

Torn Halves: Political Conflict in Literary and Cultural Theory

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Chapter 2 Back to Bakhtin

In memory of Allon White¹

In Britain in the 1970s there were two dominant positions in Marxist theory, symbolized by two names, E.P. Thompson and Louis Althusser, and by two rival annual gatherings, the Oxford History Workshop and the Essex Sociology of Literature Conference.² In intellectual terms they could be characterized as the Marxist humanism developed by the New Left after the 1956 Twentieth Party Congress in the USSR, and the anti-humanist structural Marxism of the late sixties and seventies which came to dominate Marxist literary theory of the time. The arguments between the two camps, finally devolving into the question of the poverty or necessity of theory, only ceased with the autocritical self-destruction of Althusserianism by the British Althusserians.³ Althusser's assimilation of even 'practice' into theory, his absolute disdain for any empiricism, had meant that Marxist knowledge was effectively severed from the world outside. The crisis became acute after Hindess and Hirst's

critique of Althusser and their dismissal of history as such—hitherto for most Marxists the final touch-stone of reality—when it became common practice for ex-Althusserian Marxists to announce that ‘there is no epistemology’. In an extraordinary development, Marxism either had, or seemed about to, turn itself into an idealism. At this point, Derrida’s *Of Grammatology* appeared in English, with its powerfully argued charge that Marxism was a form of metaphysics. So Marxist theory found itself under an added pressure, this time stemming from the destabilizing claims of post-structuralism.

The anxiety over the prospects for Marxism in the literary sphere was signalled most graphically by *Re-Reading English* (1982), a work which attempted to capitalise on the ‘crisis in English studies’ occasioned by structuralism and poststructuralism in order to dismiss both traditional Leavisite and poststructuralist criticism alike in favour of a return to ‘History’, and the ‘concrete’.⁴ Since Lukács, these nouns have always been invoked to designate the desired object of Marxist knowledge, that elusive materiality outside the institution. Some contributors, however, accepted that history in its concrete form was hardly available as a straightforward option when even Marxism itself, in its Althusserian version, had apparently abandoned history as its given category of certitude.⁵ In this beleaguered situation the work of Bakhtin seemed increasingly to offer the possibility of deliverance. So John Hoyle argued that:

Perhaps one *way out of this impasse* lies in a reworking of sociological poetics following the example of the Bakhtin school; for it was this school ... who [sic] in the twenties provided the first serious Marxist critique of

the Russian formalists and paved the way for a theory and practice of textual politics whereby literary criticism would avoid the twin reductionisms of formalist poetics and vulgar Marxist sociology.⁶

Here the first suggestions emerge of the shift that was increasingly to characterize Marxist criticism of the eighties, as it abandoned the apparently forlorn category of 'History' in favour of 'the social'—Habermas would be a case in point. In making his proposal for Bakhtin, Hoyles was following an initial suggestion from Raymond Williams in 1977, developed by Tony Bennett in 1979, endorsed in 1981 and 1982 by Terry Eagleton, further supported by David Forgacs in 1982, Graham Pechey in 1983, and Allon White in 1984.⁷ These often programmatic declarations created a general consensus that the way forward was back to Bakhtin.

The attraction, as Graham Pechey put it bluntly, was that 'Bakhtinism catches Formalism on its way to Structuralism, diverting it in a Marxist direction'.⁸ Bakhtin was heralded as offering a 'way out' of the impasse that had threatened to cut Marxist knowledge off from the social. Bakhtin's attraction was that he seemed to offer the possibility for Marxism to return to the old certainties of the everyday world outside. Although the work of Bakhtin and his collaborators Voloshinov and Medvedev—whom I will continue to distinguish by the books signed with their names—began to be translated in the late sixties, it is striking that it had little impact on Marxist criticism until the 1980s. Jameson's *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (1972), for instance, makes no mention at all of the Bakhtin circle.⁹ In the USA the resurgence of interest in Bakhtin coincided with the 1981 translation,

The Dialogic Imagination (available in French since 1978), but in Britain it was rather the carnivalesque *Rabelais and His World*, which had been translated thirteen years earlier, which became the central text. Thus in 1979 Tony Bennett announced that 'Bakhtin's study of Rabelais would seem fully to exemplify what a Marxist—that is, a historical and materialist—approach to the study of literary texts should look like'.¹⁰

