraisal as offerings at the altar of secularization, the opening up of the world, and the construction of a modern society.

The *Bildungsroman* has to bid farewell to the idyll, whose realm is, after all, narrow and isolated, a 'world fated to perish'. But what does the unavoidable and promising venture into the larger world of bourgeois life entail? Bakhtin's answer to this question, unexpectedly, appears less confident and less optimistic. For all his flatly anti-Romantic pronouncements, we can see here a Bakhtin very much involved in lamenting a vanished organic world, ousted by a 'great but abstract world, where people are out of contact with each other, egoistically sealed off from each other, greedily practical; where labour is differentiated and mechanized, where objects are alienated from the labour

²⁸ For an attempt to reconcile Dostoevsky and Goethe on the ground of Bakhtin's book on Rabelais see R. Deltcheva and E. Vlasov, "'The Goethe Syndrom': Villon and Rabelais as Ideological Figures in Mandelstam and Bakhtin', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 1994, No. 4, pp. 577–96, esp. p. 585; regrettably, the authors seem to disregard the internal inconsistency of Bakhtin's thought in the 1930s and for this reason the solution offered by them cannot address the real problem identified by us. On Bakhtin, Goethe, and carnival see also E. Nürlich-Zlateva, 'Das groteske Leben und seine edle Einfassung: "Das Römische Karneval" Goethes und das Karnevalkonzept von M. M. Bakhtin', *Goethe-Jahrbuch*, 1989, Vol. 106, pp. 181–202.

that produced them' (FTCN, 234). This melancholy vision, saturated with a mix of Romantic and Marxist colours, erodes the unqualified acceptance of historical change. The *Bildungsroman*, then, should not only destroy the idyllic world, but should also provide a way of coping with the consequences of doing so. The contradictory effects of modernity, Bakhtin suggests, should be dealt with by way of *Bildung*: a process which should serve the noble end of 'assembling this great world on a new basis, of rendering it familiar and humanizing it' (FTCN, 234).²⁹ At the bottom of this re-arrangement is the process of the personal 're-education' of man. It is less the process of perfection of man than that of his accommodation to a disturbing reality. Not unlike Lukács, and in many ways more distinctly than him, Bakhtin views *Bildung* as a field of harmonizing and reconciling practices which has been opened up with the transition to bourgeois life. In striking unity with Lukács's Hegelian notion of the novel, and in contrast with most of his other work, Bakhtin, writing two years after reading Lukács's papers at the Moscow discussion on the novel, tends to equate the *Bildungsroman* with the bourgeois novel at large:

In Hegel's definition, the novel must educate man for life in bourgeois society. This educative process is connected with a severing of all previous ties with the idyllic, that is, it has to do with man's *expatriation*. Here the process of man's re-education is interwoven with the process of society's breakdown and reconstruction. . .

(FTCN, 234)

It is essential to stress this equation, for it reveals Bakhtin's motivation for scrutinizing Goethe's work: once the *Bildungsroman* is taken to be the emblematic genre of bourgeois life, then it is clearly expected to provide an insight into the contradictory contents and principles of modernity.

Bakhtin's reading of Goethe realizes this hope by revealing the complex relations between time and space in his prose. His discussion of time and space in the 'Chronotope' essay emphasizes the leading role of time (FTCN, 85), but the text is rich in unexpected implications suggesting an equilibrium between the two. At first sight, this equilibrium is presented and celebrated in the rhetoric of a materialistic dialectic:

²⁹ I have slightly modified the existing English translation at this point. It renders the Russian 'etot bol'shoi mir nuzhno sobrat' na novoi osnove' as 'to constitute this great world on a new basis'; for me, the more literal translation of 'sobrat' as 'assemble' conveys better Bakhtin's idea that this new world consists of some always already present elements that need to be reshuffled in a different order rather than created anew.

time and space are mutually conditioning and reversible features of reality. On closer inspection, however, Bakhtin's phenomenological dialectic presents them as the products of a basic human faculty. Thus, as we shall see, from conditions circumscribing the process of *Bildung*, time and space are turned by degrees into powerful evidence of the emancipatory nature of *Bildung*: they are constantly being rediscovered and reproduced by humans, and the process of their mental production exemplifies the liberating potential of *Bildung*.

Bakhtin certainly speaks of time as a decisive force in the formation of man, and of the unique interpenetration of personal and historical time in the *Bildungsroman*. But there is also in the text a powerful tendency to account for the global changes leading to modernity solely by an altered sense of nature resting on a new conception of space. This tendency is also discernible in the later parts of the text known as the chronotope essay, where the growth of the world is described, more often than not, in spatial terms; the human faculty for geographic orientation is correspondingly credited with a leading role in the adaptation to the new world: 'It is necessary to find a new relationship to nature, not to the little nature of one's own corner of the world but to the big nature of the great world, to all the phenomena of the solar system, to the wealth excavated from the earth's core, to a variety of geographical locations and continents' (FTCN, 234).

The text on the *Bildungsroman*, on the other hand, does seem to be focused on the 'mastery of real historical time' and, in recognizably Hegelian mode, on the novelistic image of man '*in the process of becoming*' (BR, 19).³⁰ What is more, Bakhtin's metaphors imply that it is the becoming of man *in time* that gradually entails a *widening* of the compass of human existence. In the realistic novel of development, Bakhtin notes, 'the image of the developing man begins to surmount its private nature [. . .] and enters into a completely new, *spacious* sphere of historical existence' (BR, 24). A change in the temporal aspects of human life is thus seen as changing the spatial mode of human existence: coming of age also means entering a larger world, both metaphorically and literally.³¹

³⁰ I prefer to translate the Russian 'osvoenie' as 'mastery' rather than 'assimilation', which is the choice of the existing English translation, because it seems better to imply the active nature of the process and stands closer to the Hegelian source of Bakhtin's diction in this essay.

³¹ By translating the Russian '*prostornuiu sferu*' as '*spatial sphere*', the existing English translation is right for the wrong reason: the liberty it takes underscores the metaphorical togetherness of time and space and the change of the latter in the wake of alterations affecting the former.

Yet space is surreptitiously celebrated over time and against Bakhtin's claims to historicity. That this is the case may be inferred from an analysis of the recurring motif of *visibility* in Bakhtin's text.³²

The Power of Seeing

In Goethe, Bakhtin claims, 'external feelings, internal experiences, reflection, and abstract concepts are joined together around the *seeing eye* as a centre, as the first and last authority' (BR, 27). Bakhtin here joins a long tradition of Goethe interpretation, and consciously, since he notes 'this is generally known'. But he refuses to give his sources. They are precisely the works of Dilthey, Simmel, and Gundolf, which were known to both him and Lukács. Dilthey speaks of Goethe as an author of *lauter Sehen*³³ and, more importantly, he also praises Goethe's faculty of 'historical seeing'.³⁴ Similarly, Simmel, repeating Goethe's own account of his first meeting with Schiller, speaks of Goethe's ability to 'see the idea with eyes'.³⁵ 'The philosopher', Simmel remarks, 'sees the ideal (*das Ideelle*), because he knows it; the artist knows it, because he sees it'.³⁶ This contrast is carried further and finally yields a clearly neo-Romantic juxtaposition of reason and instinct: 'for the rationalist reason is an instinct; for Goethe, his instinct is reason'.³⁷ The most generous and unqualified praise of Goethe's gift for seeing comes, however, from Gundolf.³⁸ He interprets the *Italian Journey*, not unlike Bakhtin twenty years after him, as a paradigmatic work on the grounds that in Italy Goethe's exceptional faculty for seeing was finally given free rein. Gundolf is fairly straightforward in his conclusions: 'Goethe undertook the Italian journey above all as a man of the eye (*Augenmensch*) and

³² For an interesting analysis of metaphors of perception, visual perception included, in Bakhtin's other writings, see M. Gardiner, 'Bakhtin and the Metaphorics of Perception', in *Interpreting Visual Culture: Explorations in the Hermeneutics of the Visual*, ed. I. Heywood and B. Sandywell, London, 1998, pp. 57-73.

³³ W. Dilthey, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung*, Göttingen, 1921, p. 128.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

³⁵ Simmel repeats Goethe's phrase ('die Idee mit Augen sieht') once again in *Kant und Goethe* (G. Simmel, 'Kant und Goethe. Zur Geschichte der modernen Weltanschauung', *Georg Simmel Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 10, Frankfurt am Main, 1995, p. 129).

³⁶ G. Simmel, *Goethe*, Leipzig, 1921, p. 53.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

³⁸ The idea of Goethe as a 'seeing writer' was also shared by Ernst Cassirer (cf. his *Goethe und die geschichtliche Welt*); it is likely that not only Gundolf but rather both Gundolf and Cassirer were the source of this significant element of Bakhtin's understanding of Goethe (more on Cassirer's role see in B. Poole, 'Bakhtin and Cassirer. The Philosophical Origins of Bakhtin's Carnival Messianism', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 1998, No. 3-4, pp. 537-78).

for the education (*Bildung*) of his eye.³⁹ Gundolf here all but quotes Goethe directly: 'Ich gehe nur immer herum und herum und sehe und übe mein Aug und meinen inneren Sinn';⁴⁰ yet Goethe's 'exercise' (*üben*) has now been abandoned for the technically less precise but significantly broader and more suggestive *bilden*. Seeing is seriously presented as the basis of the entire process of *Bildung*. What Goethe sought in Italy, Gundolf insists, was not 'feeling [. . .]' but a visual idea (*Anschauung*).⁴¹ It is in the visual idea that he found 'the union of the self and the world'. Thus the intimate connection between seeing and *Bildung* is gradually clarified: 'in the eye, that which sees, the I, arrives at an identity with that which is to be seen, with the world'.⁴² Seeing, then, can be said to procure the desired oneness of subject and object without effort, as if in the immediate availability of a natural bodily activity. It smoothly allows us to internalize the realm of objects which otherwise are bound to stand over against us. This concept of seeing offers an attractive, if facile and false, alternative to Gundolf's own elitist concept of *Bildung*.⁴³ *Bildung* is no longer a tormented process of overcoming man's one-sidedness and his alienation from the world; it is presumed as a habitual practice, something both achievable and natural. Thus seeing assumes a utopian power: the ease of *Bildung* in the individual act of seeing conceals the fact that free and universal development is not attainable by everyone.

Bakhtin wholeheartedly embraces this utopian interpretation of seeing. Seeing asserts for him the unity of man and the indivisibility of his faculties. Goethe is considered a model case where 'discourse . . . was compatible with the clearest visibility' (BR, 28).⁴⁴ Bakhtin goes even further by adopting a broadly emancipatory use of the idea of seeing. In his account, seeing dissipates the tension between subject and object less because the two fuse in the act of beholding than because the

³⁹ F. Gundolf, *Goethe*, Berlin, 1930, p. 365. Ever since, this has been a staple line of interpreting the *Italian Journey*; cf. e.g. V. Lange, 'Goethe's Journey in Italy: The School of Seeing', in *Goethe in Italy, 1786-1986*, ed. G. Hoffmeister, Amsterdam, 1988, pp. 147-58.

⁴⁰ J. W. von Goethe, *Tagebuch der Italienischen Reise 1876*, ed. C. Michel, Frankfurt am Main, 1977, p. 79 (first published in 1886).

⁴¹ F. Gundolf, *Goethe*, p. 364.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 364.

⁴³ Gundolf speaks overtly of the 'Albernheit einer "allgemeinen Bildung" oder "Volksbildung"' and calls this idea a 'contradictio in adjecto' (F. Gundolf, *Shakespeare und der deutsche Geist*, Berlin, 1914, p. 222).

⁴⁴ I have modified the existing English translation in two ways at this point: first of all, in this instance I prefer to translate the Russian 'slovo' as 'discourse' rather than 'word', and secondly, I render the Russian 'bylo sovместimo' as 'was compatible', whereas the existing English translation opts for the too strong 'coincided'.

subject's look proves to be endowed with the gift of uncovering, or even generating, the true human meaning of the object. Moreover, seeing seems to synthesize thought and intuition, thus transcending that half-condition which Herder refers to when he says that men have become 'half thinkers, half feelers'.⁴⁵

The belief that the goal of *Bildung* can be reached through seeing dramatically alters the social implications of Bakhtin's analysis. Lukács's exacting political diction is reduced here to a mere shadow. The perspective of his reading of Goethe—overcoming alienation by the revolutionary abolition of division of labour—is replaced by a private ideal of organic unity guaranteed by the exercise of a single activity. Lukács's Marxist paradigm of *Bildung* under capitalism, in which man must yet cannot transcend the division of labour, is swept away by a serene trust that man might freely realize his potential in the creative act of seeing.

Thus Bakhtin entertains hopes which appear utopian and perhaps seem somewhat anachronistic in comparison with other approaches to the culture of seeing in the 1930s,⁴⁶ for example Walter Benjamin's bitter premonition that, with the advance of modernity, the act of seeing itself becomes a focal point of contradictions rather than a means of disentangling them. Unlike Gundolf and Bakhtin, Benjamin rebuts the equation of subject and object in the act of seeing. In a celebrated passage in 'Some Motifs in Baudelaire', he discusses the gradual passing of aura as the result of the fact that we can no longer invest the object we

⁴⁵ J. G. Herder, 'Übers Erkennen und Empfinden in der menschlichen Seele', *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. B. Suphan, Berlin, 1877–1913, Vol. 8, p. 256. Cassirer argues similarly, quoting Goethe's words from the preface to *Theory of Colour*: 'in every attentive glance at the world we are already theorizing' (E. Cassirer, *Rousseau, Kant, Goethe* [1944], Princeton, 1970, p. 82). Cassirer's parallel between Goethe and Kant is rooted in an established German tradition. Simmel, along with Karl Vorländer, whose book *Kant—Schiller—Goethe* (1907) comprises studies originally published between 1894 and 1898, is the first major exponent of this parallel, which did not evolve in smooth linearity. Friedrich Gundolf's Goethe book, referring to Vorländer, strongly opposed the trend to compare Goethe with Kant, claiming that it is impossible to imagine a sensibility and a mode of thinking more clearly opposed to Kant's than the ones we find in Goethe. In the second edition of his book (1923), Vorländer included the essay 'Goethe und Kant' (first published in 1919), in which he sought to defend his position while qualifying it. In Goethe's anniversary year, the Goethe-Kant parallel resurfaced in Heinrich Rickert's book on *Faust* (1932). Rickert, more than Simmel, sees Goethe and Kant as opponents only within the shared idea of the primacy of practical reason, will, and acting; he even recommends *Faust* as "'kantischer'" als Kant selbst' (H. Rickert, *Goethes 'Faust'. Die dramatische Einheit der Dichtung*, Tübingen, 1932, pp. 524–8).

⁴⁶ On the culture of seeing in its relation to modernity see, among others, D. M. Lowe, *History of Bourgeois Perception*, Chicago, 1982, and M. Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century Thought*, Berkeley, 1993.

are glancing at 'with the ability to look at us in return'.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Benjamin, taking his lead from Valéry and from Simmel's essay on life in the metropolis, stresses the destruction of the balance of human sensitivity in the big city. This typically shows up in the unhealthy preponderance of seeing over hearing, and in the overburdening of the eye 'with protective functions'.⁴⁸ For Benjamin, seeing is problematic and disillusioning; it is no longer wrapped in the softness of the classical harmony between the individual and the world. Rather than being placed at the centre of a successful *Bildung*, it has to be reconsidered in the light of a new historical experience and itself re-learned. Before serving as the foundation of an optimistic social project, it needs to be rescued from ever growing reification.

None of this seems to bother Bakhtin. His unrestrained glorification of seeing as an unproblematic act deeply affects his understanding of social and cultural change. To return to the problem of the correlation between time and space in the chronotope of the *Bildungsroman*, time, even when put on an equal footing with space, or above it, is still noticeably underplayed. Time is mastered predominantly through seeing, and the traces of its remorseless flow are weakened and indeed erased by the timelessness of the act of seeing. The phenomenological stability of seeing as a fundamental and unalterable human faculty marks time with an imprint of passivity and stasis. The dynamics of history are contaminated with stagnation, the fluidity of time is arrested in the solid appearances of permanence embodied in the forms of space.

Bakhtin is anxious to remove the traces of this inherent contradiction. Goethe's eyes, he assures the reader, 'did not want to (and could not) see anything as *ready* and *immobile*' (BR, 28).⁴⁹ What is more, Goethe's seeing 'did not recognize simple spatial contiguities or the simple coexistence of things and phenomena' (BR, 28). 'Everywhere here the *seeing eye* seeks and finds *time*—development, becoming, and history' (BR, 29).⁵⁰ And yet all this appears to be possible only on condition that the notion of time applied to each particular moment of

⁴⁷ W. Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. H. Zohn, London, 1973, p. 148. For other aspects of Benjamin's philosophy of seeing see S. Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, Cambridge, Mass., 1989.

⁴⁸ Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, p. 151.

⁴⁹ This is my translation of the Russian 'ego glaz nichego ne khotel (i ne mog) videt' *gotovym i nepodvizhnym*'. The available English translation offers: 'his eyes did not want to (and could not) see that which was *ready-made* and *immobile*'.

⁵⁰ As before, I have replaced 'emergence' by 'becoming' in rendering the Russian 'stanovlenie'.

history remains phenomenologically purified and inwardly stable. Goethe's 'startling ability to see time in space' (BR, 30) depends on what Bakhtin defines as 'the relative simplicity and elementary nature of this time' (BR, 30).⁵¹ Strongly influenced by Gundolf's juxtaposition of Dante's and Shakespeare's ages as organic, and Goethe's epoch as palpably less so,⁵² Bakhtin tries to redress the balance by declaring the age of Goethe to be a time of accomplished harmony in man's vision of the universe. Even if Goethe's world is less organic, it is nevertheless available to the senses of man, who—Bakhtin believes—transcends its chaos and views it as something 'rounded out', as a whole (BR, 43–4).⁵³ Bakhtin's ultimate claim is that anyone who goes through the process of *Bildung* does so only in so far as they learn to see the world around them in all its colours and corporeality. Seeing and being are closely related to each other, and indeed are equated in a way that, Bakhtin implies, would have been impossible before Goethe when the world was uncomfortably imposing, and was definitely not feasible after Goethe—when time became ever more complex and elusive.

Landscape and the Restoration of the Idyllic

Bakhtin, then, understands Goethe's fiction as the living embodiment of the visibility of time in space. Given the negative charge of 'landscape' in Bakhtin's 1970 review of Pinskii's book (cf. n. 53 in this chapter), it is somewhat surprising to find that in 1936–8 the desirable unity of time and space hinges so much on the glorification of *landscape*.

⁵¹ At first glance, one might discover attempts at historicism in Bakhtin's scheme: time and space are progressing from cosmic greatness (the Renaissance) to the state of gradual domestication, of relative plainness and comprehensibility (Goethe's epoch), and from this towards stages of intricacy and elusiveness of meaning. When, however, Bakhtin proceeds to give concrete shape to this pattern, it becomes clear that he has recourse to grand-scale generalizations in the *Zeitgeist* style (BR, 43–4).