What was disturbing, however, was that at the very moment when Marxist interest in Bakhtin began to quicken, everyone else's did as well. In June 1983, for instance, an article by David Lodge on 'Joyce and Bakhtin' appeared on the front page of the *James Joyce Broadsheet*. According to Lodge, Bakhtin's appeal stemmed from the way that he seemed 'to offer some kind of rapprochement between the analytical rigour of Formalism and a Marxist or humanist conception of literature as an institution serving the cause of human freedom'.¹¹ Lodge went on to apply a form of Bakhtin's typology of literary discourse to *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* with little noticeable sense that he was producing an example of 'what a Marxist approach to the study of literary texts should look like,' or, it might be added, that Joyce and Bakhtin had already been brought together by Julia Kristeva sixteen years earlier. Long articles on Bakhtin also appeared at about the same time from, among others, Wayne Booth, David Carroll, Paul de Man, and Dominick LaCapra, a newsletter was founded and an annual international conference on Bakhtin initiated. Literary journals soon produced a spate of special issues on Bakhtin.¹²

If Bakhtin seemed to offer a way out which would allow British Marxism to return to the real world, many others were also attracted by his egressive charms. The

unprecedented extent of Bakhtin's appeal, comparable in recent critical history only to that of Derrida, led de Man to ask 'who, if anyone, would have reason to find it difficult or even impossible to enlist Bakhtin's version of dialogism among his methodological tools or skills'?¹³ What was striking was that whereas de Man himself or Derrida raised passionate disciples and equally passionate opponents, it seemed that just about anyone could, and probably did, appropriate Bakhtin for just about anything. Conversely, it was extremely hard to find anyone actually writing against Bakhtin. Why and how could this be so?

Everyone was attracted to the fact that Bakhtin appeared to offer a reconciliation between poetics and hermeneutics, between questions of form and questions of interpretation in the context of their relation to society and history. But it was undoubtedly the advent of poststructuralism, particularly the spectre of Derrida, that accounted for Bakhtin's sudden appeal around 1980. This was complicated by the fact that the Derrideans themselves also liked Bakhtin, finding support for their arguments by detecting a certain compatibility between deconstruction and dialogism. Samuel Weber, for example, remarked that

'Voloshinov' goes beyond the traditional notions of dialogue (as does 'Bakhtin,' in his notion of the 'polyphonic'), just as Derrida's practice of dissemination dislocates that of polysemy. In both, an irreducible alterity is shown at work in the very identification and identity that seek to efface its traces.¹⁴

Apart from the demonstration of the workings of heterogeneity within language, Bakhtin and Derrida

apparently resembled each other in their insistence on the problems of closure in any system, the effects of iterability and the boundlessness of context: 'The problem of boundaries between text and context. Each word (each sign) of the text exceeds its boundaries' Bakhtin declared in an essay written several years later than Derrida's '*il n'y a pas de hors texte*', and causing rather less offence.¹⁵ The similarity was such that Eagleton was even able to argue that 'Bakhtin recapitulates *avant la lettre* many of the leading motifs of contemporary deconstruction'.¹⁶

Bakhtin's relation to Derrida is itself in fact an example of a certain dialogic interaction: not direct in any way, but through their shared philosophical grounding in the nineteenth and twentieth-century German phenomenological tradition, particularly the critiques of hermeneutics of Husserl (the *Logical Investigations* were translated into Russian in 1910) and Heidegger (especially *Being and Time*, 1927). As Michael Holquist observes in an account of the formation of the 'Bakhtin Circle' from 1918-1920, 'the most frequent topic of discussion, the subject of most burning concern for the majority of the group—certainly for Bakhtin—was German philosophy. At this point Bakhtin thought of himself essentially as a philosopher and not as a literary scholar'.¹⁷ This is the context cited by Voloshinov in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*:

The trend-setting works of Husserl, the main representative of modern antipsychologism; the works of his followers, the *intentionalists* ('phenomenologists'); the sharply antipsychologistic turn taken by representatives of modern neo-Kantianism of the Marburg and Freiburg school; and the banishment of psychologism from all fields of knowledge and even

from psychology itself!—all these things constituted an event of paramount philosophical and methodological importance in the first two decades of our century. (MPL 32)

Bakhtin's philosophical debts to Husserl and Heidegger, though often gesturally acknowledged, have still to be charted in detail; but it is nevertheless clear that many of the apparently uncanny similarities between Bakhtin and Derrida can be fairly simply accounted for by their close links to the same philosophical tradition of European phenomenology. The rather straightforward solution to this intellectual mystery is that they had read the same books.