⁵² Cf. F. Gundolf, *Shakespeare und der deutsche Geist*, Berlin, 1914, pp. 25–6.

⁵³ To appreciate fully the role assigned to Goethe's age in Bakhtin's overview of European civilization one has to keep in mind his distinctive polarity of vision regarding the Renaissance and the post-Renaissance epochs, which stayed with Bakhtin throughout his life. As late as 1970, Bakhtin celebrates Shakespeare's tragedy as a manifestation of cosmic forces which fade in later drama into a mere 'landscape' (*peizazh*). The 'all-humanness' of Shakespeare's tragedy is reduced in post-Renaissance art to 'civic spirit', its 'greatness' and 'significance' to 'topicality' (M. M. Bakhtin, 'Retsenziia na knigu: L. E. Pinskii, "Dramaturgiia Shekspira. Osnovnye nachala"', *DKH*, 1994, No. 2, p. 70). In this account of Shakespeare's art one can hear an echo of Gundolf's comparison between *Hamlet* and *Werther*: 'Abgesehen von der Verschiedenheit der Ansprüche und Gattung, hatte Shakespeares Heid zum Spielstoff und Anlass die ganze Breite der höchsten Renaissance, und Werther nur das enge Bürgertum vor sich' (F. Gundolf, *Shakespeare und der deutsche Geist*, Berlin, 1914, p. 246).

Bakhtin's interpretation of Goethe makes landscape an emblem for the unity of space, time, and visible human activity. Here, again, Bakhtin is indebted to Gundolf who discusses at length Goethe's 'new feel for landscape (*Landschaftsgefühl*)'.⁵⁴ Gundolf attributes the idea of the unity of time, space, and human activity to Herder. It was Herder's propitious influence that made Goethe realize that nature and history, previously thought of as separate entities, were deeply interconnected.⁵⁵ As Gundolf puts it,

even the past, history with its [. . .] monuments—a testimony to an ever-dying and ever resurrecting human spirit—became nature and contributed to the magic of the landscape. Just as the towers and oriels, markets and lanes, built by man and speaking of the deep past, belonged to the landscape, just as the Rhein is nature and at the same time has and produces history, Goethe's own sense melts nature and history to a moving [. . .] unity.⁵⁶

Bakhtin reads Gundolf's sense of a graspable and tamed nature, of a world become homely, into the notion of landscape. But he goes farther still. His passion for locality and landscape does indeed bring back the mellow contours of the idyllic. Admittedly, this is not the old idyll, devoid of history and resting solely on what is and has always already been familiar. Yet we do perceive the echo of the idyll in Bakhtin's predilection for this domesticated world in which even the smallest details bear the imprints of a human touch. He insists, of course, on drawing a clear distinction between Goethe's artistic space, permeated as it is with time, and the properly idyllic space in, say, Rousseau's prose. In Rousseau, history is expunged from the artistic world, Bakhtin claims (BR, 51–2), whereas Goethe 'cannot and will not see or conceive of any locality, any natural landscape, as an abstract thing, for the sake of its self-sufficient naturalness, as it were'. In Goethe, the landscape must be 'illuminated by human activity and historical events. A

⁵⁴ Gundolf, *Goethe*, p. 243.

⁵⁵ A curious statement of Herder's influence on Goethe can be seen in G. Jacobi's exaggerated claim that Herder served as a prototype for Goethe's Faust (cf. G. Jacobi, *Herder als Faust*, Leipzig, 1911).

⁵⁶ Gundolf, *Goethe*, pp. 91–2. Gundolf's text appears to have been extremely influential among Russian Goethe scholars in the 1930s. Here is B. Ia. Geiman's almost literal repetition of the above passage: 'V tom-to i svoeobrazie pozitsii Gerdera i Gete, chto "prirodnost'" u nikh sovmeshchastsia s istoriei, opredeliaetsia ciu. [. . .] Kharakter "prirody" u Gerdera i Gete meniaetsia v zavisimosti ot istoricheskogo perioda, poetomu-to i nel'zia merit' vsë na odin arshin' (B. Ia. Geiman, 'Problema realizma v rannem tvorchestve Gete', *Zapadnyi sbornik*, Vol. 1, Moscow and Leningrad, 1937, p. 112). Since this book was available to Bakhtin, one wonders whether his debt to Gundolf was not mediated in this particular case through Geiman's article.

piece of the earth's space must be incorporated into the history of humanity' (BR, 38). But the language of Bakhtin's comments on Goethe's prose still carries vestiges of the idyllic and thus undermines the rigid opposition between historically inhabited and idyllic space. The presence of the idyllic in Goethe's artistically constructed space is suggested by a telling diminutive: time has to be revealed 'as necessary and productive under the conditions of a given locality, as a creative humanization of this locality, which transforms a portion of terrestrial space into a place of historical life for people, into a corner (*ugolok*) of the historical world' (BR, 34). The Russian *ugolok* (diminutive of 'corner') preserves a sense of the idyllic overviewability of the world: it reveals Bakhtin's implication that even after being shot through with history, space in Goethe's prose does not expand beyond the graspable.

Lest this argument appears too technical and concerned exclusively with the minutiae of language, let us consider another episode in Bakhtin's interpretation of landscape in Goethe. Referring to Goethe's passage through the town of Einbeck, Bakhtin asks directly: 'What, specifically, did he see?' Bakhtin's answer, undoubtedly, is already an interpretation of what Goethe saw:

He saw a great deal of greenery, many trees, and he saw that they had not been planted at random. And he saw in them a *vestige of a single human will acting in a planned way*. From the age of the trees, which he determined approximately by sight, he saw the time when this will, acting in a planned way, was manifested.

(BR, 32)

What strikes the reader of these sentences is how deprived of expanse and grandeur the objects are that come into Goethe's purview. Bakhtin seems to be taking delight in analysing this everyday uneventfulness, a landscape lacking in extraordinary dimensions and drawing all its suggestive power from the limited compass of provincial routine. Small wonder, then, that his own interpretation of the scene so willingly recognizes its reliance on the small, the everyday, the isolated: 'Regardless of how random the above-cited case of historical vision may be in itself, *how microscopic in scale, and how elementary it is*, it reveals very clearly and precisely the very structure of such a [Goethe's] vision' (BR, 32; my emphasis). Whatever example of Goethe's seeing of time and space Bakhtin can think of, it is invariably placed in the realm of the measurable, the concrete, the palpable.⁵⁷ Thus for Bakhtin, *landscape* is

⁵⁷ The only exception in the essay on the *Bildungsroman* points beyond Goethe's work. Towards the end of the text, Bakhtin briefly discusses the historical novels of Walter Scott

not just the characteristic representation of space, but is perhaps the only one: it stamps on space, and therefore on time too, the features of measure, unity, and comprehensiveness. Shaped as landscape, space no longer appears vast and ungraspable, it rather assumes the status of a territory that is deliberately restricted and ennobled (another idyllic element) by human intent. Thus Bakhtin's sense of history, his feel for modernity, proves reversible: by championing the centrality of seeing in Goethe's *Weltanschauung*, he restores the idyllic under a different guise. Denounced as the chronotope of the small and sealed-off world, the idyll is brought in again by the back door through the glorification of seeing as the elementary human activity exemplified in Goethe's life and work.

It flows from this interpretation of space and time in Goethe that *Bildung* is not about widening the scope of human activity through constantly pushing back the boundaries of man in the universe. Nor does it seem to be at all about human activity understood as production. Unlike Lukács, Bakhtin does not embrace a materialistic interpretation of *Bildung*. Instead, the unity of subject and object, the coincidence of essence and phenomenon in seeing are claimed as the true features of *Bildung*.⁵⁸ The overcoming of alienation becomes a matter of adequate perceptual ascertaining of the organic togetherness of time and space in the variegated forms of landscape, and of past and present in the surrounding artefacts. Successful *Bildung* is no longer a matter of assimilating social norms and conventions, for, as Gundolf has it, 'society was no longer the law, but itself an organism (*Gewächs*); it stood not above nature, but within nature'.⁵⁹ Only the education of the senses to uncover and properly interpret nature and the traces (a word Bakhtin reiterates very often in this essay) of human activity as showing the fusion between nature and history, time and space, past and

only to discover that his depiction of the great historical past does not always guarantee a proper seeing of time. W. Scott also claimed Lukács's attention in his 1937–8 articles on the historical novel which were first published in Russian in *LK* and read by Bakhtin (Bakhtin refers to one of these articles on p. 84 of his manuscript containing the materials towards 'The *Bildungsroman* and its Significance in the History of Realism').

⁵⁸ Cf. Bakhtin's explicit declaration some thirty years after his text on the *Bildungsroman*: 'Setting phenomenon and essence against one another was deeply alien to Goethe's style of thought . . . The most cardinal opposition for epistemology, that of subject and object, is also deeply alien to Goethe . . . The knower, as a microcosm, contains in himself all that he cognizes in nature.' (The quotation comes from the portion of a letter by Bakhtin to I. Kanaev of January 1969 published in S. Averintsev and S. Bocharov's notes to M. M. Bakhtin, *Estetika slovesnogo tvorcestva*, Moscow, 1986, p. 416.)

⁵⁹ Gundolf, *Goethe*, p. 93.

present can undo alienation. In the act of seeing people learn to view their work as part of a concrete whole: seeing the durable forms of various landscapes teaches them that they are part of a larger and yet comfortably observable world; seeing time in space fosters the belief that their activity belongs to an unbroken chain of creativity which stretches back and forth across the centuries.

Thus, by interpreting Goethe, Bakhtin suggests his own ideal of *Bildung*. This ideal contains the familiar elements hallowed by tradition: unity of subject and object, of essence and phenomenon. On the other hand, it is original and bold, if ultimately utopian, in that it rejects the necessity for *Bildung* to be grounded on human practice and productive activity. *Bildung* in Bakhtin's interpretation of Goethe is predicated less on producing the world than on rediscovering and redefining the already existing world in the freshness of seeing. The Hegelian interpretation of *Bildung* as reconciliation is reaffirmed through the reproductive act of seeing. But if we can be masters of the world only by learning to see it properly, then *Bildung* is a highly monological process. We attain our human essence only by way of monologically endowing the objects of the outer world with meaning, by spelling out or reconstructing the outlines of space and time. It is in our power to see into these objects without having to wait to be looked at in response. Under the cover of an alleged unity between subject and object in the act of seeing, Bakhtin's interpretation of *Bildung* culminates—and terminates—in the absorption of the object by a self-assertive subject.⁶⁰

I have tried to show that Lukács and Bakhtin both place Goethe at the centre of their theoretical concerns, and the problem of *Bildung* at the

⁶⁰ As early as 1944, in his 'Additions and changes to *Rabelais*', Bakhtin comes to address the incompatibility of Goethe with the traditions of dialogism and the praise of prose over poetry: 'The one-toneness ["odnotonnost'"] of Goethe's ambivalence (he thought that only in verse can one express contradictory ambivalence, because he did not command the *illogical* prose of laughter) ["ne vladet smekhovoi *alogicheskoi* prozoi"]' (SS, 82). Twenty-five years later, in the letter to Kanaev of 1969, Bakhtin once again implies that Goethe failed to appreciate the potential of prose: 'It is in Romanticism that we can find the origins of Goethe's assertion of the possibility in poetry of such irrational and paradoxical insights as are absolutely impossible in prose' (cf. S. Averintsev and S. Bocharov's notes to M. M. Bakhtin, *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*, Moscow, 1986, p. 416). Bakhtin's awareness of the discrepancy between his ideal of dialogue and Goethe's poetological monologism does not mean that the idea of dialogue and Bakhtin's own monological interpretation of *Bildung* are any less incompatible. It is worth noting that at roughly the same time (the early 1940s), Bakhtin—contrary to the logic of his mainstream argument—deplores one of his other heroes, Maiakovskii, for not being able to 'rise from prosaic two-toneness [. . .] to a new poetic one-toneness' (SS, 53).

core of their interpretations of Goethe's work. Whereas they both depart from the idea of *Bildung* as a product and necessity of modernity, Bakhtin, more than Lukács, arrives at the conclusion that it is an eternal rather than an historically defined process. Lukács's approach is explicitly sociological and predicated on the Marxist belief that the many-sided development of the human is possible only through abolishing the material division of the world in the act of 'dis-alienated' production. Bakhtin, while working from a similarly dialectical framework (the unity of time and space in the chronotope), arrives at a view of *Bildung* as an emphatically emancipatory process which consists in the exercise of a fundamental human faculty (seeing) which rediscovers and validates that which a materialistic view would consider to be the primary and non-negotiable basis of *Bildung*. Thus, proceeding from broadly similar traditions of thought, the two question *Bildung* in dramatically dissimilar and characteristic ways: Lukács presents it as the process of liberation of man from the imposed mechanisms of social alienation and his self-enslavement; Bakhtin recasts it as the full expression of essential human faculties that are more or less independent of social conditions. All differences aside, however, they both were hoping that the process of *Bildung* could bridge the gap between subject and object, individual and society, external mastership and inward slavery and could bring man into blissful equilibrium with the world.

HEGEL AND RABELAIS

This chapter takes a different approach from those preceding it. It sets itself the task of analysing Lukács's reading of Hegel and Bakhtin's perusal of Rabelais as two intersecting interpretative series. The point of convergence will be sought in the impact of Hegel's philosophy on Bakhtin's thought of the 1930s and 1940s. Thus, two scholarly journeys, that of Lukács into the world of the young Hegel, and Bakhtin's into Rabelais's fiction, seemingly separated and unlikely to be correlated, come to life again as bound by a shared intellectual itinerary.

LUKÁCS'S *THE YOUNG HEGEL*

Here I explore an almost entirely neglected aspect of Lukács's work: the intellectual context, the originality, and the weakness of his interpretation of Hegel's *Phenomenology* in *The Young Hegel*. I adopt a comparative approach by placing Lukács's work on Hegel in the broad context of French appropriations of Hegel from the late 1920s to the mid-1940s, concentrating especially on Kojève and, less extensively, on Hyppolite, and by tracing the relevant traditions of German interpretations of Hegel to which Lukács responded.

That Lukács's book has not been given sufficient scholarly attention can be inferred if only from the fact that research on Lukács's life so far has failed to establish incontrovertibly the precise stages through which the work on the text proceeded. We know from Lukács's preface to the second edition ([East] Berlin, 1954) that the book was completed late in the autumn of 1938 (*YH*, xi); and *Record of a Life* gives the second half of the 1930s as the time when the book was being written.¹ Lukács, however, does not mention the fact that the text—as yet unpublished and consequently open, and indeed inviting modifications of various degrees of substantiality—was defended as a doctoral dissertation (*doktor nauk*) at the Institute of Philosophy of the Soviet Academy of Sciences during Lukács's second (1933–45) stay in Moscow. What changes were

¹ G. Lukács, *Record of a Life. An Autobiographical Sketch*, ed. I. Eörsi, trans. R. Livingstone, London, 1983, p. 101.

made on this occasion and when exactly the defence took place remains unknown. László Sziklai claims that the defence took place in December 1942, with Lukács obtaining his doctoral certificate in August 1943, and endorses the latter of these dates with documentary evidence;² in her introduction to the Russian edition of the book (Moscow, 1987), the Hungarian scholar M. Hévesi maintains that Lukács's defence took place only in 1944 and that the first edition of the book (Zurich and Vienna, 1948) followed further work on the text.³

This uncertainty cannot obscure the fact that the pre-history of Lukács's book goes back as far as the early 1930s,⁴ although Lukács's turn from Kant to Hegel occurred, as we have seen in the chapter on the concept of culture, as early as the latter half of the 1910s, and his first text on Hegel was published in 1922. Ever since, Hegel occupied a central position in Lukács's philosophical investigations.⁵ Remarkably, his *oeuvre* on Hegel from the 1930s onwards runs in close parallel to the interpretation of Goethe.⁶ Both Goethe and Hegel enjoy his zealous protection from the assaults of the Nazi German press,⁷ for they both

² L. Sziklai, *Georg Lukács und seine Zeit, 1930–1945*, Budapest, 1986, p. 99.

³ M. Hévesi, 'D'erd' Lukach i ego issledovanie filosofii Gegelia kak teoreticheskogo istochnika marksizma', in D. Lukach, *Molodoi Gegel' i problemy kapitalisticheskogo obshchestva*, Moscow, 1987, p. 3; Hévesi gives no documentary support for her dating of Lukács's defence.

⁴ The best account of the early pre-history of Lukács's book can be found in L. Sziklai, *Georg Lukács und seine Zeit*, pp. 91–3.

⁵ The list of Lukács's most important writings on Hegel, most of them completely neglected by Lukács scholarship, comprises the following published texts: (1) 'Die Jugendgeschichte Hegels', *Die rote Fahne*, Berlin, 3 May 1922, No. 203 (A review of Dilthey's book of the same title republished as Vol. 4 of Dilthey's collected writings [1921]); (2) 'Der deutsche Faschismus und Hegel', *Internationale Literatur*, 1943, No. 8, pp. 60–8; (3) *Der junge Hegel. Über die Beziehung von Dialektik und Ökonomie*, Zurich and Vienna, 1948; (4) 'Les nouveaux problèmes de la recherche hégélienne', *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie*, 1949, Vol. 43, No. 2, pp. 54–80; (5) 'Hegels Ästhetik', *Sinn und Form*, 1953, No. 6, 17–58 (first published in Hungarian in 1952); (6) *The Ontology of Social Being Hegel's False and his Genuine Ontology*, trans. D. Fernbach, London, 1978 (a chapter from Lukács's *Ontologie*). This list does not take into account the numerous reprints of these texts in German and other languages, nor does it account for the many slight variations resulting therefrom. A good example of this practice is Lukács's article 'Die Nazis und Hegel', *Aufbau*, 1946, No. 2, pp. 278–89, which is largely identical in terms of content and phrasing with the 1943 text from *Internationale Literatur* (indeed, the only changes in the 1946 version, along with the altered title, is the use of the past simple tense instead of the present and the omission of a small number of quotations).

⁶ The joint discussion and defence of Goethe and Hegel is characteristic of all of Lukács's texts on Goethe in the 1930s. The single exception, for the obvious reason of extreme brevity, is 'Goethe und die Gegenwart', *Arbeiter-Sender*, 1932, No. 2.

⁷ Interestingly, in 1932 Carl Schmitt, one of the most brilliant German political philosophers and very soon afterwards a proponent of Nazi ideology, wrote with sympathy about Lukács as a thinker, in whose work (the reference is to *HCC*) Hegel's actuality is very much alive (C. Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. G. Schwab, Chicago and London, 1996,

symbolize to him in equal measure the 'supremacy of reason',⁸ the triumph of universal values and of classical rationality. Lukács, together with Karl Korsch, is the single most important thinker of the first half of the century to argue the indissoluble bond between Marxism and Hegel's philosophy or, putting it even more precisely, the impossibility to think Marx without Hegel. The careful student of Lukács's texts cannot avoid the impression that while an uncontested political affiliation was driving him towards a full embrace of Marx, a lasting sense of measure, historical continuity, and the unrestricted sway of reason was propelling him towards an appreciation of Hegel as the philosopher *par excellence*, whose thought, regardless of all delusions and limitations, posits the true scale and depth of Marxism.