Despite, or perhaps rather because of, his affinity to Derrida, it was the possibility of providing grounds for a critique of deconstruction that for many formed the basis of Bakhtin's appeal. If structuralism and deconstruction seemed to have reduced the material world and any knowledge of it into a hermetic realm of language and sign systems, Bakhtin offered the possibility of moving out of the looking-glass back to the real world. For humanist critics a key factor lay in the way in which Bakhtin's work emerged as a critique of Russian Formalism and formalist work in general: he thus appeared as a critic who had gone 'beyond' structuralism, uncannily anticipating much post-structuralist thought but presenting it in a more traditional (if scarcely more readable) guise. He talked reassuringly, about characters, plots, the author, and consciousness, offering a humanist version of poststructuralism together with a liberal politics centring on the idea of the word as guarantor of human freedom. The humanist claim on Bakhtin is graphically illustrated

by the telling translation of a title which in Russian had been the neutral *Questions of Literature and Aesthetics* (*Vosprosy literatury i estetki*) into the resoundingly affirmative *The Dialogic Imagination*.¹⁸

Some humanist critics, particularly in the United States, went so far as to want to deny Bakhtin's Marxism altogether, in an exact parallel to the case of Walter Benjamin. Bakhtin's sudden popularity came at the same time as the culmination of a movement to assimilate the works of two members of his circle, Medvedev and Voloshinov, to Bakhtin himself (Medvedev and Voloshinov having died in 1938 and 1936 respectively, the former perhaps for the privilege of publishing Bakhtin's work under his name).¹⁹ The effect of this monological drive to reduce multiple authorship to the works of a single genius was always to reduce the importance of Marxism. Voloshinov's translator, I. R. Titunik, for instance, claimed that

the sociological poetics of the Bakhtin group (minus Medvedev's eclecticism; that is, minus Marxist presuppositions) and the formal method ... represented parallel overlapping, interdependent, and ultimately completely reconcilable methods. (*MPL* 200)

Take the Marxist presuppositions out of Medvedev and Voloshinov—and you get a perfectly acceptable Bakhtin.

The same dismissal of Bakhtin's Marxism can be found in Michael Holquist's account of why Bakhtin entered into such polyphonic arrangements with his friends about authorship. According to Holquist it was merely a case of expedience: 'Bakhtin was notorious in Leningrad circles as a *cerkovnik*, a devout Orthodox Christian'. Bakhtin's Marxism was simply a disguise

which can now be discarded:

Marxist terms are ... most often present in Bakhtin's books ... as a kind of *convenient*, in the abstract, not necessarily inimical—but above all, *necessary*—flag under which to advance his own views: If the Christian word were to take on Soviet flesh it had to clothe itself in ideological disguise.²⁰

Despite Holquist's later biography, conclusive evidence of this argument is still lacking; nevertheless it undoubtedly facilitated Bakhtin's American appeal.²¹ A recent more plausible suggestion has been that the stories about Bakhtin's secret authorship were simply an expedient device to use the prestige of his name in order to get the books of Voloshinov and Medvedev republished.²²

Streetwise with Bakhtin

For Marxists, meanwhile, Bakhtin's attractions were not altogether dissimilar: he provided an effective sociological critique of structuralism, as well as the materialist account of language so conspicuously missing in Marxist theory ever since Stalin's prescriptive intervention in the field.²³ Rather than offering an alternative to Derrida in the sense of an oppositional position, Bakhtin seemed to allow the assimilation of some of the more compelling aspects of his thought while placing them within a more acceptable sociohistorical framework. Derrida himself could then be more or less indifferently rejected altogether. In general, Bakhtin seemed to recapitulate many of the dominant motifs of poststructuralism while at the same time adding an

historical basis to them.²⁴ According to Eagleton, Bakhtin united 'what we might now rhetorically call certain Derridean and Lacanian positions with a politics revolutionary enough to make much poststructuralism nervous' (79). Citing Bakhtin's notion of carnival as proof of this, he observed that here 'the Nietzschean playfulness of contemporary poststructuralism leaves the academy and dances in the streets'.²⁵ Nothing illustrates better the basis of Bakhtin's appeal than Eagleton's description here, where the theorist '*leaves the academy and dances in the streets*'. Bakhtin transports you from the inside to the outside, out of the academic institution into the pulsating life of the real world. So the invocation of history as an outside which poststructuralism lacked was developed alongside a corresponding inside/outside metaphor of theory and the people, the university and the real world outside it, the academy and the streets.

In this antithesis between the world of the academy and the life of the streets, it is noticeable that Bakhtin's own style remains remarkably erudite. He proposes in a conventional 'high' academic language, not noticeably comic, and full of authoritative jargon, a monological theory which paradoxically denies the possibility of a theory and celebrates laughter, subversion, parody, and 'low' genres. Or is there, as Hayden White suggests, a carnivalesque inversion of his own claims to authoritativeness taking place at the same time, illuminating 'the very grandiosity of his enterprise as a parody of the methods of scholarship and science alike'?²⁶ The length of Bakhtin's essays, their unreadability, their repetitive structure, their proliferating jargon, and ever bifurcating categories, are, as White points out, at odds with the thesis of their content, thus subverting any claim to authoritativeness. This

would not be incompatible with some of the other curiosities known about Bakhtin:

During some sixty years as a scholar, Bakhtin assumed many masks, spoke in many voices, published under a number of different names, parodied many methods. Is there any reason to believe that these essays [*The Dialogic Imagination*], published under the name of Bakhtin, represent the fixed position, the real centre of his thought, by which to measure the merely parodistic dimensions of his other works, both those recognized as having been written by him and those *thought* to be from his hand?²⁷

Similarly, can we be so sure as Holquist that the *real* Bakhtin was the devout *cerkovnik* who wrote the religious magnum opus *The Architectonics of Responsibility* which, Holquist assures us, 'contains, in embryonic form, every major idea Bakhtin was to have for the rest of his long life'?²⁸ It is noticeable, at any rate, that, although Bakhtin's subject concerns dialogism in the novel, many of his critics, without showing any awareness of the transference that they are making, write as if such qualities are to be found in Bakhtin himself. Bakhtin begins to become the thing of which he speaks. His texts turn the outside in, just as much as the inside out. This makes it even harder to identify 'Bakhtin'.

Is there, in fact, a real Bakhtin that can be appropriated by a particular mode of criticism, or is it not rather that the ambivalence of Bakhtin's position seems to allow everyone to claim a particular version of him as their own? His ideas such as the contested nature of the sign, the determination of the utterance from without by social relations, the endless struggle for the word, and the reaccentuation of meanings in texts throughout history,

evidently apply just as much to his own writings. Above all, Bakhtin's ambivalence results from the way in which he himself represents rather than resolves the conflictual struggles in society—so that by definition everyone can find somewhere in Bakhtin an image of themselves.

The 'Directedness' of the Sign

The indeterminacy of Bakhtin's texts is of course compounded by the authorship problem. But though the works of Voloshinov and Medvedev, published in the twenties, have seemed to many to be more self-consciously Marxist both in word and spirit than Bakhtin's contemporary book on Dostoevsky or any of his later works, it does not necessarily follow that a straightforward separation can be made between them. For despite their differences, Bakhtin could also be said to have dramatically extended the implications of the work of his collaborators. Voloshinov's 1929 critique of Saussure undoubtedly enabled a Marxist perspective—some fifty years later—on the kinds of privilege accorded to language by the Saussurian structuralism of the 1960s. But Voloshinov's own position also constituted the basis of an argument that was to be equally troubling to many of the fundamental assumptions of more orthodox dialectical theory.

Voloshinov's critique of Saussure is by now well-known, but it would still be helpful to reconsider some of its main components at this point. In general, Marxist criticism of Saussure has focussed upon his initial separation of the analysis of language into synchronic and diachronic dimensions and disparaged his privileging of the first over the second, that is of structure

over history.²⁹ Voloshinov, by contrast, did not object to Saussure on these grounds at all, which would perhaps be more surprising if it were not recalled that Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* spends more time analyzing the diachronic than the synchronic—it was in fact rather the structuralists, Lévi-Strauss in particular, who foregrounded space over linear time. Voloshinov himself took issue with a second separation, concerned not with the realm of history but the social, namely Saussure's division of language into the individual utterance (*parole*) as opposed to the overall system (*langue*). In concentrating on the latter Saussure made the mistake, according to Voloshinov, of using a methodology developed for the analysis of dead, written languages which meant that the basis of his linguistics was flawed from the outset. For the utterance, says Voloshinov, can't be considered as an isolated phenomenon; there is no such thing as a merely individual expression because we do not (generally) speak into thin air—every utterance is not only spoken by someone but is also addressed to someone else. Even the academic silently writing at his or her typewriter, or today into a computer, performs an act of communication which must be regarded as 'a social phenomenon' (MPL 62). What is more, in so far as it forms a part of a process of communication, 'its organizing centre' Voloshinov argues, 'is not within but outside ... in the social milieu surrounding the individual being' (MPL 93). This observation could be said to constitute the crucial move, enabling him both to avoid Saussure's implicit psychologism and to set up the whole basis of language as a kind of double-dealing, an idea that was later to be developed into dialogism:

The *word is oriented toward an addressee, toward who that*

addressee might be... *word is a two-sided act*. It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant. As word it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*. Each and every word expresses the 'one' in relation to the 'other'. (MPL 85-6)

Orientation of the word toward the addressee means that the word is a kind of bridge thrown between the self and other, constituting a border zone between the two that belongs to neither. Voloshinov's word thus, crucially, breaks through from inside to outside, from the same to the other. In the same way, Bakhtin was to emphasize the 'directedness' (*'napravlennost'*) of the word and of discourse, thus encompassing, as in Husserlian phenomenology, the intended orientation of the word towards an object as well as the speech-act.³⁰ Voloshinov himself emphasizes that such an orientation means that individual utterances are already determined by social relations. The sign, therefore, is invariably *motivated*: 'the immediate social situation and the broader social milieu wholly determine—and determine from within, so to speak—the structure of an utterance' (MPL 86). In this way, Voloshinov breaks down both the solipsism and psychologism of Saussure and opens up the study of language to its social dimension. Instead of becoming a world unto itself, as for the poststructuralists, for Voloshinov language dissolves the division between inner and outer spheres.