The Polemical Field: Lukács, Dilthey, and Jean Wahl

The Nazi distortions of Hegel's philosophy are not the only target of Lukács's criticism. In *The Young Hegel*, where the polemical pathos gives way to a more constructive tone of interpretation, the intermittent, yet nevertheless strong outbursts of discontent are clearly channelled against a philosophy-of-life interpretation of Hegel, with all attendant nuances of Romantic intuitivism, as well as against theological metaphysics and what Lukács abrogates as an existentialist reading of Hegel.

Characteristically, Lukács's polemics against the philosophy-of-life interpretations of Hegel focus on much the same names as his reinterpretation of Goethe. A case in point is the questioning of the authority and the appropriateness of Dilthey's account of Hegel's philosophy. In 1922, Lukács was still willing to see in Dilthey's book on the young Hegel not only Dilthey's 'rejection' of the dialectical method and his failure to grasp it but also—despite this—'a valuable contribution to the history of its genesis'.⁹ In the late 1930s, things were already different. He was less tolerant to Dilthey and ready to assert his own

p. 63). Only a year later, in 1933, Schmitt published a new edition of his book, in which Lukács's name was dropped. This fact was established first by K. Löwith, in H. Fiala (pseud.), 'Politischer Dezisionismus', *Revue Internationale de la Théorie du Droit*, 1935, Vol. 9, No. 2, p. 119; Schmitt thought that the author of the article of 1935 was Lukács (cf. K. Löwith, *My Life in Germany Before and After 1933*, trans. E. King, London, 1994, p. 91).

⁸ G. Lukács, 'Der deutsche Faschismus und Hegel', *Internationale Literatur*, 1943, No. 8, p. 62.

⁹ G. Lukács, 'The History of Hegel's Youth', *Reviews and Articles from Die Rote Fahne*, trans. P. Palmer, London, 1983, p. 55.

viewpoint at the cost of disregarding the complexity of Dilthey's approach.¹⁰ The extent to which Lukács thought of his own book as an act of intellectual and political rivalry can be derived even from the almost complete identity of the titles of the two respective books: Lukács's *Der Junge Hegel* and Dilthey's *Die Jugendgeschichte Hegels*. What is even more, Dilthey discusses basically the same texts as Lukács. Since most of Hegel's texts prior to 1805/6 were works built up through fragments, their qualification as the germs of a clear-cut philosophical and political trend would suggest the imposition of a disturbingly 'strong' interpretation which refuses to take into account their tentative nature. One has to admit that Lukács should be charged with that sin more than Dilthey. In a way, Lukács violates the rules of fair play by seeking to endorse his view of the young Hegel as a proto-Marxist by resorting to *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Unlike him, Dilthey deliberately excludes this work from his interpretative purview: his book pays attention to a genuinely juvenile Hegel, whose thought is still in the process of fermentation rather than in a state approaching systematic completeness.

Besides Dilthey, another major source of dissatisfaction for Lukács is Jean Wahl's important book *Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel* (1929). Relegated to a footnote (*YH*, 525, n. 72), the objection against Wahl underrates the significance of his argument.¹¹ Lukács accuses Wahl of taking sides with Kierkegaard in 'placing the Unhappy Consciousness at the very centre of the *Phenomenology*' (*YH*, 536). It is vital to note the substitution that occurs in Lukács's text. While Wahl speaks of the 'unhappiness of the consciousness' in Hegel's philosophy, Lukács interprets this narrowly as an exclusive concentration on the Unhappy Consciousness as it appears in the *Phenomenology*. He discards the fact that in Wahl's book only a relatively short fragment is directly concerned with the explication of the *Phenomenology*.¹² Wahl attempts a grand-scale reading of Hegel designed to lodge him in the history of European thought after the Enlightenment. He abundantly and

¹⁰ Even the most extensive account of Lukács's debt to and polemics with Dilthey does not mention Lukács's review (1922) of Dilthey's book nor his book *The Young Hegel* (cf. W. Jung, 'Georg Lukács als Schüler Wilhelm Diltheys', *Dilthey-Jahrbuch*, 1988, Vol. 5, pp. 240–57).

¹¹ Jean Wahl, on the other hand, knew parts of *The Young Hegel* thanks to Lukács's permission to familiarize himself with the manuscript of the book (cf. the discussion in G. Lukács, 'Les nouveaux problèmes de la recherche hégélienne', *Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie*, 1949, Vol. 43, No. 2, p. 77). In this discussion Wahl spoke unequivocally in defence of Dilthey (pp. 77–8).

¹² Cf. J. Wahl, *Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel*, Paris, 1929, pp. 158–93. Further quotations are incorporated in the main body of the text, with page references given in brackets.

willingly records his debt to Dilthey, who understands Hegel's early philosophy as a critique of several of the central motifs of the old social and ethical ideal: 'Separation, pain, labour [. . .] are moments of each human condition, for they belong to the very process of life. Herein the frightful seriousness finds an expression with which Hegel opposes the beatific phantasies of the Enlightenment'.¹³ There is nothing ever to be attained without 'pain and labour'. The path of humanity winds through the thorny fields of loss and deprivation, out of which the new self-conscious and reconciled human being is bound to emerge.

In elaborating Dilthey's ideas, Wahl places particular emphasis on the threads of continuity which bind Hegel, the German Romantics, and their contemporaries. A case in point is the interpretation of the connections between Hegel and Hölderlin. Although they appear closely interwoven in Lukács's book as well, he views them as irreversibly, if painfully, estranged from one another. This alienation ought to be measured by the extent to which Hegel abandoned his early enthusiasm for the French Revolution, while Hölderlin remained a loyal and heroic Jacobin (*YH*, 87–8; 202). If Hölderlin strikes his audience as a deeply tragic poet and thinker, certainly more tragic than Hegel, then for Lukács the explanation lies in Hölderlin's lasting and uncompromised belief in the ideals of the revolution, which could not but collapse in the face of subsequent historical developments. Wahl offers an altogether different interpretation. Just as for Dilthey,¹⁴ for Wahl the proximity of Hegel to Hölderlin is deemed stronger than any divergence. Like Hölderlin, the young Hegel accepts the unhappiness of human existence, which manifests itself in the increasing separation between the Spirit and the objective world. Wahl reshapes this unhappiness into a fundamental human condition. In his account, both Hölderlin and Hegel understand unhappiness as a grave existential trepidation. However, Hegel, even more than Hölderlin, believes that the state of despair will be dissolved in a final point of reconciliation. Moreover, like the Romantics and Hölderlin himself, Hegel views this change as a continuous process in which unhappiness is gradually transformed into a hard-borne 'serenity in suffering' (33–4). Drawing on Schlegel's principle of irony (23–4), Wahl, in what remains an exclusively theological and existentialist interpretation of the young Hegel, claims for his philosophy the role of a powerful and wonder-working

¹³ W. Dilthey, 'Die Jugendgeschichte Hegels', *Gesammelte Schriften*, Vol. 4, Leipzig and Berlin, 1921, p. 187.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 40 ff.

converter of unhappiness into beatitude. The tone, though strongly reminiscent of Dilthey's, conveys an essentially optimistic vision: 'the motif of division, sin, torment . . . little by little is transformed into that of reconciliation and beatitude' (29). The odyssey of consciousness in Hegel, Wahl concludes, unites the Romantic idea of an 'infinite anguish' with the Enlightenment project of a 'happy totality': 'Hegel knows that this totality is not to be attained save through struggle and suffering' (29). In Wahl's interpretation, Hegel stands out for a synthesis between primordial human woe and the ultimate salvation of mankind in the activity of the Spirit. This synthesis knits both the Romantic motif of grief and the Enlightenment belief in a final happy resolution. Thus Wahl's analysis proves to be underwritten by the grand and reassuring movement from affliction to beatitude. Under a Kierkegaardian veil of world-historical irony, it asserts the power of dialectical reversal. It is this power, along with the awareness that such transitions depend on the 'low' energies of pain, suffering and initial submission, that became so attractive for an entire generation of Marxist-minded interpreters of Hegel in the 1930s and 1940s. Lukács's case, despite his cursory criticism of and slighting attitude to Wahl's book, is hardly an exception in this respect.

Wahl's sway has been especially noticeable in France, where it provided one of the starting points for the work of Alexandre Kojève and Jean Hyppolite.¹⁵ Kojève/Kozhevnikov, a Russian émigré in Paris, gave a series of commentary classes on Hegel's *Phenomenology* at the Sorbonne from 1933 to 1939, but they only appeared in 1947, when Raymond Queneau edited them for publication. A year earlier Hyppolite's *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* appeared, following the publication of his translation of the *Phenomenology* (1939–41). Lukács claims that his acquaintance with these studies took place in the years between the first (1948) and the second (1954) editions of his own book, and one can produce no particular reason why his statement should not be trusted. We have to be more cautious, however, not to take at face value his judgement of Kojève's and Hyppolite's work. All he has to say about Hyppolite in the preface to the 1954 edition of *The*

¹⁵ For a broad panorama of French interpretations of Hegel in the twentieth century, see Roberto Salvadori, *Hegel in Francia: Filosofia e Politica nella Cultura francese del Novecento*, Bari, 1974; Barry Cooper, *The End of History: An Essay on Modern Hegelianism*, Toronto, 1984, esp. chapter 2; Judith P. Butler, *Subjects of Desire. Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, New York, 1987; Michael S. Roth, *Knowing and History. Appropriations of Hegel in Twentieth-Century France*, Ithaca and London, 1988; M. Kelly, *Hegel in France*, Birmingham: University of Birmingham, 1992, esp. pp. 31–53.

Young Hegel is an offhanded dismissal of his fundamental study (*YH*, xi). As our analysis will demonstrate in the following section, Lukács's abrogating qualification of these studies as a reading of Hegel in an 'existential, irrationalist sense' is less of a misjudgement and more of a carefully pondered tactic to make his own Marxist interpretation of Hegel look unprecedented and unique.

Having outlined the main polemical fields of Lukács's book we can now better appreciate its central ideas in the context of the concurrent left interpretations of Hegel.

The Epistemology of Reversal and the Origins of Dialectics

From the wealth of philosophical arguments advanced in *The Young Hegel* I choose to focus on two central moments: the dialectics of goal and instrument, and that of master and slave. While analysing these crucial aspects of Lukács's interpretation of Hegel I also comment critically on his efforts to trace the sources of Hegel's dialectic back to Hobbes and Mandeville, for it is in these attempts that Lukács's suggestive epistemology of reversal comes to the fore. As we will see later, this specific epistemology is particularly relevant for the understanding of Bakhtin's ideas in *Rabelais*.

Hegel portrays the history of humanity through a range of metaphors suggesting the power of adaptation, of growth through education, and of a final reconciliation with reality. We can find strong support for this view in Hegel's later *Logic*, at the point where the relation between human needs and the instruments for their attainment is discussed. Hegel appeals to a careful 'education' of human desires, and urges the reader to recognize that the goals of labour, as far as it is a process designed to satisfy practical human needs, are finite. 'To that extent', Hegel argues,

the *means* is *higher* than the *finite ends* of *external* usefulness: the *plough* is more honourable than those immediate enjoyments which are procured by it and serve as ends. The *instrument* is preserved while the immediate enjoyments pass away and are forgotten. In his tools man possesses power over external nature, even though, as regards his ends, nature dominates him.¹⁶

What is of special importance to us in Hegel's argument is not merely his pathos of rational discrimination between that which is

¹⁶ G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller, London, 1969, p. 747. Lukács quotes this passage as an excerpt from Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* (*YH*, 348–9).

truly durable and that which is passing, momentary, and confined to an ephemeral and insecure state of delight. The really significant element in Hegel's conclusion is the rhetoric of reversal and the attendant recognition of disguise. The tool, initially considered by common sense to be secondary, subsidiary and, therefore, of only too limited weight, emerges as genuinely indispensable, vital and superior to human needs. The centrality of the means is, however, not immediately given: it is the outcome of a successful removal of the mask concealing the true meaning of the instrument. This cognitive turn, resulting in the exchange of the starting positions occupied by the goal and the means, rests on the insight of philosophical reason. On more than one occasion in his work, Hegel speaks of the 'cunning of reason' which Lukács, suppressing the other meanings of the term, interprets as an emphasis on the fact that human history and practice are the product of deliberate aspirations which nevertheless end up producing something different from what men initially desired (*YH*, 354). The reversal undergone by goals and means in human labour tempts one into extending Lukács's interpretation of 'cunning' to a metaphor which also covers the field of human cognition. The faculty of philosophical reasoning 'outsmarts' common sense and endows man with a type of knowledge that is capable of piercing the surface of the merely visible. However, this exercise is contrived not to undermine but to assist common sense in obtaining a correct notion of what is useful and practical beyond the immediate effect of gratification.

The same 'outwitting' activity of reason could be demonstrated to be at work in Hegel's anticipatory exposure of fetishism, the scattered details of which Lukács so eagerly (re)constructs throughout his book. Yet one could argue that the sense of reversal and surprise, of laying bare the obvious for the purpose of gaining a glance into the core, of 'outmanoeuvring' the immediate expectations of experience is nowhere exhibited in a stronger and more fascinating fashion than in Hegel's analysis of master and slave and of unhappy consciousness in the *Phenomenology*. The attention Lukács gives to this problem is not comparable with the dedicated scrutiny undertaken by Wahl, Kojève, or even Hyppolite who place it at the centre of their discussions of Hegel. The significance assigned to the problem of mastership and slavery in Lukács's *The Young Hegel* is more in line, despite all substantial differences, with Marcuse's analysis in *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity* (1932), where the posing of the master-slave problem is discussed as an important but in no way crucial episode in Hegel's

attempts to reach a full mediation between individual self-consciousnesses.¹⁷ This clearly suggests that my own reading of *The Young Hegel* is motivated by a critical choice: it brings to the fore motifs and tendencies which might otherwise remain dormant and sidelined in the bulk of Lukács's observations.

Lukács traces the origins of the master–slave problem in the *Phenomenology* back to Hobbes. He speaks, however, rather generally about this connection. All Lukács has to say is that Hegel's point of departure is Hobbes's doctrine of the *bellum omnium contra omnes* in the natural condition of man (*YH*, 326).¹⁸ But he does not go any further in the clarification of Hegel's sources. Hegel argues that man becomes a slave as the result of his refusal to fight to the death for his freedom and recognition as a human being. Insisting on the preservation of his own life in the encounter with a stronger rival, man loses his freedom. This argument is indeed strongly reminiscent of Part II, chapter xx in *Leviathan*, where Hobbes discusses the two principal ways of gaining domination over another person. According to Hobbes, domination arises through generation or through conquest.¹⁹ The latter is the situation in which slavery arises: the victor preserves the life of the conquered, but becomes his lord. Hobbes even throws in an entertaining philological

¹⁷ Cf. H. Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*, trans. S. Benhabib, Cambridge, Mass., London, 1987, p. 263. Lukács never mentions Marcuse's book. One of the reasons for this is Marcuse's benevolent attitude and obvious debt to Dilthey's philosophy-of-life interpretation of Hegel: 'The ontological concept of Life is the central one around which the problem of historicity unfolds in Hegel's work' (Marcuse, *Hegels Ontology*, p. 319). Marcuse, however, also makes a strong case for Hegel being a predecessor of and an influence on Dilthey (cf. Marcuse, *Hegel's Ontology*, chapter 26). Lukács's silence is less explicable in the late 1960s when he undertakes his own project of Marxist ontology, a chapter of which deals with Hegel's ontology (see G. Lukács, *The Ontology of Social Being. Hegel's False and his Genuine Ontology*, trans. D. Fernbach, London, 1978).

¹⁸ An indication elsewhere in Lukács's book (*YH*, 417) fosters the conclusion that the idea of a possible connection between Hobbes's *bellum omnium contra omnes* and Hegel's dialectic of master and slave was first revealed to him in a letter by Marx to Engels, in which the former suggests that Hobbes's principle reminds one of Hegel's 'animal kingdom of the spirit' in the *Phenomenology*. Although the name of Leo Strauss does not appear in Lukács's book, it is very likely that the inspiration to trace the origins of Hegel's dialectics to Hobbes also comes from Strauss's book *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* (1936), where Strauss announces his and Kojève's plans 'to undertake a detailed investigation of the connection between Hegel and Hobbes' (Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*, Oxford, 1936, 58 n.). On young Hegel's debt to and transformation of Hobbes, see, above all, L. Siep, 'Der Kampf um Anerkennung. Zu Hegels Auseinandersetzung mit Hobbes in den Jenaer Schriften', *Hegel-Studien*, 1974, Vol. 9, pp. 155–207 (Siep also provides a strong criticism of Strauss's interpretation of the link between Hegel and Hobbes); and A. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. J. Anderson, Cambridge, 1995, pp. 17–18 and 43–5.

¹⁹ T. Hobbes, *Leviathan*, London, 1973, p. 105.

puzzle to endorse his argument: is 'servant' to be derived from *servire* or, perhaps for better reasons, from *servare*, in the sense that the one whose life is preserved inevitably has to sink to serfdom.²⁰ Whatever the solution to this etymological riddle, it cannot obscure Hegel's debt to, but also his surmounting of, Hobbes. If for Hobbes the conditions of lordship and bondage are part of the status quo of society and therefore can be changed only through the application of external force, Hegel views them in a radically different way. For him, master and slave are bound together in an internal dialectic of subtle transitions and reversals.

According to Lukács, the other source of Hegel's dialectical method in the *Phenomenology* is Mandeville, whose 'spontaneous dialectic' depicts the turning of private vices into public benefits (*YH*, 355). The similarity between Mandeville's 'spontaneous dialectic' of vices and benefits and Hegel's dialectic in the *Phenomenology* is, however, too superficial to be able to serve as more than a curious intimation. Lukács refuses to acknowledge the fact that in Mandeville's *Fable of the Bees* there is no question of reversal or change, save 'by the dexterous management of a skilful politician',²¹ who has to render certain vices beneficial for that group of society which is interested in the preservation of the moral status quo. Mandeville's conservative logic of the balance between vices and benefits is perhaps best exemplified by his ideas of how morality should be sustained among women: 'there is a necessity of sacrificing one part of womankind to preserve the other . . . From whence I think I may justly conclude . . . that chastity may be supported by incontinence, and the best of virtues want the assistance of the worst of vices'.²² In Mandeville, vices never alter their moral content, but remain vices throughout. The outward analogies (the behaviour of 'winners' and 'losers' in gambling²³) do not contribute to a better arguing of the opposite case. After all, what is at stake in Mandeville's work is not the transformation of vices into virtues, but only the use of vices to the advantage of certain groups of the public.

Lukács's endeavour to find predecessors of Hegel's dialectic in Hobbes and Mandeville is ultimately frustrated by his own analysis of the dialectic of master and servant in the *Phenomenology*, where he claims for Hegel an unprecedented originality in approach, thus largely

²⁰ Ibid., p. 106.