Literature and the psyche

This doubled structure of signification is reinvoled by

Medvedev in his subtle account of the relation of literature to society in *The Formal Method* (1928). Here the connection between literature and the socioeconomic base is described as one of direct mediation by other ideological forms, in a structure somewhat similar to Spinoza's distinction between efficient and final causes. Thus Medvedev simultaneously opposes the formalist separation of literature from so-called 'extrinsic' factors to Marxist assumptions that 'separate works, which have been snatched out of the unity of the ideological world, are in their isolation directly determined by economic factors' (*FM* 15)—a position which Bakhtin himself re-endorsed over forty years later (*SG* 140). This means that even the intertextual effect of literature upon literature can still be considered a sociological effect. Literature is thus determined from within and from without, except that the within is itself determined by the without, and vice versa. As Bakhtin put it in the 1929 Preface to *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*: 'every literary work is internally, immanently sociological' (*DP* 276).

The same structure works for the relation of the psyche to the social: Graham Pechey notes that if Formalism 'had only gone as far as to bracket out the authorial psyche as "cause" of the work, Bakhtin takes the more radical step of theorizing this "cause" as an effect of the same (discursive) order as the work itself'.³¹ The distinction between the different realities of inner and outer realms is broken down by the sign which partakes of both: in *Freudianism*, Voloshinov describes them as the difference between 'inner' and 'outer' speech (*FMC* 21-4). Consciousness is not, therefore, analyzable as an interior state of being as in conventional theories of psychology and ideology but can only be interpreted through, and as a part of, the semiotic system which is

itself a social phenomenon. Thus the whole of social reality, signs, language, and the psyche are seamlessly stitched together.

Voloshinov's critique of Freudianism, which in general has always remained undervalued in comparison to the other works of the Bakhtin Circle, has the distinction of providing the earliest theory of a political unconscious in which the text of history produces revolutionary change, though Voloshinov senses no imperative to detect the traces of a vast, uninterrupted narrative of class struggle as Jameson does. The critique is particularly interesting in that for all his attack on the premises and categories of psychoanalysis, Voloshinov does not dismiss the idea of the unconscious as such. Instead he suggests that, given the absence of a dividing line between the individual psyche and the formulated ideology of its social milieu, what Freud calls the conscious constitutes the official or dominant ideology, while what he calls the unconscious forms the unofficial or revolutionary ideology:

Those areas of behavioural ideology that correspond to Freud's official, 'censored' conscious express the most steadfast and the governing factors of class consciousness. They lie close to the formulated, fully fledged ideology of the class in question, its law, its morality, its world outlook.... Other levels, corresponding to Freud's unconscious, lie at a great distance from the stable system of the ruling ideology. They bespeak the disintegration of the unity and integrity of the system, the vulnerability of the usual ideological motivations. (*FMC* 88-9)

Although not every motive in contradiction with official ideology will do so, any that is founded on the economic

being of a whole group

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 exactly how a revolutionary ideology in all spheres of culture comes about. (FMC 90)

On the one hand, Voloshinov admits that motives in contradiction with official ideology, in the social *déclassé* loner, ‘little by little really do turn into a “foreign body” in the psyche’ (FMC 89), thus in a certain sense validating the findings of psychoanalysis and providing a proleptic political interpretation of the cryptonymy of Abraham and Torok. On the other hand, Voloshinov also puts forward a theory of revolutionary change based on Freud’s model in which contradictions and censored ideologies can ‘ultimately burst asunder the system of the official ideology’ (FMC 88). If this seems to anticipate Kristeva, Voloshinov also comes close to Reich when at one point he implies that psychoanalysis itself constitutes a revolutionary movement.³²

The sign

Whereas Saussure stresses language’s role as a system of social conventions, Voloshinov emphasizes the function of the sign above all as ‘an ideological phenomenon, a product of social intercourse’ (FMC 115). This might at first seem contradictory, in so far as ideology conventionally requires the category of consciousness. But Voloshinov redefines consciousness itself as the effect

of the production of signs in social interaction, as 'a social-ideological fact', which means that it cannot be explained in terms of idealism or psychologism because it is always located between individuals: 'Signs can arise only on *interindividual territory*' (MPL 12). Thus ideology does not exist in an individual consciousness which can be opposed to the real, as inner to outer, because it both comments on and partakes of the real:

Any ideological product is not only itself a part of reality (natural or social), just as is any physical body, any instrument of production, or any product for consumption, it also, in contradistinction to these other phenomena, reflects and refracts another reality outside itself. (MPL 9)

Language therefore occupies a special place within the social sphere because it has a unique double role: it is both itself a part of reality but also simultaneously 'reflects and refracts another reality outside itself'. The basis for Bakhtin's main argument about the novel can be seen to be already available here. The sign does not merely reflect reality, but also 'refracts' it as an effect of the competing social interests in a society, in other words, as an effect of the class struggle:

Class does not coincide with the sign community, *i.e.* with the community, which is the totality of users of the same set of signs for ideological communication. Thus various different classes will use one and the same language. As a result, differently oriented accents intersect in every ideological sign. Sign becomes an arena of the class struggle. (MPL 23)

This 'social multiaccentuality of the ideological sign'

constitutes Voloshinov's most significant and influential theoretical contribution. It must be emphasized, however, that it is a concept incompatible with the category of consciousness, and therefore also with conventional accounts of ideology.

Since it never actually becomes the thing to which it refers, the sign can always remain contested, accented, stressed or evaluated according to the disposition of a particular system, language, or class. It is thanks to 'this intersecting of accents that a sign maintains its vitality and dynamism and the capacity for further development'. It is also just this aspect of the sign that allows it to become a force both for domination and for subversion:

The very same thing that makes the ideological sign vital and mutable is also ... that which makes it a refracting and distorting medium. The ruling class strives to impart a supra-class, eternal character to the ideological sign, to extinguish it or drive inward the struggle between social value judgements which occurs in it, to make the sign uniaccentual. (*MPL* 23)

This is the process that Bakhtin will describe as the drive to monology by the dominant class and its discourse. But Janus-like, the sign is two-faced: it has an 'inner dialogic quality' which means that it can become a kind of double-talk, its accent shifting ineluctably between truth and falsity, affirmation and disavowal. Although all language has the quality whereby 'any current curse word can become a word of praise, any current truth must inevitably sound to many other people as the greatest lie', this inner dialectical quality of the sign is normally restrained by the pressure of a dominant ideology which

maintains a single established meaning. It is, according to Voloshinov, only at the time of social or revolutionary crisis that this antithetical aspect of the sign emerges. In the persuasive thesis of his book on Rabelais, Bakhtin was to add another privileged moment, that of carnival. At its simplest, Bakhtin's theory of 'dialogism' finds its basis here in the ambivalence of the sign, indeed of representation itself, whereby any sign can address or refer to anything outside itself without becoming or subsuming it—and thus potentially always stand open to reaccentuation or reinflexion.³³ As Kristeva recognized, the contested nature of the sign also provokes as its corollaries the denial of univocal meaning, unfinalisable interpretation, the negation of originary presence in speech, the positioning of the subject in and by discourse, the breaking down of the identity of the subject, all inside/outside oppositions, the semantic identity of the sign, and 'the crumbling away of the representational system' as such (*RP* 114). Bakhtin takes the principle of dialogism very far, eventually developing it into a theory of the novel, society, and indeed of life itself.

'Inauthentic Direct Discourse'

The great attraction of Voloshinov's account of the struggle for the sign is that it brings the class struggle to the level of language and by implication also offers an immediacy to the politics of writing. Bakhtin's dialogism develops this basic idea of the multiaccentuality of the sign, but shows that when its logical implications are extended an increasing complexity begins to make problems for the engaging politics which Voloshinov's prescription promises.

These difficulties begin in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* itself: if its thesis is summarized—as it often is—into ‘the struggle for the sign’, then all is well. But if there is a struggle for each sign, or word, so making it multiaccentuated, then discourse in general—the Russian *slovo* means both word and discourse—becomes more problematic because your own language will always itself be marked by past struggles, very probably without your having any knowledge of it. This is particularly the case with reported speech: in Part III Voloshinov proposes a division of discourse into the typologies of ‘direct speech’ and ‘reported speech’. He notes in the Russian language ‘an extraordinary ease of interaction and interpenetration between reporting and reported speech’ (MPL 127): it is not here a question of the use of indirect discourse as a formal literary style, but rather the way in which within ordinary direct speech there is, as Voloshinov puts it, ‘anticipated and disseminated reported speech concealed in the authorial context and, as it were, breaking into real, direct utterances’ (MPL 135). This means that even in ordinary speech ‘almost every word ... figures simultaneously in two intersecting contexts, two speech acts’ (MPL 136). Voloshinov emphasizes the way in which this allows a continuous ironising of speech—not only enabling the speaker to reinflect the reported speech he or she uses, but also allowing the reported speech to ironise the speaker unawares.