²¹ B. Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees or Private Vices, Public Benefits*, London, 1934, p. 230.

²² Ibid., p. 85.

²³ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 32 and remark E, pp. 72-4.

refusing to recognize the roots of Hegel's opposition of master and servant in earlier philosophy, more specifically in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*, in Leibniz,²⁴ and in Rousseau.²⁵ Haunted throughout his interpretation of Hegel—as was Hegel himself—by the problem of objectification, Lukács insists that Hegel's innovation rests on the decision to consider the relations between master and servant in their mediation through the 'world of things' (*YH*, 326). The master, Hegel argues, 'relates himself to the thing mediately through the bondsman' (*PhM*, 235),²⁶ and thus manages to attain a pure negation of the thing in the act of enjoyment. The servant, too, as far as he is 'a self-consciousness in the broad sense', strives to 'cancel' things, but his negativity towards them is limited by the fact that he has to work on them.

But as we have seen in the brief discussion of goals and instruments in the *Science of Logic*, such acts of enjoyment are not meant to last. The attainment of ends and the quenching of desire in mastery over nature is shown to be a short-lived and false victory, whereas the real achievement proves to be the tool, which is initially thought of as something humble and dependent. A similar logic underlies the chronologically earlier section on lordship and bondage in the *Phenomenology*. Here, too, one is introduced into a performance marked by an unexpected reversal. The servant gradually emerges as the more important member of the pair; he turns out to embody the truly indispensable path of human consciousness towards emancipation. 'Desire has reserved to itself', Hegel warns, 'the pure negating of the object and thereby unalloyed feeling of self. This satisfaction, however, just for that reason is itself only a state of evanescence, for it lacks objectivity or subsistence' (*PhM*, 238). Labour, on the other hand, is seen by Hegel as 'desire restrained and checked, evanescence delayed and postponed'. Labour has the advantage in that it shapes and fashions the thing. In Hegel's parlance, 'the negative relation to the object passes into the *form* of the object,

²⁴ Cf. Leibniz, 'On Natural Law', *Political Writings*, trans. and ed. P. Riley, Cambridge, 1988, p. 78; on a parallel between Leibniz and Hegel, see H. Holz, *Herr und Knecht bei Leibniz und Hegel*, Neuwied and Berlin, 1968, p. 83 ff.

²⁵ On Aristotle, Rousseau, and the dialectics of lordship and bondage, see J. Shklar, *Freedom and Independence: A Study of the Political Ideas of Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind*, Cambridge, 1976, pp. 59–70.

²⁶ While I think that Miller's more recent translation of the *Phenomenology* is correct in rendering *Geist* as 'Spirit', I consider Baillie's translation on the whole to be stylistically better. For this reason references will be made to the latter (with some infrequent modifications).

into something that is permanent and remains' (*PhM*, 238). It is precisely the servant who is capable of shaping the object, because it is only for him that the object has independence. Thus, in labour, the servant's consciousness experiences a favourable transition from complete dependence to permanence and growing independence:

In the master, the bondsman feels self-existence to be something external, an objective fact; in fear self-existence is present within himself; in fashioning the thing, self-existence comes to be felt explicitly as his own proper being, and he attains the consciousness that he himself exists in its own right and on its own account (*an und für sich*).

(*PhM*, 239)

Lukács draws from this transition a conclusion that refashions Hegel's own. The 'dialectics of work', Lukács claims, urges Hegel to place the consciousness of the servant above that of his master in the dialectics of world history. This comes as the result of the

realization that the highroad of human development, the humanization of man, and the socialization of the natural condition can only be traversed through work, through that attitude to things, in which their autonomy and regulation by laws of their own become manifest, by virtue of which things force man, under the threat of perdition, to cognize them, i.e. to cultivate his organs of cognition; only through work does man become human.

(*YH*, 327*)²⁷

Two moments are of particular importance here. The first one is Lukács's substitution of a 'dialectics of work' for Hegel's dialectics of consciousness. Admittedly, the dialectics of work is a significant moment of the dialectics of consciousness, yet hardly more than a moment. At bottom, Hegel's argument is not about labour as such; it is about the destiny of consciousness to progress through an unavoidable

²⁷ Here I modify the existing English translation of Lukács's German text. The German original reads: '[zu der Erkenntnis], daß der große Weg der Menschheitsentwicklung, das Menschwerden des Menschen, das Gesellschaftlichwerden des Naturzustandes nur über die Arbeit geht, nur über jene Beziehung zu den Dingen, in der deren Selbständigkeit und Eigengesetzlichkeit zum Ausdruck kommt, durch die die Dinge den Menschen bei Strafe seines Untergangs zwingen, sie zu erkennen, d. h. die Organe seiner Erkenntnis auszubilden; nur durch die Arbeit wird der Mensch zum Menschen' (*W*: 8, 408). The English translation renders this as follows: 'realization that the high-road of human development, the humanization of man, the socialization of nature can only be traversed through work. Man becomes human only through work, only through the activity in which the independent laws governing objects become manifest, forcing men to acknowledge them, i.e. to extend the organs of their own knowledge, if they would ward off destruction'.

stage of objectification in labour, from which it has eventually to free itself in the utopian process of incorporation of the substance in the subject. Secondly, we can see Lukács adding a new dimension to Hegel's interpretation of the master-servant relation. While Hegel confines himself to underscoring the general (and abstract) condition of the servant's 'having and being a "mind of his own"' (*PhM*, 239), Lukács goes a long way further, and reads into this emerging independence a desired (and imagined) growth of the human faculty for acquiring knowledge of the world through labour.

We can also see how, in Lukács's interpretation, the episode of the master-slave relations is cleansed of Hegel's suppressed bitterness, which Dilthey and Wahl so perceptively capture. Hegel's explicit insistence that, along with 'formative activity', 'fear' is the other essential presupposition for the growing freedom of human consciousness (*PhM*, 239–40) is totally excised from Lukács's argument. What we get instead is a version of the *Phenomenology* that reads like an optimistic and dignified *Bildungsroman* of the entire human race. Revealingly, in an unceremonious footnote in the chapter on the structure of the *Phenomenology*, Lukács recommends that *Geist* be read by the modern readership everywhere as 'species', pure and simple (*YH*, 470, n. 5). Further in the same chapter, he calls upon the modern reader to think of Hegel's work as concerned with 'the acquisition by the individual of the experience of the species' (*YH*, 470), an interpretation only partially endorsed by Hegel's text. One cannot help the feeling that Lukács engrafts onto the texture of Hegel's *Phenomenology* visions which originate in and attend his own coterminous interpretations of Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and *Faust*. This impression is confirmed by Lukács in his numerous parallels between the three works throughout the book.

As we have seen in the section discussing the polemical field of *The Young Hegel*, in the 1930s Lukács was not alone in his Marxist interpretation of Hegel. The master-slave relation and the role of work in the *Phenomenology* are particularly prominent in Kojève's *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*.²⁸ In Lukács's book the problem of the master-slave relation takes up only a few pages; in Kojève's, it is the indisputable pinnacle of the entire analysis. When we define Kojève's interpretation as Marxist, we should not overlook the fact that it is richly amalgamated

²⁸ For a brief orientation in the current debates on the master-slave relation and Kojève's place in them, see J. O'Neill, 'Introduction: A Dialectical Genealogy of Self, Society, and Culture in and after Hegel', in *Hegel's Dialectic of Desire and Recognition. Texts and Commentary*, ed. J. O'Neill, Albany, NY, 1996, pp. 1–25.

with existentialist ideas.²⁹ The very birth of the master–slave couple is portrayed as the result of free choice, and, in this sense, as an existential act. Although Kojève postulates that both the future master and the future slave are granted equal freedom to create themselves as such,³⁰ this seems to be true only for the future slave: he prefers subjugation to demise. The master to be, on the other hand, has to make an altogether different decision. He must decide whether to kill his rival or to let him live. Since each of the two opponents seeks recognition by the other in the fight (*PhM*, 232–3), the stronger one, if he kills the weaker, will survive the struggle alone, with no one left to recognize him as victor. Therefore, he must spare the life of his adversary and overcome him, in Kojève's account, 'dialectically', that is 'he must leave him life and consciousness, and destroy only his autonomy' (15). If we opt for a post-structuralist reading of Kojève's proposition, we might say that his imagination finds at the start of human history the histrionic scene of a 'struggle to the death' with no bodies left behind.³¹ In order for history to go on, the same scene must be repeated over and over again,

²⁹ For a critique of Kojève's (and Lévinas's) existentialist reading of Hegel from the agenda of intersubjectivist moral philosophy see, above all, A. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, pp. 48–9. Interestingly, just two years before the start of Kojève's lectures on the *Phenomenology* at the Sorbonne, Heidegger gave a lecture course (1930–1) on the *Phenomenology* in Freiburg (cf. M. Heidegger, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. P. Emad and K. Maly, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1988). Heidegger's lectures, however, do not analyse the master–slave relationship.

³⁰ Cf. A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. A. Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols, Jun., New York and London, 1969, p. 43. Further page references to Kojève follow this edition and are given in brackets in the main body of the text.

³¹ A post-structuralist reading of Kojève would not be ungrounded. Kojève radicalizes Hegel's motif of desire for recognition as a desire that desires not an object but the desire of another up to a point where human history becomes 'history of desired Desires' (Kojève, *Introduction*, p. 6). Elsewhere, this statement is expanded in the following way: 'To be anthropogenetic, then, Desire must be directed toward a nonbeing—that is, toward another *Desire*, another greedy emptiness, another *I*. For Desire is absence of *Being*. . .' (Kojève, *Introduction*, p. 40). It is not difficult to recognize in this thought one of the proto-images of Lacan's endless signifying chain. A paler trace can be found in Lacan's 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis': 'man's desire finds its meaning in the desire of the other, not so much because the other holds the key to the object desired, as because the first object of desire is to be recognised by the other' (J. Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. A. Sheridan, London and New York, 1977, p. 58). Lacan, among others, attended Kojève's lectures on Hegel at the Sorbonne: cf. J. Heckman's Introduction to J. Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. S. Cherniak and J. Heckman, Evanston, 1974, p. xxiii; Lacan's unacknowledged debt to Kojève is also brought into relief by Macherey in his article 'The Hegelian Lure: Lacan as Reader of Hegel' (P. Macherey, *In a Materialist Way. Selected Essays*, ed. W. Montag, trans. T. Stolze, London and New York, 1998, pp. 59–60). For a disagreement with Kojève's exegesis of *desire*, see H. G. Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic. Five Hermeneutical Studies*, trans. P. Christopher Smith, New Haven and London, 1976, p. 62, n. 7.

each time to the same effect. At its origin, Kojève insists, man is always either Master or Slave.³² History stops at the moment 'when the difference, the opposition, between Master and Slave disappears' (43). This opposition needs to be kept in check at all times while History lasts: it should not be given completely free rein, or else the relation between the two will dissolve as the upshot of actual death.

Since, however, Hegel's understanding of History envisages a point where it comes to an end and gives way to a self-sufficient Spirit withdrawn in itself, Kojève has every right to predict that the interaction of Master and Slave 'must finally end in the "dialectical overcoming" of both of them' (9). Where Kojève does injustice to Hegel's project is in the claim that this state will be reached solely through the activities of the slave. In maintaining, moreover, that human history as a whole is 'the history of the working Slave' (20), Kojève comes very close to Lukács's veneration of labour and the oppressed. Yet Kojève's analysis bespeaks a larger conceptual scale and freedom of argument: he starts not from the supposedly inherent advantage of work in the formation of man, but from what he perceives to be the 'existential impasse' of mastery (19; 46). After the master has enslaved his adversary, he realizes that 'he has fought and risked his life for a recognition without value for him' (19). He wants to be recognized as master, but he can be recognized as such only by the slave who, for him, is no more than an animal or a thing. Therefore, the master can never be satisfied. Mastery, though, remains a supreme value for him and he remains fixed in it. There is nothing more he can achieve: 'He cannot go beyond himself, change, progress. . . He can be killed; he cannot be transformed, educated' (22). Unlike him, the slave does not desire so strongly to be master (otherwise he would have struggled for this to the death); but he

³² At this point we can clearly see how Kojève's existentialist premises violate the classical Marxist philosophy of history, whose scheme of human history is neatly drawn: there is a proto-stage of indiscernibility between master and slave, exploiter and exploited, followed by a protracted era of class struggles making up the 'pre-history' of humanity; finally, a short hour of eruptive break heralds the advent of an eternal realm of justice and dignity for everyone. In Kojève, however, the long spell of history dominated by master-slave relations and filled up with the theatrical dramatism of compromise and negotiation is not preceded by an initial phase of primitive solidarity. The entire history of the human race seems to fall apart into an era of evolutionary transformations within the prevailing pattern of inequality and a radical moment at which the 'struggle to the death' finally claims a real victim in the person of the (former) master. There is no stage of primordial equality in Kojève's scenario, for his existentialist perspective precludes any point of aboriginal purity: even 'in his nascent state, man is never simply man. He is always, necessarily, and essentially, either Master or Slave' (Kojève, *Introduction*, p. 8).

does not want to be slave either: he had acquiesced in order to preserve his life. Consequently, neither of these two conditions is binding for him. 'He is ready for change; in his very being, he is change, transcendence, transformation, "education"' (22). The future and History hence belong not to the warlike Master, who either dies or preserves himself indefinitely in identity to himself, but to the working Slave (23; 225).

For the understanding of this epistemology of reversal and theatricality, it is of the greatest importance to realize that Kojève's picture of history singles out bourgeois society as a space constituted by the exchange between slaves who do not have masters, and masters who do not possess slaves. In bourgeois society, extended in Hegel/Kojève's notion back to the time of nascent Christianity, 'the opposition of Mastery and Slavery is "overcome"'. Not, however, because the Slaves have become true Masters. The unification is effected in *pseudo-Mastery*, which is—in fact—a *pseudo-Slavery*, a Slavery without Masters' (63). Thus, we can see that the bourgeois world is built upon a principle of pseudo-change which leaves just enough room for the status quo to thrive. Bourgeois society is the ultimate confirmation and example of reversals without upheaval; it is a continuation of the same 'struggle to the death' that leaves no bodies on the stage; it is a theatrical alteration of identities where the master sinks to the position of a slave of his own property, but the slave, while liberated from his slavery, does not rise to mastery.

These almost carnivalesque relations can also be traced in language. The stage in which Spirit alienates itself to create for itself the necessary support of objectivity is marked by dualism and harsh contradictions. Having become alien to itself, Spirit lives a disharmonious life. Even opposites previously thought of as absolute become interchangeable:

What is found out in this sphere [of objective Spirit] is that neither the concrete realities, state-power and wealth, nor their determinate conceptions, good and bad, nor the consciousness of good and bad . . . possess real truth; it is found that all these moments are inverted and transmuted the one into the other, and each is the opposite of itself.

(*PhM*, 541)

Both Lukács and Kojève remain, however, insensitive to the manifestations of this dialectic in language. It is their contemporary Jean Hyppolite who called attention to this aspect of the *Phenomenology*. For Hyppolite, language remains the only way to go beyond the 'natural

alternatives of positing and negating'.³³ In language, Hyppolite writes, we can estrange ourselves without having to die. Language can do the work of sublation by preserving at the same time as it negates. The realm of Objective Spirit and culture is therefore the realm of language: 'The language expressing the condition of disintegration. . . is, however, the perfect language and the true spirit of this entire world of culture' (*PhM*, 540*). Language, being the essence of the self-alienation of Spirit, is not merely the vehicle of the process of 'inversion and perversion of all conceptions and realities' (*PhM*, 543), but the only way to hold together the products of this process. Hegel quotes a long passage from Goethe's translation of Diderot's *Le Neveu de Rameau* to give a clearer idea of what language ought to be in order to perform this function. A 'fantastic mixture of wisdom and folly', it must resemble 'the madness of the musician

"who piled and mixed up together some thirty airs, Italian, French, tragic, comic, of all sorts and kinds; now, with a deep bass, he descended to the depths of hell, then, contracting his throat to a high, piping falsetto, he rent the vault of the skies, raving and soothed, haughtily imperious and mockingly jeering by turns".

(*PhM*, 543)

It is due to this practice of expressing oppositions and bringing together thoughts which for the innocently subjective consciousness of the 'honest soul' (*Ehrlichkeit*) lie so far apart, that the consciousness of laceration cultivates a language 'full of *esprit* and wit (*geistreich*)' (*PhM*, 543). The wit of language is testimony to the merciless perversion of 'everything that is monotonous' (*PhM*, 544), for the self-sameness of the monotonous entity (Subjective Spirit) is 'merely an abstraction', which conceals the work of tension and contradiction within it and has, therefore, to be exposed and overcome in the non-identical objectifications of Spirit.

We thus arrive at a picture of the evolution of Spirit largely anticipated by Lukács and Kojève in their analysis of the reversible inequality of Master and Slave, and more distinctly drawn by Hyppolite in his analysis of language. The exit of Spirit from the condition of unchallenged yet limited subjectivity, and its setting out on the road of self-education (*Bildung*) is a process, if you will, of incarnation of Spirit in a

³³ J. Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure*, p. 402. In stressing the importance of language, Hyppolite seems to be following Alexandre Koyré's identification of language and Spirit: 'The history of language and the life of language is at the same time the history of the Spirit' (A. Koyré, 'Hegel à Iéna', *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, 1934, Vol. 118, p. 282).

carnavalesque world which is inarticulable other than through a similarly joyful and Protean language capable of expressing at once the entire range of contradictions inherent in this world. The truth about this world can be reached only in the interplay of moments that are as much positive and necessary as negative and transitory. Characteristically, then, the attainment of truth is likened by Hegel to a 'bacchanalian revel, where not a member is sober; and because every member no sooner becomes detached than it *eo ipso* collapses straightaway, the revel is just as much a state of transparent unbroken calm' (*PhM*, 105). We will find similar, and even stronger, imagery in Hegel's analysis of the immediate actuality of self-consciousness as reason. The metaphors of drama and performance are outweighed here by a vocabulary that patently describes the human body and its activities:

The 'depth' which mind brings out from within, but carries no further than to make a presentation (*Vorstellung*), and let it remain at this level—and the 'ignorance' on the part of this consciousness as to what it really says, are the same kind of connection of high and low which, in the case of the living being, nature naïvely expresses when it combines the organ of its highest fulfilment, the organ of generation, with the organ of urination.