This argument for a ‘double-oriented speech’ problematizes the earlier argument for the struggle over the sign. Such a struggle assumes an intentionality on the part of the speaker that can be put into effect; double-oriented speech means, however, not simply that the other’s signs can be shifted in meaning, recontextualized,

but that your own signs were never your own in the first place. They are always already ironised and ready to shift into a different perspective from that which you intended, as an effect of the ‘disseminated reported speech concealed’ in your words. The subject is not in a position to control the alterity of discourse—the speech of the other will always be encrypted in your language. The subject thus becomes as much a tissue of conflicting forces as the sign itself. At this point the differences between Voloshinov’s and Foucault’s theories of discourse become evident. The former’s stress on the prevalence of reported speech within discourse must be incompatible with Foucault’s notion of rival, and therefore distinct, stratifications of language and discourses of truth. For reported speech makes it impossible to maintain distinctions between discourses in the first place.

In the final section of the book Voloshinov broaches the question of ‘quasi-direct discourse’ (*uneigentliche direkte Rede*, improper or unreal direct discourse—or, to bring out its un-Heideggerian quality, inauthentic direct discourse). In a discussion of its definition as ‘concealed or veiled discourse’, he observes that in a novel this means that the form of speech ‘does not at all contain an “either/or” dilemma; its *specificum* is precisely a matter of *both* author *and* character speaking at the same time, a matter of a single linguistic construction within which the accents of two differently oriented voices are maintained’ (MPL 144). So the proper has become improper: and at this arresting point Voloshinov anxiously tries to draw the line. He ends his book by denouncing the ‘alarming instability and uncertainty of [the] ideological word’, pleading for a return to ‘the word that really means and takes responsibility for what it

says' (MPL 159). But it is too late: his whole text argues otherwise. The characteristic structure here becomes observable of the workings of what Kristeva called an 'other logic' of alterity that transgresses the either/or forms of Western rationalism. It is this quality which Bakhtin, far from denouncing, celebrated as 'dialogism': not merely its simple form in which an utterance must be considered from the point of view of being spoken by someone and addressed to another, but in its radical implication that discourse cannot be proper or authentic, because it is double-voiced, a 'double-accented, double-styled *hybrid construction*' (DI 304). We have analysed elsewhere how dialogism in this guise of hybridity can be transformed into an interrogative, critical instrument. But can the same apply to dialogism itself?

Dialogism

Dialogism first appears as an important concept in the book on Dostoevsky where it is used to describe the particular discursive form of Dostoevsky's 'polyvalent' novel. Dostoevsky's world, says Bakhtin, is 'profoundly *pluralistic*' (DP 26): instead of the authorial position dominating the novel and the speeches of the characters, the speech and ideologies of the different characters compete without ever being concluded:

In Dostoevsky's novels, the life experience of the characters and their discourse may be resolved as far as plot is concerned, but internally they remain incomplete and unresolved. (DI 349)

This kind of novel, Bakhtin claims, developed from the

same medieval comic genres to be described in his book on Rabelais: somewhere in the seventeenth century they lost their laughter—about the same time, interestingly enough, that Foucault argues that the Western world excluded folly and madness from normal life. According to Bakhtin, these comic genres developed through satire into the dialogic form used by Dostoevsky. Though from a conventional point of view Dostoevsky's novels appear 'a chaos, and the construction of his novels some sort of conglomerate of disparate materials and incompatible principles for shaping them' (DP 8), Bakhtin characterizes this as a new version of the carnivalesque, so that the novel takes on its anti-ideological and anti-totalizing functions. Accordingly Bakhtin praises the 'rigorous unfinalisability and dialogic openness of Dostoevsky's artistic world' in which the hero's consciousness of self 'lives by its unfinalisability, by its unclosedness, and its indeterminacy' (DP 272, 53). Later he would apply this to himself, commenting on 'a certain *internal* open-endedness of many of my ideas' (SG 155).