(*PhM*, 372)

Let us attempt a brief conclusion after this extensive analysis of Lukács's *Young Hegel* in the context of the 1930s and 1940s left interpretations of Hegel. We have seen behind the relation between master and slave and the objectification of Spirit through alienation in language the presence of an epistemology of reversals and turns, but also a theatrical staging of the contradictions governing these relations. Thus we arrive at a notion of—to paraphrase Nietzsche—a 'gay dialectic' which examines the oppositions in their interchangeability and containment. As we have seen, this dialectic is inconceivable without a language of wisdom and folly, of bacchanalian revelry and bodily earthiness. Language is not merely a field for the application of the dialectic; it is the very mode of objectified existence of Spirit, a form of its incarnation, replete with inner contradictions and reproducing them. The being of Spirit in the era of its objectification (culture) is essentially and imperatively linguistic; it is in language that the opposites meet to produce the theatrical blend of sublime and abject, of tragic and comic.³⁴ The entire history of Spirit, or—speaking in secular

³⁴ For a suggestion that Hegel's *verkehrte Welt* in the *Phenomenology*, interpreted as both 'inverted and perverted world', could be closely linked with the genre of satire (as a potential manifestation of the comic), see H. G. Gadamer, *Hegel's Dialectic*, p. 48.

terms—the whole history of humankind, proves to be dependent on this necessary stage of self-estrangement, flamboyant and painful at once, and on the provocative inversion of thoughts and realities.

BAKHTIN'S *RABELAIS*

In the light of this analysis of Lukács's *Young Hegel*, Bakhtin's *Rabelais* could probably be read as a grand footnote to the *Phenomenology*. While this is certainly an option, one should realize that it is hardly the best, for it would not do justice to Bakhtin's ability to synthesize more than one intellectual tradition in an ambitious and original, if rather controversial mode. *Rabelais* is the most representative of Bakhtin's texts precisely to the extent to which it stands at the cross-roads of a number of intellectual traditions and partakes of a number of philosophical fields: the Hegelian, the neo-Kantian, that of vitalism and *Lebensphilosophie*, and that of Russian religious and social thought.

Approaches to Rabelais and its Sources

Contrary to all expectations, however, in recent years Bakhtin's *Rabelais* has been the focal point of a growing number of interpretations claiming to exhaust its meaning in a variety of simple catchwords. These choices have been invariably informed by the belief that Bakhtin's book can be interpreted against a single dominant tradition of thought and without giving sufficient consideration to the ties that hold together *Rabelais* with the rest of Bakhtin's *oeuvre*. Carnival has been read in startlingly divergent ways,³⁵ yet in an unfailingly monolithic fashion. Very often it has been seen as an emblem of the people's revolt against—or, more widely, as a response to—the oppression emanating from official power. This view has assumed two extremely popular variations: according to the first, carnival is the playful face of revolution, a celebration of disobedience and freedom in which the seeds of social upheaval are sown. This is a leftist, if not always a Marxist, reading of carnival founded on the specious argument that nothing

³⁵ For an analytical account of some recent debates on *Rabelais* see C. Emerson, *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin*, Princeton, 1997, chapter four; D. Shepherd, "'Communicating With Other Worlds': Contrasting Views of Carnival in Recent Russian and Western Work on Bakhtin", *Le Bulletin Bakhtine / The Bakhtin Newsletter*, 1996, No. 5, pp. 143–60; and A. Wall, 'On the Look-Out for Bakhtin in German', *ibid.*, pp. 117–41, which gives a good critical overview of the debates on *Rabelais* in Germany.

separates Bakhtin's Hegelian underpinnings of the 1930s from Marxism. The second version of this view regards carnival as the complex—both subversive and consolidating—expression of a traumatic life-experience under Stalin's totalitarian regime. The other pole of the spectrum is occupied by the idea of carnival as the embodiment of sinister energies which threaten to destroy the world of liberal values. On this account, carnival is the site of renewed oppression, of dark forces that break up the order of civilization and democracy. Needless to say, each of these views bespeaks an unprecedented degree of implication of Bakhtin's thought in the discussion of current political issues. A third notion of carnival places Bakhtin's book in the native tradition of Russian religious and moral philosophy and thinks of *Rabelais* as one of the late attempts by a number of Russian thinkers in the 1930s to revive religious values.

The untenability of a simplified reading of *Rabelais* would be best endorsed by a more detailed picture of its variegated sources. Such a picture has been largely absent in Bakhtin studies over the last decades, no matter how much archival material on the textual evolution of *Rabelais* was excavated.

Three important groups of texts known to Bakhtin can be singled out as sources for *Rabelais*. To start with, there is a body of preceding or coterminous scholarship and criticism in Russia and Germany that needs to be taken into account: Viacheslav Ivanov's writings on *demoticheskoe iskusstvo*, the work of Ol'ga Freidenberg on parody in her book *Poetics of Plot and Genre*, the research of the farcical/comic aspects of Dostoevsky's prose by L. Pumpianskii,³⁶ Lunacharskii's article on

³⁶ As early as 1919, in his 'A Short Paper at the Dispute on Dostoevsky', Pumpianskii speaks about the transition of (failed) tragedy into comedy and farce and the unfolding of all tragic plots in a comic environment in Dostoevsky's art (L. Pumpianskii, 'Nevel'skie doklady 1919 goda', ed. N. Nikolaev, *Literaturnoe obozrenie*, 1997, No. 2, p. 5); this view is expanded and radicalized in 'Dostoevsky and Antiquity' (a paper given in 1921 and published as a book in 1922) where Pumpianskii accuses Viacheslav Ivanov of completely missing 'pure comedy' as the other 'limit' (besides tragedy) of Dostoevsky's prose, in which tragedy and comedy reach an ultimate fusion (L. Pumpianskii, 'Dostoevskii i antichnost', *DKH*, 1994, No. 1, pp. 88–103 (97–8)); it is also important to keep in mind the fact that Pumpianskii chose as an epigraph to his never completed book on Gogol' V. Hugo's words of praise for the comic genius of Rabelais (cf. L. Pumpianskii, 'Gogol', *Uchenye Zapiski Tartuskogo Gosudarstvennogo Universiteta*, 1984, Vol. 664, p. 125). A possible but unverified source is Ivan Lapshin's article of 1932 'The Comic in Dostoevsky's Works' where, from a perspective opposite to that of Pumpianskii, Dostoevsky's ability to 'discern a tragic in the comic' is appreciated (I. Lapshin, 'Komicheskoe v proizvedeniiakh Dostoevskogo', in *O Dostoevskom*, ed. A. L. Bem, Prague, 1933, Vol. 2, pp. 32, 43). Lapshin taught Bakhtin in Petersburg (BD, 57). Boris Zubakin, who was close to Voloshinov and, to a lesser degree, to Bakhtin during their Nevel period, was, too, reading and lecturing on laughter (and Bergson) in September 1920 in Minsk, shortly after

laughter,³⁷ Lukács's and Berkovskii's writings on realism,³⁸ and the publications of Voßler and Spitzer on stylistics and on the history of the French language and culture, including Rabelais.³⁹ Particularly important are, in my view, Voßler's observations on Rabelais's heteroglossia and 'laughing joy in language' (*lachende Sprachfreudigkeit*) as well as his definition of Rabelais's style as a veritable 'carnival of words' (*lexikalischer Karneval*).⁴⁰ Secondly, there is a group of sources that can be termed philosophical. Here, apart from Hegel, belong Nietzsche's *The*

leaving Nevel; Sergei Eisenstein was among those attending (cf. A. Nemirovskii and V. Ukolova, *Svet zvezd ili poslednii russkii rozenkreitsler*, Moscow, 1994, p. 59).

³⁷ A. Lunacharskii, 'On Laughter', *Literaturnyi kritik*, 1935, No. 4, pp. 3–9. From the editorial note accompanying the publication of the text it is evident that it was delivered as a speech as early as January 1931. In late 1930 Lunacharskii founded and headed a 'Commission for the study of the satirical genres', associated with the Academy of Sciences. Many of the authors Bakhtin read for the preparation of his dissertation were read and commented upon before him by Lunacharskii: Lipps, Freud, Schneegans, Bergson and others. In his speech, Lunacharskii makes a special reference to Bergson and Spencer. Bakhtin made excerpts from the article which can be found in his archive; he did not mention it among his sources, although Lunacharskii gave special attention to carnival (p. 7) and spoke of laughter as permeating the whole of human history.

³⁸ The first chapter of the 1940 version of *Rabelais* contains a positive reference to Lukács's book of 1939 *K istorii realizma* (M. M. Bakhtin, *Fransua Rable v istorii realizma*, Archive of IMLI (RAN), section 427, list 1, No. 19, p. 42) and a long polemic with Berkovskii's views of realism. Bakhtin's target is mainly Berkovskii's article 'Realizm burzhuznogo obshchestva i voprosy istorii literatury' (*Zapadnyi sbornik*, Vol. 1, Moscow and Leningrad, 1937, pp. 53–86), excerpts of which he made in 1938. Bakhtin is unhappy about Berkovskii's locating the origins of grotesque realism in early bourgeois society, thus neglecting the entire tradition of antiquity. On the other hand, although all references to Berkovskii are dropped in the 1965 version, Bakhtin remains in his orbit of thought as far as the democratic and folklore-oriented character of Renaissance art is concerned. The pathos of Bakhtin's analysis can be found in a nutshell in Berkovskii's statement: 'The most consistent manifestations of "bourgeois realism" in the Renaissance period have a plebeian colouration and intersect with the folklore and the people's traditions in literature' (Berkovskii, 'Realizm', p. 56).

³⁹ See, above all, K. Voßler, *Frankreichs Kultur im Spiegel seiner Sprachentwicklung*, Heidelberg, 1913, esp. pp. 260–4 (this edition of Voßler's book is referred to as early as 1929 by Voloshinov [*MPL*, 51, n. 15]) and L. Spitzer's 'Die Wortbildung als stilistisches Mittel, exemplifiziert an Rabelais' (*Beihfte zur Zeitschrift für romantische Philologie*, 29 Heft, Halle, 1910). Spitzer's study, which discusses the possible distinction between parody, grotesque, and travesty (Spitzer, 'Die Wortbildung', pp. 27–30), can be seen in Bakhtin's bibliography to the 1940 version of *Rabelais* under No. 166 ('Spisok literatury tsitiruemoi ili upominaemoi v ssylkakh ili alliuziakh v dissertatsionnoi rabote Bakhtina "Rable v istorii realizma"', Archive of IMLI (RAN), section 427, list 1, No. 19a, p. 9; the reference was removed in the 1965 version). Spitzer's work is also quoted by Voßler in his above-mentioned book (p. 260).

⁴⁰ Bakhtin's debt to Voßler seems so great that I shall allow myself a longer quotation in German to illustrate the scale of his impact: 'Er [Rabelais] . . . begnügt sich nicht mit den französischen [Wörtern], greift nach den Wörtern der Mundarten, greift zum Latein, zum Griechischen, zum Hebräischen, zum Arabischen, zum Deutschen, Englischen. . . Sein Werk ist ein lexikalischer Karneval, wo einheimische und fremde Gäste in phantastischen Verannummungen fröhliche Sprünge machen' (Voßler, *Frankreichs Kultur*, p. 260).

Birth of Tragedy, Simmel's work on the philosophy of culture, Rozanov's writings on the significance of corporeality,⁴¹ Bergson's books *Matter and Memory* and *Laughter*,⁴² Th. Lipps's writings on laughter, and Cassirer's *Philosophy of the Symbolic Forms* as well as his works on the Renaissance understanding of man.⁴³ Finally, there is a group of sources that seems to be still scandalously under-researched: this is Russian and Western literature, notably the German Romantics (especially E. T. A. Hoffmann), Gogol',⁴⁴ Mandelstam,⁴⁵ Vaginov, Gumilev,⁴⁶ and Maïakovskii, whose poetry Bakhtin interpreted in the light of carnival (SS, 50–62).⁴⁷ Herein falls also Russian popular theatre and the research on it by Bogatirev and others. We always tend to think that Bakhtin's *Rabelais* provides insights into art, but at the same time we forget that the book was written in response to incentives and challenges originating in contemporary literature and art.

Unfortunately, even when studied, these sources have been taken, more often than not, in isolation from one another. None of them was, however, available to Bakhtin in a pure condition; in his book they all function in an already modified and interpenetrative fashion. Bringing

⁴¹ On Bakhtin's *Rabelais* and Rozanov, see N. Tamarchenko, 'M. Bakhtin i V. Rozanov', in *Bakhtinologia*, ed. K. Isupov, St Petersburg, 1995, pp. 171–8.

⁴² For Bergson's impact, see L. Rudova, 'Bergsonism in Russia: The Case of Bakhtin', *Neophilologus*, 1996, Vol. 80, pp. 175–88; laughter and *Rabelais* are mentioned only once in this article (p. 186).

⁴³ On *Rabelais* and Cassirer, see B. Poole, 'Bakhtin and Cassirer: The Philosophical Origins of Bakhtin's Carnival Messianism', *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 1998, No. 3–4, pp. 537–78.

⁴⁴ Chapter 7 of the 1940 version of *Rabelais* establishes in its final pages a close parallel between Rabelais and Gogol' (IMLI [RAN], fond 427, opis' 1, No. 19a, pp. 659–64); cf. also 'Rable i Gogol' (*Voprosy literatury i estetiki*, 484–95).

⁴⁵ The fact that Bakhtin never met Mandelstam (BD, 213) says very little about the real importance of Mandelstam's poetry and essays for Bakhtin's thought. Mandelstam is one of the indisputable and closest contexts (and very likely a source) of Bakhtin's interest in the cultural value of the body. I have discussed this in another text; on Mandelstam and Bakhtin see, among others, S. Monas, 'Mandel'stam, Bachtin e la parola come psyche', in *Bakhtin: teorico del dialogo*, ed. F. Corona, Milano, 1986, 246–53; R. Deltcheva and E. Vlasov, "'The Goethe Syndrome': Villon and Rabelais as Ideological Figures in Mandelstam and Bakhtin', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*, 1994, Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 577–96.

⁴⁶ Bakhtin himself valued very much Vaginov's prose, especially *The Goat's Song*, whose central character Teptelkin he thought an example of a tragicomic person (BD, 194–7); Bakhtin referred to Gumilev's relevance for his own ideas of memory and the body (BD, 267). On the interconnection between Vaginov's prose and Bakhtin's *Rabelais* see, most recently, T. Anemone, 'Carnival in Theory and Practice', in *The Contexts of Bakhtin*, ed. D. Shepherd, Amsterdam, 1998, pp. 57–69.

⁴⁷ Bakhtin's extensive fragments on Maïakovskii are not unequivocally dated yet. In their first publication V. Kozhinov proposes the years 1939–40 (V. Kozhinov, 'Bakhtin o Maïakovskom', *DKH*, 1995, No. 2, p. 103) whereas N. Pan'kov in his commentaries to the publication in Bakhtin's Collected Works gives the early 1940s as a more likely date (SS, 438).

them into relief as well as pointing out their intersections involves the unavoidable labour of analytical abstraction.

Here I shall confine myself to demonstrating Bakhtin's move in the 1930s and 1940s to a Hegelianism which inherits the topics of his neo-Kantian writings but gives them a very different interpretation. I will subject *Rabelais* to a close reading revealing both the points in which Bakhtin remains indebted to Hegel and those in which he departs from him or attempts a synthesis between Hegelianism and other lines of thought, notably those of *Lebensphilosophie* and phenomenology. I shall also seek to offer an interpretation of the theoretical status of carnival and the novel in Bakhtin's writings of the 1930s and to compare *Rabelais* and Bakhtin's text on Goethe as divergent responses to modernity.

Bakhtin and Hegel: Initial Premises

Bakhtin's debt to Hegel has not been appreciated in full measure, and certainly less so than his neo-Kantian background.⁴⁸ Two main reasons could account for this. The first is Bakhtin's own well-known criticism of dialectics in the 1970s. In one of these late fragments (*SG*, 147) he considers dialectic no more than an impoverished dialogue from which personal voices and intonations are removed. In another short section he speaks of the monologism of Hegel's *Phenomenology* (*SG*, 162). We have to stress, however, that these accusations come from the late Bakhtin of the 1970s; the author of 'Discourse in the Novel' and *Rabelais* thinks differently in the latter half of the 1930s. As we saw in Chapter 6, in 'Discourse in the Novel' Bakhtin closes the gap between literary imagination and social analysis and implies that heteroglossia

⁴⁸ On Bakhtin and Hegel see, above all, P. Zima, 'Ambivalenz und Dialektik: Von Benjamin zu Bakhtin—oder: Hegels kritische Erben', in *Romantik. Literatur und Philosophie*, ed. V. Bohn, Frankfurt am Main, 1987, pp. 232–56. Zima suggests that while carnival in the second Dostoevsky book (1963) has to be understood as a continual 'carnavalesque tradition' in literature, in *Rabelais* carnival needs to be explained in connection with the mechanisms of the commercial market culture of bourgeois society resting on the power of exchange value to force things into universal comparability (p. 234); he admits, however, that Bakhtin himself never produced this connection (p. 251). See also P. Zima, 'Bakhtin's Young Hegelian aesthetics', *Critical Studies*, 1989, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 77–94. This article may be perceived to place too strong an emphasis on Bakhtin's critique of Hegel while neglecting the complexity of the historical context which stimulated Bakhtin's pragmatic use of Hegel's mode of thinking. A letter to Bakhtin by M. Iudina (1954) clearly suggests the continual importance of Hegel and his *Phenomenology* for members of the Bakhtin Circle: 'and you will resemble Hegel writing the *Phenomenology* as on the photograph that Pampa [Pumpianskii-G. T.] once presented to me' (M. Iudina, *Luch'i Bozhestvennoi Liubvi. Literaturnoe nasledie*, Moscow and St Petersburg, 1999, p. 370).

is the manifestation of the object's internal contradictoriness. Dialogue, one will recall, is explicitly paralleled by dialectic (DN, 278).

It is only much later that Bakhtin would disavow this intimate connection between dialogue and dialectics. It is worth noting that even when he comes to criticize Hegel's dialectics as monologic, Bakhtin's way of describing the adventures of dialectics and dialogue is rather Hegelian: 'Dialectics was born of dialogue so as to return again to dialogue on a higher level (a dialogue of *personalities*)' (SG, 162). Thus, ironically, even in the 1970s Hegel is challenged by Bakhtin with Hegelian arguments.

The second obstacle in the way of those who wish to do justice to the scope and depth of Bakhtin's Hegelianism of the 1930s is the prevailing (and well grounded) opinion placing him in the firm grip of neo-Kantianism. The work that has been done on Bakhtin's neo-Kantianism in the last five years (cf. Chapter 6) has contributed significantly to our knowledge of Bakhtin's intellectual background. What has remained insufficiently observed so far is the fact that neo-Kantianism was hardly a homogeneous school of thought and that its internal evolution brought it ever closer to Hegel. Four convincing examples of this evolution, as we have seen in Chapter 1, are Windelband, Hartmann, Natorp, and Cassirer, the latter two being of special importance for Matvei Kagan and Mikhail Bakhtin. Neo-Kantianism was indeed 'infected' with and moving towards Hegelianism. Many thinkers joined this evolution after the aura of neo-Kantianism darkened in the 1920s. Some of them (Lukács) were split between neo-Kantianism and Hegel as early as the latter half of the 1910s; others, including Bakhtin, embraced Hegelianism only in the 1930s and, while remaining attached to the problems they had been discussing in their neo-Kantian phase, began to discuss them from a different point of view.

Bakhtin's change of philosophical interests found propitious ground in Russia, where in the 1930s one can observe a process of intense appropriation of Hegel's work.⁴⁹ This process was triggered by the publication in 1929 of Lenin's 'Philosophical Notebooks', where Lenin

⁴⁹ Hegel's presence in Russia before the 1930s is richly documented in D. Tschizewskij, 'Hegel in Rußland', *Hegel bei den Slaven*, ed. D. Tschizewskij, Reichenberg, 1934, pp. 145-396 (Tschizewskij explicitly mentions here Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* as one of the most important works of early Soviet Marxism, cf. 'Hegel in Rußland', p. 378, n. 27); D. Tschizewskij, *Gegel' v Rossii*, Paris, 1939; Guy Palnty-Bonjour, *Hegel et la pensée philosophique en Russie 1830-1917*, The Hague, 1974; *Gegel' i filosofii v Rossii, 30-e gody XIX v.-20-e gody XX v.*, Moscow, 1974; for an account that covers the 1920s-1930s (especially Riazanov's and Deborin's role), see O. Sumin, *Gegel' kak sud'ba Rossii*, Sofia, 1997.

recommends the reading of Hegel as a paramount task for every Marxist. In the same year the Marx–Engels Institute initiated the extremely ambitious and speedy publication of a fifteen-volume edition of Hegel's works, which, as an archival entry of 1930 reveals, was to be completed by 1932.⁵⁰ Although the edition was completed only well after the second World War, by 1940 the Russian readership had at its disposal an imposing body of Hegel's texts comprising thirteen volumes.

The meaning of this acute interest in Hegel's work under a totalitarian ideological regime can be seen to have been twofold: on the one hand, the Hegel boom was designed and controlled to endow the ruling Marxist–Leninist ideology with the grandeur of a long-reaching intellectual tradition. On the other hand, however, the preoccupation with Hegel allowed many intellectuals to find a *modus vivendi* with Marxism: without accepting it entirely, they were able to live with its domination. For them, the study of Hegel was an emblem of a departure from the parochial postulates of Stalinized Marxism. Hegel was, above all, a serious philosopher, which meant that paying attention to him was a gesture of reconciliation with the inescapable centrality of Marxism in the ideological atmosphere of the 1930s without burdening one's conscience with too many and too heavy a compromise. That dealing with Hegel in Russia could have meant an almost dissident distancing from official Marxism emerges from the experience of people like Mikhail Lifshits, or, in a much more radical way, from the fate of David Riazanov, the person who was in charge of the first edition of the Complete Works of Marx and Engels (MEGA) and who, together with Deborin, initiated the Hegel edition, but later perished in the purges as 'betrayed' of the purity of Marxism.⁵¹

Against this general background of enhanced interest in Hegel's philosophy, one should not be surprised to find in Bakhtin's manuscripts and in his published work scattered references to Hegel, mainly to his *Aesthetics* and to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Some of them (but by no means all) resulted from Bakhtin's acquaintance with Lukács's articles of the 1930s where Hegel, and especially the *Phenomenology*, are constantly present. Another source of mediation can be recognized in Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, which contains strong and well-documented echoes of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. Given all this, perhaps

⁵⁰ Archive of the Former Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Moscow, fond 374, opis' 1, delo 5, p. 98.

⁵¹ On Riazanov's life and work see I. Rokitianskii, *Krasnyi dissident*, Moscow, 1996; David Borisovich Riazanov und die erste MEGA, ed. C.-E. Vollgraf et al., Hamburg, 1997.

the decision to look for an explanation of Bakhtin's Hegelianism precisely in the *Phenomenology* should not appear arbitrary.

Bakhtin's Hegel: Body, Laughter, and Spirit in Rabelais

The premises on which Bakhtin's book rests do indeed echo those of the *Phenomenology*. First of all, *Rabelais* is grounded in the cancellation of the difference between master and servant in carnival. Secondly, it foregrounds the unity of praise and abrogation, of vitality and death in the *language* of carnival. Thirdly, like Hegel, Bakhtin deals with a unified notion of 'the people' which, he explicitly states, precludes class division at any point in human history. The hero of Bakhtin's book is the ever-growing and re-juvenating people, a secular equivalent to Spirit. The material expression of this people/Spirit is what Bakhtin calls 'the body of the species' (*rodovoe telo*).

All this is only one aspect of Bakhtin's appropriation of Hegel; it reveals his loyalty to the author of the *Phenomenology*. However, as we shall demonstrate later on, there is in Bakhtin's book another trend which interprets laughter, carnival, and the body in a philosophy-of-life manner. This direction appears to be reconcilable with the Hegelian line as long as Bakhtin does not undertake to write a history of laughter and the body. Once he attempts such a history, the contradictions become evident and his Hegelianism undergoes a serious metamorphosis towards a phenomenological reductionism that is quite remote from Hegel. Thus the sections to follow will reveal two trends in Bakhtin's thought: the first celebrates laughter and the body as symbolic forms representing various embodiments of Spirit; the second extols the body as an independent power that opposes Spirit and, characteristically, defies historicization.

(a) *Body and Laughter as Embodied Forms of Spirit*

To be sure, the body had long been among Bakhtin's main theoretical preoccupations. The chapter on the spatial form of the hero from 'Author and Hero' is centred around the problem of the limits of the body. Here Bakhtin grasps it as an individual entity which has to be delineated in space. He is concerned to reveal its cultural significance, i.e. to pose the question of 'the body as value' (AH, 47*). But this question can be traced—Bakhtin maintains—only on the plane of ethics, aesthetics, or religion, for biology, psycho-physiology, and the philosophy

of nature deal with a form of the body which cannot generate symbolic forms and significance. Hence the insistent phenomenological distinction between 'external' and 'internal' body.³² One has to concede, however, that 'Author and Hero' already contains the germ of *Rabelais*. Characteristically, when analysing the attitude of Christianity to the human body, Bakhtin notes: 'ethical self-experience in relation to the body was almost absent'. This absence is seen to resolve itself in 'the unity of the people as an organism' (AH, 55-6). Clearly, what in *Rabelais* is to become a merit, in 'Author and Hero' is a cause for regret: here Bakhtin laments the fading connection between the ethical and the bodily; the resulting unity of the people's organism is disturbing, unenlightened, blind.

What is more, Bakhtin contends that the rehabilitation of the body in the Renaissance has a 'mixed and confused character' (AH, 57). The body—so Bakhtin tells us—desired but failed to find a 'prestigious author', in whose name it could be represented. For that reason, it remained 'solitary' (AH, 57) during the whole Renaissance period. Now compare this to the statement in *Rabelais*: 'This communal (*vsenarodnoe*), growing and ever-victorious body feels *at home* in the cosmos' (R, 341).³³ Paradoxically, this body has finally found in *Rabelais* its true author, but it no longer seems to need him, for it is a body that exists unassisted, being not simply 'flesh of the flesh and blood of the blood of the cosmic elements', but—moreover—'the last and the best word of the cosmos' (R, 341).

Thus Bakhtin's notion of the body can be said to have experienced two vital alterations on the road from 'Author and Hero' to *Rabelais*. In 'Author and Hero' the body is an individual possession: my body or the other's body; it is dismembered into an inner and an outer body, and these are implied to be of different cultural value. The appealing totality of the outer body, Bakhtin submits, is attainable only through the gracious acts of the Other who bestows the sense of totality as a gift upon the inarticulate mass of the inner body. In *Rabelais*, Bakhtin posits as the main object of his reflections the collective body of the people which never comes to know the split into interior and exterior. In his early work, the body is one of those phenomena that stir

³² Bakhtin's division of the body into external and internal originates in Max Scheler's philosophy. Scheler speaks of the 'animate' body (*Leib*) and the 'physical' body (*Körper*); see his *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie*, Bonn, 1931, p. 260.

³³ The existing English translation does not preserve Bakhtin's italics and renders the Russian '*vsenarodnoe*' as 'people's'.

attention towards the problem of boundaries; *Rabelais* celebrates the boundless body, that which lives, in Bakhtin's own words, in the non-classical canon of free transition and transgression. Thus, while bound together by the centrality of the cultural value of the body, 'Author and Hero' and *Rabelais* stand for two strongly divergent positions: the earlier one searching for the limits of privacy and identity in the exchange with others; the later one cherishing the abolition of these limits, the removal of every boundary separating one human body from another.

These crucial changes, for which Bakhtin's immersion in Hegel's philosophy in the 1930s is one of the main factors, could be better appreciated if we recall one more text written in the milieu of the Bakhtin circle. In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* Voloshinov poses the question of the capacity of the body to serve as a social sign. He answers this question, however, in the negative. The body cannot be the source of social symbolization, for it 'equals itself, so to speak; it does not signify anything but wholly coincides with its particular, given nature' (*MPL*, 9). Such being the case, the body cannot be utilized as a sign and therefore cannot partake of ideology. In *Rabelais*, on the contrary, Bakhtin affirms the power of the body as an expressly social phenomenon. The body is an autonomous entity, but it does not coincide with itself because its mode of being has already grown essentially different. The non-classical canon encourages an ever-changing body, one that has no primordial image to fit, and no state of perfection to reach. No longer a singular organism possessed of a 'particular' (*edini-chnaia*) nature, Bakhtin's body in *Rabelais* is poised between the materialization (objectification) in self-sufficient acts of abundantly physical character and the condition of an abstract identity which is revelatory of powers of a higher order: immortality, endless regeneration, limitless 'courage' in the face of nature and death. Thus in *Rabelais*, the body is already a *symbol*: it stands on its own, performing the reassuringly healthy functions of every body, but it also points to a transcendental togetherness of bodies which constitutes a Body that not only copulates, eats, or fasts, but also abides in the opposite state of solemnity and spiritual elevation, as if it had never committed the transitory acts of copulation, feasting, and fasting. Thus Bakhtin endows the concept of body with two different meanings: the first one represents its verifiable physicality while still shying away from the condition of singularity, known from 'Author and Hero'; the other one looks out over a state of collectivity where the bodily eventually comes to represent the spiritual.

The representation of the body as collective spiritual entity is itself of Hegelian provenance. The Objective Spirit—we will recall—seeks to liberate itself from naïve subjectivity (singularity). In this process it gives rise to collective formations such as the nation and the state, which Hegel considers to be advanced forms of historical self-reflection on the part of Spirit. In Bakhtin, however, we witness a regressive embodiment: Spirit materializes itself in the anachronistic and idyllic body of a socially homogenized and emphatically primitive community. The Spirit objectifies itself in the body of the undifferentiated people to bestow on it the gifts of animation. Accordingly, this body assumes wide-ranging faculties. All functions of the singular physical body—from generation to urination (to recall the *Phenomenology*)—are now sublated in the controversial gesture of preservation through erasure. They are brought closer to a pervasive spiritualization and their effects are seen to endorse the unearthly reward of immortality.

There is one particular function—laughter—that needs to be examined in detail from this perspective. Bakhtin inherits two European traditions in theorizing laughter: the neo-Kantian and that of vitalism and philosophy-of-life. The views of Lipps and Bergson were of special importance to him. They both belonged to his early cultural baggage and were referred to in the 'Author and Hero' essay. The neo-Kantian tradition in aesthetics, of which Lipps is a powerful proponent, draws heavily on experimental psychology. Lipps repeats Kant's definition of humour as frustrated expectation;⁵⁴ but he also maintains—and here Bakhtin appears to be indebted to him—that expectation, and hence laughter, is not a passive function, but rather an endeavour or an aspiration that originates in and is adequate to experience (*erfahrungsgemäße Strebung*).⁵⁵ Bergson, on the other hand, is important to Bakhtin in so far as he champions laughter as a means of protection against the mechanization of life. 'The attitude, gestures and movements of the human body'—Bergson warns—'are laughable in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine.'⁵⁶ Later in his book, he extends

⁵⁴ Lipps defines the comic in reference to the sublime, another category of central importance to Kant's aesthetics: 'The sublime is that which exceeds the measure of expectation or psychical adaptation; the comic is that which lags behind this measure' (Th. Lipps, *Grundtatsachen des Seelenlebens*, Bonn, 1883, p. 677 ['Das Erhabene ist das über das Maß der Erwartung Hinausgehende, wie das Komische das dahinter Zurückbleibende']). A similar definition of the comic can be found in Lipps's *Grundlegung der Aesthetik*.

⁵⁵ Th. Lipps, *Grundtatsachen des Seelenlebens*, p. 669.

⁵⁶ H. Bergson, 'Laughter', in *Comedy*, ed. W. Sypher, Baltimore and London, 1980, p. 79. Further abbreviated as 'L', with page references given in brackets in the main text.

this thesis to include cases of reification: 'We laugh every time a person gives us the impression of being a thing' (L, 97). For Bergson, laughter is the 'corrective' of automatism and mechanization; it helps society get rid of rigidity 'in order to obtain from its members the greatest possible degree of elasticity and sociability' (L, 74). Implicitly evoking the theory of laughter as a means of struggle and browbeating in disputation, Bergson arrives at a conclusion that is not far from Hobbes's: 'Its [laughter's] function is to intimidate by humiliating' (L, 188). It is this philosophy of laughter as punishment and reprimand that riles Bakhtin. He remains unconvinced by Bergson's view of laughter as only fulfilling negative functions (R, 71).⁵⁷ Bakhtin's misgivings notwithstanding, he appears to be continuing Bergson's thought on two major points. For one thing, he is indebted to Bergson for the notion of laughter as 'social gesture' (L, 73), which always originates in a group. However spontaneous it might seem, laughter, Bergson stresses, 'always implies a kind of secret freemasonry, or even complicity, with other laughers, real or imaginary' (L, 64). Bakhtin's notion of laughter radicalizes this idea: for him laughter originates in the opposition of groups representing popular culture in its clash with official ideology; but laughter is soon to shed this identity and become social and collective to the point of transcending all group divisions. In *Rabelais*, laughter tends to be thought of more as the emblem of the united body of the people, the cohesive bond between various layers of society, than as a dividing practice. Everyone laughs in carnival to ridicule the otherwise all too serious style of practical everyday life. From a group phenomenon called to rectify the faults of other groups, laughter is transformed into a collective power that emanates from the whole of the people's body and spreads throughout the universe. Secondly, Bergson is largely responsible for Bakhtin's interest in laughter as the confirmation of the organicity and suppleness of life. This vitalist interpretation endorses the attempts of a Simmelian *Lebensphilosophie* to transcend the boundaries between culture and nature. Here we can see Bakhtin's twofold philosophical orientation. On the one hand, he believes that laughter—in a Hegelian manner—should be viewed as the embodied power of Spirit to flesh out the contradictory nature of reality. On the other hand, however, he is tempted—in a vitalist, and later

⁵⁷ While *Rabelais* contains only a brief mention of the shortcomings of Bergson's theory, a fragment of the first half of the 1940s, entitled 'On the Questions of the Theory of Laughter' (SS, 49–50), deals almost exclusively with Bergson's book and spells out Bakhtin's discontent at greater length.

on in a phenomenological fashion—to see laughter as the exclusive activity of the body. In *Rabelais*, laughter becomes a symbol of that ideal condition where humans can produce culture from the resources of nature, and without obliterating it. This ideal—and contradictory—condition is mirrored in the disappearance of the difference between spectator and participant in carnival. Bakhtin insists on this point, for it supplies an additional argument to support his projected unity of the people: not only in strictly social terms, but also in the process of cultural production. The social division becomes irrelevant precisely because the rites of laughter efface the much more significant boundaries between nature and culture. Referring to the wedding feast as a carnivalesque event, Bakhtin asserts: ‘. . . during that period there are no footlights, no separation of participant and spectators. Everybody participates’ (*R*, 265). Undoubtedly, Bakhtin is here following Nietzsche’s *Birth of Tragedy*. In section 8, Nietzsche stresses the absence of differentiation between viewer and actor in Greek tragedy. Moreover, when he discusses the architecture of the Greek theatre he says it was constructed in such a way that the spectator could *overlook* ‘the whole world of culture proceeding around him and imagine, in absorbed contemplation, that he himself was a chorist’.⁵⁸ Walter Kaufmann explicates the importance of the ambivalent verb ‘to overlook’. Both in English and in German (*übersehen*) it has two meanings: survey, but also neglect. Bakhtin’s idea of carnival laughter appears to corroborate the same idea: culture should be generated through overlooking, through simultaneous construction and neglect. Laughter, being the product of the body, is the perfect emblem of this twofold activity: it generates cultural values while still preserving its physiological identity. But this is, as we have demonstrated, only one aspect of Bakhtin’s understanding of laughter. The other one—the Hegelian—keeps insisting that laughter is and should remain the manifestation and the product of language, not a spontaneous expression of the body, but the embodied manifestation of the contradictions of a higher entity (Spirit for Hegel; life for Bakhtin). In the introduction to *Rabelais*, Bakhtin interprets the participatory nature of carnival in this recognizably Hegelian mode: ‘Carnival has universal dimensions;⁵⁹ it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world’s revival and renewal, in which all take part’ (*R*, 7).

⁵⁸ Fr. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Case of Wagner*, trans., with commentary by W. Kaufmann, New York, 1967, p. 63.

⁵⁹ This is my translation of the Russian ‘Karnaval nosit vselenskii kharakter’ which is rendered in the existing English translation as ‘It has a universal spirit’.

'One can express this also thus: in carnival, life itself plays, enacting—without a stage, without footlights, without actors, without spectators, that is without any specifically artistic and theatrical features—another free form of its materialization (*osushchestvlenie*), its regeneration and renewal on better terms. The real form of life is here at the same time its revived ideal form' (*RR*, 10–11).⁶⁰ A philosophy-of-life glorification of the universal unity of life blends here with a version of the Hegelian equation of the rational and the real. Bakhtin, however, substitutes 'ideal' for Hegel's 'rational', thus bringing an undeniable strain of utopianism into his text.

(b) *Is a History of Body and Laughter Possible?*

Bakhtin's controversial position can be better grasped against the background of another attempt, parallel in time and independent of his, to interpret the meaning of laughter as a bodily phenomenon. In 1941, Helmut Plessner, a former student of Scheler, published his book *Laughing and Crying. A Study of the Limits of Human Behaviour*. It has not been possible to ascertain whether Bakhtin knew Plessner's study, but it would be impossible to outline the features of Bakhtin's approach without reference to the existing theoretical field in the 1940s.

Plessner's perspective is anthropologico-phenomenological and, unlike Bakhtin's, radically and unequivocally ahistoricist. He endeavours to analyse laughter as a form of expression. His interpretation, however, does not serve the aesthetics of the comic or of wit. It is concerned not with the psychology of humour 'but with the theory of human nature'.⁶¹ In his 1928 book *Stufen des Organischen und der Mensch* Plessner develops his concept of man's anthropological 'eccentricity' (*Exzentrizität*). Because of its shared roots in Scheler, it strongly resembles Bakhtin's 'outsideness' in 'Author and Hero'. In his book on laughter, Plessner preserves this concept, according to which eccentricity originates in man's ambiguous position (couched in terms strongly reminiscent of Scheler's and Bakhtin's differentiation between 'inner' and 'outer' body) 'as living body in a physical body (*Leib im Körper*)' (32):

Just as the world and my own body are revealed to me, and can be controlled by me, only insofar as they appear in relation to me as a central 'I', so, on the

⁶⁰ This passage is omitted in the existing English translation of 1968.

⁶¹ H. Plessner, *Laughing and Crying*, trans. J. S. Churchill and M. Greene, Evanston, 1970, p. 14. In the passages to follow, page references are given in brackets in the main body of the text.

other hand, they retain their ascendancy [. . .] as an order indifferent to me and including me in a nexus of mutual neighbourhoods.

Even if man can come to no decision between these two orders, the one related to a centre and the other not, he must nevertheless find a relation to them. For he is totally merged in neither. Neither *is* he just living body, nor does he just *have* a body. Every requirement of physical existence demands a reconciliation between being and having, outside and inside.

(36-7)

It is in reference to this eccentricity ('for he is totally merged in neither') that laughter can be accounted for. In his attempt to surmount the Cartesian division (physical *or* mental), Plessner sees in the 'brokenness' of man's relation to his body the basis of his existence, 'the source, but also the limit, of his power' (32). Laughter, then, is interpreted as the situation in which 'the person does indeed lose control, but he remains a person, while the body, so to speak, takes over the answer for him'. With this—Plessner argues—an otherwise hidden possibility of 'co-operation between the person and his body' (33) is disclosed. This 'co-operation', though, is only the resolution of 'a *crisis* precipitated in certain situations by the relation of a man to his body' (11; my emphasis). The important thing is to realize that this crisis—the loss of control—has expressive value:

The disorganization of the relation between man and his physical existence is not willed, to be sure, but—although it sets in in an overwhelming way—it is still not merely accepted and endured. On the contrary, it is understood as expressive movement and significant reaction. . . . [B]y the disorganization of his inner balance, man at once forfeits the relation to his body *and* re-establishes it. The effective impossibility of finding a suitable expression and an appropriate answer *is* at the same time the only suitable expression, the only appropriate answer.

(66)

The conclusions Plessner draws from this analysis of laughter bear directly on our discussion of Bakhtin's ideas. Taking into account its 'compulsive onset and discharge' (51), laughter should by no means be equated with gesticulatory or verbal language; it is 'purely expressive and reactive' and lacks sign function. With Bergson in mind, Plessner warns that this does not necessarily mean that in laughter archaic strata of human existence are 'breaking through' (21). On the contrary, his entire analysis seems to imply that laughter is an elaborate mechanism for dealing with man's 'eccentricity' as a timeless feature of human nature.

I want to extend this second conclusion and to reveal its ultimate logical implications. If laughter is not amenable to the zeal of biologists enamoured of evolutionary charts, still less can it be the object of cultural history. The fact that, in Plessner's understanding, laughter is not a conscious sign reaction renders it a poor attraction for historians; history can study the application of the comic, wit, and irony, but not laughter. Laughter is expressive in default of conscious effort and intent, not thanks to them. This helps it travel only too well through time and space; its 'universal distribution' among all peoples and in all periods must preclude the writing of its history.

However, this is not the case with Bakhtin. Or so it seems at least on reading the first chapter of his book, 'Rabelais in the History of Laughter'.

How is Bakhtin's history of laughter possible? A short and simple answer would be: by positing laughter as a symbolic form of a kind which is poised, as we have noted before, between its bodily origins and its status as a cultural form. It is the latter of these two features of laughter that underlies Bakhtin's attempt at a history. The opening sentence of this chapter provides testimony to the breadth of his project: 'The four-hundred-year history of the understanding, influence, and interpretation of Rabelais is very instructive: it is closely interwoven with the history of laughter itself, its functions and the understanding of it in the same period' (*RR*, 68).⁶² The materialization of this programme, however, proves to be rife with contradictions and hidden slippages. A case in point is Bakhtin's discussion of the attitude to laughter in the Renaissance. A longer quotation is needed to reveal the tensions constitutive of Bakhtin's text:

The Renaissance attitude to laughter can be tentatively and roughly described as follows: Laughter has the deep meaning of a world-outlook, it is one of the most essential forms of truth about the world in its entirety, about history and man; it is a universal viewpoint of a kind that sees the world differently yet no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than seriousness. For that reason, laughter is just as admissible in great literature (the one posing universal problems at that), as seriousness. Certain very important aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter.

(*RR*, 75).⁶³

⁶² The English translation compresses this passage to: 'The four-hundred-year history of the understanding, influence, and interpretation of Rabelais is closely linked with the history of laughter itself' (*R*, 59).

⁶³ Except for the final sentence, I have modified the existing English translation. The Russian text reads (without the portion translated in the two last sentences): 'Otnoshenie

The problem here is the status of laughter. It is declared to be a form of *Weltanschauung*, a universal viewpoint that sees the world differently from seriousness. But this is a universal viewpoint 'of a kind' (*osobaia universal'nost'*), and this complicates its status. The implication is that there are also other universal viewpoints, that laughter is only one of the forms of truth about the world in its entirety. In order to privilege laughter, Bakhtin tells us that certain aspects of the world are accessible only to it. If we recall Medvedev's definition of genre from the *Formal Method*, it will be immediately clear that Bakhtin interprets laughter in two ways: as a universal viewpoint, i.e. as a world-outlook or a mentality, and as genre, that is as a horizon from which *specific* aspects of reality are approachable. These two functions, Bakhtin implies, are not irreconcilable in the Renaissance period but are doomed to separate in the post-Renaissance age. In Renaissance culture, Bakhtin submits, laughter is a synthetic symbolic form which underwrites the viability of an organic outlook: laughter is equally the product of the body pointing to the importance of the physical roots of human existence and a mentality, a form of communicating a wide range of attitudes to the world. Besides, it is equally capable of addressing being in its entirety and of capturing some of its *specific* features. In Bakhtin's philosophical utopia, the Renaissance is a blessed age when mentality and genre, universal and specific seem to coincide. Laughter is not yet a merely aesthetic form, it is a form of outlook referring to the world as a whole.

The unhappy career of laughter begins, so Bakhtin believes, in the seventeenth century when it is degraded to a purely aesthetic form and ceases to be a universal form of outlook. Laughter is no longer entitled to express what is important or positive; it is confined to the negative and the deplorable. Thus the domain of laughter is narrowed to cover only very specific and particular phenomena of social life. In other words, laughter becomes an aesthetic genre but ceases to be an outlook.

k smekhu Rennessansa možno predvaritel'no i grubo okarakterizirovat' tak: smekh imeet glubokoe mirosozertsatel'noe znachenie, eto odna iz sushchestvennoishikh form pravdy o mire v ego tselom, ob istorii, o cheloveke; eto osobaia universal'naia tochka zreniia na mir, vidiashchaia mir po-inomu, no ne menee (esli ne bolee) sushchestvenno, chem ser'eznost'; poetomu smekh tak zhe dopustim v bol'shoi literature (pritom staviashchei universal'nye problemy), kak i ser'eznost'. The existing English translation renders this as: 'The Renaissance conception of laughter can be roughly described as follows: Laughter has a deep philosophical meaning, it is one of the essential forms of the truth concerning the world as a whole, concerning history and man; it is a peculiar point of view relative to the world; the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint. Therefore, laughter is just as admissible in great literature, posing universal problems, as seriousness.'

It is precisely this transition of laughter from *Weltanschauung* to genre that Bakhtin finds so regrettable. *Rabelais* is a striking confirmation of a recurrent feature of Bakhtin's thought in the 1930s: either genre is extended to a supreme and integral worldview which cancels its strictly generic nature (the novel) or else it ceases to be attractive to his theory.

This view is one of the most reliable indications that Bakhtin is working within the theoretical paradigm of modernity. Friedrich Schlegel is the initiator of this specific thinking about genre which is interested in it only as far as it can lose its boundaries and become representative of all other artistic forms. It is equally fair to say, Schlegel insists (*Athenäum*-Fragment No. 116), that there is only one modern genre as well as it is to claim that there is an endless number of modern genres. This specific theoretical strategy, to which Bakhtin seems to subscribe unreservedly, has its roots in the controversial legitimization of modernity. Being concerned to lend support to its own aesthetic and social norms in opposition to the supply of norms from the past, the aesthetics of German Romanticism and of most subsequent modern trends faces the dilemma of recognizing its own standards as transitory while still substantiating the case for their timeless rationality. At the very heart of modern literary and cultural theory works a mechanism whose cogs move in constant cohesion yet in opposite directions: the one relentlessly dashing all hopes that the criteria and values of the present can be regarded as eternal, the other pushing back the limits of their applicability and restoring confidence in their intransient nature disguised as rational lawfulness. As we have suggested in Chapter 6, the questions that cultural theory is at pains to answer in the age of modernity are how something can be essential while being ephemeral, and how it can give birth to a tradition without proving in turn to be the result of the past.

Bakhtin's idea of laughter seems to be well placed to try to offer elegant solutions to this twofold conundrum. Renaissance culture puts an end to the relegation of laughter to the sphere of the unofficial and the low. We are told that 'a millennium of folk humour broke into Renaissance literature' (R, 72); we are reminded that, unlike the Middle Ages, the Renaissance was the first and the only period in human history when laughter freely entered the zone of high culture: 'it emerged but once in the course of history, over a period of some fifty or sixty years, and entered with its popular ('vulgar') language the sphere of great literature and high ideology' (R, 72). In this way, laughter is 'cleared' of its dependence on the past and is transformed into a

powerful mentality which is free to inhabit a variety of artistic forms at will and to set the standards for their capacity to encompass and express the whole of the world. Such moments are necessarily brief, but they nevertheless produce the measure against which all subsequent manifestations should be evaluated. Like the novel, carnival is now expanded to shed its rigid identity as a particular cultural form and to become the epitome of ramified social practices, of culture as such. It is declared to be the point at which all impulses of popular energy flow together, much like the novel, which accommodates the roaming power of the word:

This process of bringing together under the rubric of 'carnival' heterogeneous local phenomena and of unifying them in a single concept corresponded to a process taking place in life itself; the various forms of folk celebration, as they were dying or degenerating, transmitted some of their traits (*momentou*) to carnival: rituals, paraphernalia, images, masques. . . [C]arnival became the reservoir into which the forms of folk celebration, which ceased to exist on their own, emptied.

(RR, 236-7)

Moreover, carnival is endowed with the same colonizing force as the novel. Not unlike the novel which tends to novelize all other genres (precisely because it is thought of as something more than a genre), carnival does not get on well with other forms of popular culture: 'when carnival flourished. . . and became the centre of all popular forms of amusement, it weakened all the other feasts to some extent by depriving them of almost every free and utopian folk element. All other feasts fade when placed alongside carnival' (R, 220*).⁶⁴

We thus arrive at the conclusion that the novel and carnival function in the same way in Bakhtin's theoretical discourse. They absorb previous historical experience and sublate genres and cultural forms that otherwise cannot obtain or are doomed to lose independence. It is of vital importance to recognize that this is a Hegelian strategy: by retaining the features of past forms on a higher level, the novel and carnival become the embodiment of a new stage in the development of consciousness. The history of laughter and carnival in *Rabelais* is feasible only within this Hegelian framework of sublation leading to an ever more developed consciousness. As Bakhtin himself notes,

⁶⁴ The existing English translation gives 'develop' instead of 'flourish' for the Russian 'rastsvetal'. The last sentence ('Vse ostal'nye prazdniki bledneiut riadom s karnavalom') is rendered as 'The other feasts faded away.'

medieval laughter became at the Renaissance stage of its development an expression of the new free and critical *historical* consciousness of the epoch. It could acquire this character (*mog im stat**) only because the buds and shoots of this historicity, the potentialities leading to it, had been prepared over thousand years of development in the Middle Ages.

(R, 73*)⁶⁵

That the history of laughter is possible only as the Hegelian history of sublated cultural energy channelled into *Weltanschauung* is, however, only one of the two sides of the coin. If it is legitimate to describe Bakhtin's notion of laughter as generated at the intersection point of Spirit and body, then the history of laughter should be duplicating the irreversible upward movement of Spirit. But this is not what one finds in *Rabelais*. Bakhtin's history of laughter incorporates the double perspective of growth and decline, of progress and decomposition. Characteristically, the degeneration of laughter in post-Renaissance culture is measured by its sinking to the level of addressing private vices rather than conveying universal outlooks. Laughter ceases to be associated with the collective embodiments of Spirit: it no longer originates in them, nor does it serve to strengthen their vitality. Referring to one of the key-concepts of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, 'the universal individuality', Bakhtin concludes in resigned fashion: 'The historical universal individuality ceases to be the object of laughter' (R, 115*).

It is at the juncture of this transition to degenerated laughter, paralleled and supported by the transition to the classical bodily canon, that Bakhtin's historicist adventure suffers its most salient drawback. Faced with the need to explain away the presence of 'grotesque anatomy' in the ancient and medieval epics (Bakhtin's examples are Homer, Virgil, and Ronsard) he diminishes its value by having recourse to reasons that fly in the face of his general scheme. 'The grotesque anatomization of the body in the epic', Bakhtin claims, 'is rather numb, for here the body is too individualized and closed. In the epic, there are only relics of the grotesque conception which has already been overpowered by the new [classical—G. T.] canon of body' (RR, 385).⁶⁶ At first glance, one might

⁶⁵ The English translation, which I modify here, omits the important Russian 'epokhi' in 'the *historical* consciousness of the epoch'. It also gives a truncated version of the second sentence: 'It could acquire this character only because the buds and shoots of new potentialities had been prepared in the medieval period' ['On mog im stat' tol'ko potomu, chto v nem za tysiacheletie ego razvitiia v usloviakh srednevekov'ia byli uzhe podgotovleny rostki i zachatki etoi istorichnosti, potentsii k nei']. Bakhtin literally repeats the same conclusion later on (R, 97).

⁶⁶ These two sentences are absent from the existing English translation.

find this to be a plausible reinforcement of Bakhtin's established preference for the novelistic over the epic: on this reading, the epic should be declared by its very nature an enemy of the grotesque canon, and it should lend itself to being accused of bluntly precluding the depiction of an ever-evolving decentred and open body. There are two obstacles in the way of this reading. The first is the fact that Bakhtin's tone is not one of invective: rather, he regrets the dissipated and weakened presence of grotesque elements in the epic. The epic, he implies, did not engender the classical bodily canon; instead, this new canon eliminated the residual elements of the grotesque lingering in the epic. (Effacing the difference between the novel and epic, at an earlier point Bakhtin even reproaches Hugo for 'never understanding the epic quality (*epichnost'*) of Rabelaisian laughter' (*R*, 128).) The second point which makes one cautious to write everything off at the expense of the epic is Bakhtin's mention of Homer. If the flourishing of the non-classical (grotesque) canon is located in the sixteenth century, in the novel of Rabelais, how is it possible for earlier forms to have already been conquered by the classical canon, especially given the impossibility that this conquest could have been undertaken by the epic? Moreover, what literary forms can be accepted as having been in existence prior to Homer? This patent incongruence in Bakhtin's narrative may suggest that he considers the Renaissance to be an exception, a solitary island in the predominantly non-grotesque history of the human body. But this clearly contradicts his assertion that 'the grotesque mode of representing the body and bodily life prevailed in art and creative forms of speech over thousands of years' (*R*, 318). The other possibility is that Bakhtin regards the Renaissance as a peak in a cyclically revolving process of (de)canonization of the human body, swinging between the grotesque and the classical order and closure. If this version is taken to hold good, one will be struck how non-Hegelian Bakhtin's attempt at historicizing the idea of the human body is. Bakhtin's fascination with the grotesque body in Rabelais's work bespeaks his profound reluctance to follow the modern project of historicist linearity and continuity. The past, in turn, is only selectively praised as the beneficial ground on which 'germs and shoots' of the future are grown. The indisputably grotesque elements of the ancient and the medieval epic are left out as unsublatable; they are already undone before the opportunity arises of their redemption in the non-classical canon of the Renaissance. Thus Bakhtin's endorsement of Hegel's progressivist historicism in the description of Renaissance laughter as a new stage in

the rise of consciousness is eroded and betrayed in his inconclusive historical accounts of the representation of the body.

This rupture in Bakhtin's 'will to history' invites an even more radical interpretation of his strategy. It uncovers Bakhtin's desire to enact the history of human views of the body as a timeless battle between two primordial principles: the grotesque and the classical. Placed in succession, the former being obviously older than the latter, they are nevertheless endowed with the status of eternal organizing forms. As the passage quoted above implies, the start and the first successes of the grotesque canon should be sought in the time before Homer. Folklore, as is usual with literary and cultural theory after German Romanticism, is the omnipotent alibi for ahistorical arguments. Bakhtin's vision of the origins of the grotesque imagines them as disappearing in a remote unrecorded (and unrecordable) past. History, then, is reshaped into the struggle of two constantly acting principles. The impression of peaks and troughs is no more than a camouflage for an equilibrium sustained by means of tension and competition. The brilliant yet controversial rhetoric of Bakhtin's narrative depicting the gigantic clash between the grotesque and the classical suppresses and de-emphasizes his own occasional points as an historian. The reader is invited to forget that the classical canon 'never prevailed in antique literature' and that in the 'official literature of European peoples it has taken the absolute upper hand only in the last hundred years' (*R*, 319).⁶⁷ Rather, as the text presents and amplifies the evidence for the success of the grotesque in the Renaissance, it encourages the belief that the grotesque view of the body had had a potent enemy all along.

(c) *Bakhtin's Phenomenological Reductionism*

But if Bakhtin's historical argument is so unsettled and insecure, is this not due to his subject's insurmountable resistance to historicization more than to a presumed want of rigour in his presentation? When separated from Spirit, the body seems to be hard to historicize. Indeed, we can see Bakhtin indulge in enumerating and studying at length its physiological functions—which, as a matter of course, can have no history at all. We have to distinguish here between the functions of the body and their artistic representation. It is only the latter—not the former—that Bakhtin is at pains to historicize by claiming that eating

⁶⁷ The existing English translation does not preserve the italics of the Russian 'ofitsial'noi'; it translates 'stal vpolne gosподstvuiushchim' simply as 'existed'.

and drinking are among the most significant manifestations of the grotesque body (*R*, 281). That this attempt is itself riddled with contradictions has already been made clear.

The way in which bodily functions are treated in *Rabelais* makes it a perfect example of Bakhtin's phenomenological reductionism. In the previous chapter we encountered this specific feature of Bakhtin's thinking: in the text on Goethe he was trying to substitute for the appropriation of reality through labour and production the omnipotence and infallibility of seeing. Similarly, in *Rabelais* Bakhtin strives to 'stabilize' the variety of human activities around the basic acts of eating, drinking, and copulating. He is not completely safe from sounding facile in this exercise of radical generalization: 'Man's encounter with the world in the act of eating was joyful and exultant; here man triumphed over the world; it was he who devoured the world, not vice versa' (*R*, 281*); or: 'Man is not afraid of the world, he has defeated it and eats of it' (*R*, 296). One might object that this is a legitimate interpretation of eating in an archaic society whose horizons and knowledge of the world were yet to broaden. It seems to me, however, that Bakhtin views the functions of the body as central, basic, and primordial, placed beyond the flow of history, rather than as archaic. Contrary to the apparent effects of his discourse, Bakhtin is anything but a materialist who seeks to give these functions an historical explanation. If anything, he is a phenomenologist *sui generis* who is enticed by the hope of uncovering the immediate structures of human experience and interaction with the outer world. He willingly concedes that eating as a collective process was not 'a biological, animal act but a social event' (*R*, 281). What is more, he is quick to establish an intimate connection between eating and work by converting the former into the 'last victorious stage' of the latter. This is already a controversial step: because of its quality as the last and victorious stage of labour, Bakhtin argues, eating often replaces the entire process of labour. It is true that he tries to confine this connection to the plane of archaic artistic images, but this does not prevent him from concluding that Rabelais's body imagery is equally marked by the unity of eating and work, which represent the two sides of man's appropriation of the world. The disturbing point in this picture of work is the unnoticed slippage into idyllic resignation. In his *Vorschule der Aesthetik* Jean Paul, with whose aesthetic theory and novels Bakhtin was familiar,⁶⁸ considers the idyll a

⁶⁸ Cf. the references to Jean Paul in 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel' and 'Discourse in the Novel'; later in his career (more accurately, when he was already

narrative of limited and accessible happiness. The idyll requires conscious self-limitation, so that the individual does not stand out and remains happily welded to the community. Bakhtin's labouring man seems to comply impeccably with these requirements. At all stages of history, Bakhtin suggests, man should stay within the boundaries of community life. The price to be paid for this is, however, too high: from being a glorious victor who wins over the inclement conditions of nature, man once again becomes the subordinate of nature, for he needs to validate his 'victory' in the basic acts of bodily consumption. The joyful devouring of food in collective feasts has the connotation of accessible happiness and of an illusory triumph over the alienation separating man from the world. In the archaic community and in Renaissance society alike, Bakhtin's fascination with eating and drinking implies that man should rest content with a unity sealed with the stamp of physiology. The social dimensions of the process in which harmony with the world and with one's self is to be reached remain constantly neglected. The ostensible security of possession in the act of consumption ousts all social concerns that would go farther than perfecting man's art of digesting. Bakhtin's rich pictures of communal feasts evoke an ideal of society resting on a deliberately chosen primitiveness. It restores the vision of a golden age of opulence which makes redundant all questions of the origins or the distribution of wealth.

All essential human activities in *Rabelais* gravitate towards the body as their ultimate source. Bakhtin is particularly keen to establish the organic bond between eating and discourse (*R*, 283 ff.). The antique symposium and the medieval feast provide welcome evidence that even language, the supreme manifestation of man's spiritual nature, is not to be disconnected from the bodily framework of human existence. One is not quite certain what the effect of this claim is: does it reduce the spiritual to an emanation of the bodily or, on the contrary, does it elevate the body's needs by making them the starting point from which even truth can unfold (*in vino veritas*)? This undecidability suggests rather that Bakhtin's intention was to suspend the dualism of body and spirit. Plessner, the reader will remember, proceeds from the same premise of the unity between the two. But he sees in language an insurmountable obstacle and removes it from his account of laughter. Bakhtin, for one, endeavours to demonstrate that it is not only in

retired) Bakhtin supervised a doctoral dissertation on Jean Paul, one of the five dissertations he has ever supervised (cf. N. Vasil'ev, 'M. M. Bakhtin i ego aspiranty', *DKH*, 1998, No. 4, p. 58).

laughter that language and body can come to harmony. Every spoken word in the forms of community life is encircled and housed by the functions of the body. We speak at the table, we pronounce merry truths while drinking, we give our blessings over food. The crucial difference between Plessner and Bakhtin is that they envisage two very dissimilar types of body. Plessner is concentrated on the individual human body and of necessity has to exclude language, for language is never a private possession; Bakhtin is concerned with a body which voluntarily gives up its privacy to dissolve itself without residue in the community. It is only at this utopian communal level that language and body can be fused seamlessly.

But this is a dangerously conservative and regressive utopia, if an oxymoron be permitted, in which the body gradually expels Spirit and comes to be seen as the self-sufficient proto-image of mankind's future: 'The lower stratum is mankind's real future. The downward movement that penetrates all Rabelaisian images is ultimately directed toward this joyful future' (*R*, 378*). If we recall Bakhtin's celebration of the eye in his analysis of Goethe in the text on the *Bildungsroman*, we will be surprised to find now that the eyes are an immaterial detail of the human body, at best, and a hindrance to the affirmation of the grotesque ideal of the body, at worst. The eyes 'express a purely *individual*, so to speak, self sufficient *inward* human life' (*R*, 316*),⁶⁹ and for this reason they cannot be of any use in grotesque realism. The temporal contiguity of the texts on Goethe and Rabelais is one of the most striking examples of the simultaneous accommodation and expression in Bakhtin's work of irreconcilable values. The championing of contradictory ideals of social development in this period of his work is consistently premised on phenomenological reductionism. In the text on the *Bildungsroman*, Bakhtin still lingers on the power and the art of seeing as a distinctly individual human gift. In *Rabelais*, he abandons this humanistic notion of man and gladly descends down the ladder of organic life to stop at the basic functions of the body which make it indiscernible among other bodies. Not even laughter raises man above this indistinct bodily mass. The deeper man sinks into the abyss of the organic, the brighter the redemptive star of utopia shines above him: deprived of individuality, he appears to be granted in exchange a guarantee that his every breath and his muscles' every movement will inevitably produce culture and freedom in the warm embrace of

⁶⁹ The existing English translation omits the words 'purely' and 'inward' and does not reproduce Bakhtin's emphases.

community. Thus we can see Bakhtin's readings of Goethe and Rabelais as transmitting, with equal ardour, the opposing values of modern individualism and pre-modern collectivism, always with the serious belief that culture springs without any tension from the essentially physical nature of man and is the subject of constant construction and deconstruction in the process of his organic existence.

These observations lead us to differentiate between three conditions in which the body is theorized by Bakhtin: there is, first, the individual body endowed with sight and speech; then there is a communal body marked by overwhelming vitality, enhanced appetite, and reproductive desire; and, finally, there is the pale image of the 'body of the species', an explicitly Hegelian metaphor of the human kind more than a palpable reality.⁷⁰ Of these, only the two last conditions are thematized in *Rabelais*. Their presence is not free of contradictions. They stand for two disparate reactions to modernity: while the communal body, as we have seen, becomes the emblem of a regressively utopian contra-modernity, the Hegelian 'body of the species' acts as the assertive exemplification of the progressivist ideals of modernity. To furnish a final proof of the contradictory rhetoric of Bakhtin's text, as it desperately tries to reconcile these two concepts of the body, let us analyse a portion of the text concluding Chapter 5:

Rabelais is consistently materialistic. But he approaches matter only in its bodily form. For him, the body is the most perfect form of the organization of matter and is therefore the key to all matter. That matter, of which the whole universe consists, discloses in the human body its true nature and highest potentialities: it becomes creative, constructive, is called to conquer the cosmos, to organize all cosmic matter; in man matter acquires a historic character.

(R, 366*)⁷¹

One can observe in this passage the smooth transition from a notion of the body that is neutrally biological (any human body in its material aspect) and only vaguely mobilizes the semantics of a compelling

⁷⁰ Bakhtin's uses of Hegel should not obscure the fact that Hegel's concept of the body, also in *PhM*, is much more complex and multi-layered; on this, see the sophisticated analyses in J. Russon, *The Self and Its Body in Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, Toronto, 1997, esp. pp. 61–76; and J. Dodd, 'The Body as "Sign and Tool" in Hegel's *Encyclopaedia*, *International Studies in Philosophy*, 1995, Vol. 27, pp. 21–32.

⁷¹ The existing translation does not preserve Bakhtin's italics. It is not sufficiently close to the original at two points: it translates the first two sentences as 'He was consistently materialistic, and moreover approached matter only in its bodily aspect'; secondly, it inserts a non-existent 'nearly' to qualify the expression 'the most perfect form of the organization of matter'.

corporeality characteristic of the communal body (the first two sentences) to a spiritualized and sublime notion of the 'body of the species' that sheds its material nature and acquires an historical one. It is only this latter notion of the body that can be summoned as an ally of modernity. Further on, Bakhtin tries to erase all remaining traces of corporeality: what matters is not the 'biological body, which merely repeats itself in the new generations', but 'precisely the historic, progressing body of mankind' (*R*, 367). It is this third, Hegelian, concept of the body that Bakhtin is struggling to pass off as the centre of Rabelais's 'system of images' and of his own analysis in stark contrast to the evident preponderance of the communal, biological, and corporeal concept.

Bakhtin's *Rabelais* emerges from our analysis as the battleground of two divergent approaches that are hard to reconcile. On the one hand, his argument moves under the spell of Hegelian progressivist historicism. When applying this approach his premises are: (a) a unitary and strongly utopian notion of the people as a harmonious entity alien to all class divisions (Bakhtin clearly excludes all class formations from the people [*RR*, 316⁷²]); (b) an intimate and organic connection between this classless notion of the people and the ambivalence of laughter;⁷³ which (c) is bound to the contradictory manifestations of Spirit in language; (d) the belief that the people's laughter is a form of a growing historical consciousness, whose material foundation is seen in the immortal 'body of the species'; this body is placed above the death and life dilemma, all it knows are the powerful swings of sublation between *stirb und werde* (*R*, 250). On the other hand, Bakhtin's argument is phenomenologically centred around the basic functions of a communal body which resists historical analysis. His historicist pathos is constantly held in check by his desire to endow the human body not simply with imperishable but also with unalterable features. Bakhtin's drive to produce a utopian and egalitarian model of culture that invites, and indeed rests on, mass participation—and hence a utopian model of society—leads him to a glorification of the body in its most material and primitive aspects which preclude change and evolution. Thus

⁷² Bakhtin speaks here of the tension arising when folklore images are employed to characterize the life of 'class, i.e. groups not belonging to the people' (*klassovykh, narodnykh grupp*). This detail is ignored in the existing English translation.

⁷³ In a footnote omitted in the English translation Bakhtin claims: 'The people, of course, is itself a participant in the drama of world history, but it differs from the other participants (besides other differences) through its ability and right to laugh with ambivalent laughter' (*RR*, 517).

Bakhtin only partially succeeds in keeping his promise to take an interest in laughter as a historical phenomenon; the duality of laughter as a product of Spirit, but also as an emanation of an overwhelmingly physical body, drags him into the realm of the static, the immovable, that which is proof against historical change. His criticism of 'philosophical anthropology with its phenomenological method, alien to genuine historicity and sociality' (*R*, 276-7*) is diluted and eventually overturned by his serene trust that the human condition is constituted by essential and permanent characteristics. This accounts for the fascinating metamorphosis undergone by Bakhtin's Hegelianism in *Rabelais*: from a phenomenology of Spirit which reveals the Spirit's inescapable contradictoriness in its variegated embodiments, to a vitalist phenomenology of the Body loaded with imminently utopian social messages.

EPILOGUE

Lukács and Bakhtin emerge from our comparative study as two thinkers exposed to the shared ideas of their time and responding to a similar agenda, at the core of which was the urgent need to analyse the meanings of modernity and the place of art in a changing world. Lukács and Bakhtin, we have already seen, were thinkers who very often interpreted philosophical and social problems (fetishism, reification, *Bildung*, the equilibrium between the individual and the collective, changes in the established structure of society) through the mediating grid of culture and art. They came from a philosophical tradition which insisted on the uniqueness of literature but did not encourage an autonomous discourse on it. Instead, the analysis of literature was deemed auxiliary to the discourse of social philosophy, ethics, and aesthetics. Although they both contributed substantially to a field which later academic specialization was to articulate as 'literary theory', they preferred to be thought of as philosophers.

Their intellectual careers, despite all differences in their outward status, followed strikingly similar paths. They both started as followers of *Lebensphilosophie* and neo-Kantianism and were deeply affected by the conceptual division between culture and civilization worked out in the German philosophical tradition. The early stages of their work were marked by ambitious projects in aesthetics, which they both abandoned unfinished under the pressure of new theoretical paradigms and in the face of the growing necessity to pay attention to the social dimensions of art. At this point Lukács embraced Marxism for life, while Bakhtin went through a period of intensive co-operation with his Marxist friends Voloshinov and Medvedev, traces of which were to be found in his Hegelianism in the 1930s and 1940s. Bakhtin's and Lukács's sociological projects of the 1920s did not, however, cancel the neo-Kantian ground of their philosophizing. They both preserved this ground and transformed the basic categories and propositions of neo-Kantianism and *Lebensphilosophie* in their views of ideology, language, and realism, so that these could broaden the horizon of their investigations. At a later age, both Lukács and Bakhtin, without abandoning their interest in the novel, went back to aesthetics and philosophy, posing once again questions about the uniqueness of art and the nature of the humanities.

Strong evidence for the common trajectory and the continuity of Bakhtin's and Lukács's thought is the special place that the problem of genre, and especially that of the novel, occupied in their mature writings. Working out a theory of genre and of the novel became for them a tool for formulating their responses to modernity. Their discourses on the novel proved to be predicated on the belief that there exist constant laws guaranteeing the specificity of art and governing the life of a genre and that, at the same time, the novel is the product of history, an exemplification of the volatile spirit of modernity. The passion for theorizing the novel as the off-spring of modernity was paralleled in Lukács's career by a vivid interest in and (at least theoretical) commitment to the destiny of the proletariat. The recent emergence of both the novel and the proletariat made them in Lukács's eyes an emblem of modernity and thus a desired object of theoretical appropriation. Indeed, for Lukács, to scrutinize the genre of the novel meant matching Marx's eager curiosity about the fortunes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, the two new-comers on the stage of social history. But Lukács's conservative Marxism and his heavy debt to Hegel always kept him away from a radical assertion of the new. For him, the novel became an embodiment of modernity precisely in so far as it was bound to dissolve in the harmony of a renewed (but not entirely new) form of epic in socialist art. Not surprisingly, the classical bourgeois novel was destined to disappear yet it kept providing the high standards of true art.

Bakhtin's attempt to analyse problems of society and culture by theorizing the genre of the novel emerges as equally problematic. The thread that holds together the seemingly disparate writings of the early, mature, and late Bakhtin is the concern with the relationship between life and culture and their intersection in the realm of form. In his early work he explored the place of art in culture (1920s) to focus subsequently on the ways in which artistic forms (the novel) can appropriate life without destroying its versatile and dynamic nature (1930s). Behind this underlying unity, however, one can detect his contradictory responses to modernity: from welcoming the heteroglossia of a cosmopolitan world which—through the novel—emancipates itself from the norms of the past and celebrates the openness of the present, to a phenomenological ahistoricism which seeks to grasp the eternal elements of the human condition. Hence his mutually exclusive social ideals advocated in his texts on Goethe and Rabelais: the first defending the liberal values of traditional bourgeois individualism, the

second extolling the anonymous body of the human species (*rodovoe telo*) in a dubious act of regressive utopianism.

The antinomies of modernity were thus reflected in Lukács's and Bakhtin's theoretical propositions and style of philosophizing: they both theorized modernity in a contradictory fashion marked by a productive hesitation between historicity, sometimes in its most radical form, and essentialist suprahistoricity and utopian revery.

In the course of analysing Lukács's and Bakhtin's ideas in this book I have examined the complicated dialectical relationship of mastery and slavery in Hegel's *Phenomenology* and suggested the explanatory power of this dialectic as regards Bakhtin's 'Author and Hero' essay and especially as regards *Rabelais*. I have also demonstrated that much of what preoccupied both Lukács and Bakhtin can be inscribed in a humanistic philosophical agenda propelled by the potential anxieties and the real threats arising from the shifting relations between subject and object, author and hero, culture and civilization, mastery of the outer world and inner enslavement suffered in the process.

Extending this latter image even further, we may now say that, from an historical perspective, the work of Lukács and Bakhtin, considered in terms of genesis and impact, falls within the same regime of reversible mastery and slavery. Lukács, despite his long periods of exile in outward and inward emigration, secured for himself in his life-time the position of one of the most powerful and renowned Marxist aestheticians, which he filled almost unchallenged well into the mid-1960s. He gradually rose from an émigré intellectual to the most pre-eminent Marxist of the Eastern Bloc in post-World War II Europe. For an entire generation he symbolized the art of political compromise in preserving one's loyalty to Communism while defending a Marxism with a human face. Bakhtin, during the decades of Lukács's ascendancy, was leading an almost clandestine existence in Kazakhstan and the scarcely noticeable life of a provincial academic in Saransk. In the 1920s he read *The Theory of the Novel* and responded to Lukács's interpretation of Dostoevsky in his own Dostoevsky book of 1929; in the mid-1930s he took notes from Lukács's widely discussed papers on the novel and had to respond to them in his essays of 1935-41, where Lukács's framework of opposition between epic and novel was largely preserved, and in his work on Goethe and the *Bildungsroman*; in the late 1930s he acquainted himself with several of Lukács's publications on realism and they became part of the texts which set the agenda for his

highly original study of grotesque realism in *Rabelais*. While Lukács went through an untroubled public defence of his doctoral thesis on Hegel, protected as he was by influential names on the Soviet philosophical scene, Bakhtin struggled for years to obtain his doctoral degree on *Rabelais*. His texts of this time remained unpublished for several decades and this contributed to his standing as an outsider. It was only in the early 1960s that he re-emerged from the wilderness of Soviet academic life.

Despite the enslaving conditions of his personal life and the severe limitations imposed by the social climate, Bakhtin did manage to find his own replies to the questions his time and his intellectual background posed for him. Yet, as this book has demonstrated, Bakhtin's original ideas were formulated not only in response to, but sometimes also on the shoulders of, his predecessors and contemporaries, and Lukács occupied a particularly prominent place among them. In a silent dialogue with him, Bakhtin fought a long fight to overthrow the views of the recognized Master and to reject his pervasive impact. With the exception of a brief reference in his unpublished doctoral thesis, he never acknowledged in print his debt to Lukács, thus making the absence of his name even more suggestive of Lukács's real importance for his intellectual pursuits.

I do not wish to portray Bakhtin's life and his work as a simplified version of a persistent 'anxiety of influence', nor as a melodramatic narrative of glamour after misery and neglect. Bakhtin's originality was acknowledged in his life-time and he has maintained his dominant position in critical discourse in the two decades after his death, at a time when Lukács's star was already on the wane. It is this changing regime of reputations, this rise of the former slave and gradual descent of the former master, that has obscured up to this day the extent to which, as I have endeavoured to show in this book, traces of Lukács's theories, dispositions, and views clung onto Bakhtin's, even when he thought he had succeeded in overcoming them. From our vantage point at the beginning of the new century, some of Lukács's ideas look increasingly irrelevant and abandoned, while Bakhtin's still are celebrating their 'homecoming festival'. From the point of view of intellectual history, though, the former and the current master remain locked in a firm embrace.

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