In *Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin opposes the dialogic novel to the more usual monological form of which Tolstoy is given as the prime example. But already within this book, the ramifications of dialogism are extended quite dramatically. If dialogue began as a description of a feature of the utterance, it quickly becomes a principle of almost everything. Those things resistant to dialogism—which Bakhtin calls 'poetry'—retreat further and further from his gaze and indeed becomes less and less possible as dialogism spreads beyond language and subsumes ever greater areas of human activity. For the dialogic principle is everywhere and permeates everything: '*Life by its very nature is dialogic*' (DP 293, my emphasis). No material or historical

explanation is offered for what Bakhtin describes: instead dialogism itself becomes a founding principle of language and meaning:

Dialogic relationships exist among all elements of novelistic structure; that is, they are juxtaposed contrapuntally. And this is so because dialogic relationships are a much broader phenomena than mere rejoinders in a dialogue, laid out compositionally in the text; they are an almost universal phenomenon, permeating all human speech and all relationships and manifestations of human life—in general, everything that has meaning and significance. (*DP* 40)

Dialogism's ubiquity is such that, as Todorov points out, logically it becomes impossible to distinguish between monologic and dialogic discourse, since all discourse is by definition dialogic, that is, maintains inter-textual relations.³⁴ In the last analysis, dialogism breaks down all same/other oppositions even while it is itself predicated on them. Insisting on differences, dialogism simultaneously negates their very possibility, just as carnivalisation not only involves a decentring of the official discursive norms (such as Bakhtin claims for Sterne—'a parody of the logical and expressive structure of any ideological discourse as such'), but ultimately becomes, as in Rabelais—'a parody of the very act of conceptualizing anything in language' (*DI* 308-9). All conceptual distinctions that Bakhtin proposes in his texts are inexorably propelled as if towards their own dissolution in the same way.

The function of dialogism is more than one of mere negation and dispersal however, for while, like the carnival, it denies and destroys it also simultaneously revives and renews. The movement of dialogism is also

the means by which ideology is changed and generated rather than remaining given; it both portrays and enacts the struggle for meaning and dominance among different socio-political groups in society. This linguistic and ideological conflict over representation is unending and cannot achieve closure, utopic or otherwise: it is not a contradictory struggle in the usual sense of a dialectical materialism. Representations, ideologies, are generated and die: there is no possibility of any ultimate resolution into a realm of truth, because dialogism always enforces

a radical scepticism toward any unmediated discourse and any straightforward seriousness, a scepticism bordering on rejection of the very possibility of having a straightforward discourse at all that would not be false. (*DI* 401)

Of course by the same token a dialogized discourse cannot be true either. It will always be ironised. In this sense what we get in Bakhtin is a kind of negative knowledge reminiscent of Adorno's, implying the impossibility of all hermeneutics: truth and dialogism can only contradict each other. So, for Bakhtin, the novel can unmask, but it can never reveal truth:

Truth is restored by reducing the lie to an absurdity, but truth itself does not seek words; she is afraid to entangle herself in the word, to soil herself in verbal pathos. (*DI* 309)

Truth, then, is a word which can never mean itself, can never, paradoxically, as a word be made to mean anything but the shadow of its opposite. What we get is what Bakhtin calls a 'gay deception', an 'inter-illumination', a 'verbal and semantical decentring of the

ideological world' comparable to Adorno's claim that what a negative cultural criticism can achieve is the 'defetishization' of ideology. However Bakhtin leaves the humourless Adorno behind in his Nietzschean celebration of what is variously translated as a 'gay' or a 'jolly' relativity (*DI* 401, 363, 367). For Bakhtin, as for Gogol, 'laughter is the only serious element'.³⁵ Laughter disrupts all closure and, like death, will always introduce alterity.

Carnival

In his best known example, Bakhtin found dialogism embodied in carnival. Here the dialectical quality of the sign, its two-facedness, becomes manifest in a social institution, the medieval carnival which comprised, he suggests, 'a second world and a second life outside officialdom' for medieval people. The laughter of carnival produced a moment of freedom:

carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the feast of becoming, change, and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed. (*RW* 10)

Carnival's significance was thus not so much that it constituted a form of resistance but rather that it gave the people a break; moreover it enabled the kind of

transparent communication without let or hindrance between all subjects of society which Habermas looks forward to—

a special type of communication impossible in everyday life. This led to the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came into contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times. (*RW* 10)

According to Bakhtin, in Rabelais we find the representation of this kind of carnivalesque expression, as well as the whole related tradition of folk humour embodied in the comic genres of medieval literature.

As we have seen, some literary critics have tended to emphasize carnival as the centre of Bakhtin's work.³⁶ It is not certain, however, that it can be detached from its place in Bakhtin's larger argument: by the time of its re-emergence in the form of the nineteenth-century novel, for example, carnival has simply become a name for a new manifestation of the ubiquitous dialogic principle. In its historical manifestation as a Medieval and Renaissance institution, carnival is often offered as an example of a revolutionary dispersal of hegemonic feudal order, its uncontrollable laughter allegedly performing a political, anti-ideological role. But if carnival also allows a special kind of communication which momentarily restores a lost 'utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance' (*RW* 9), this means that these functions are in contradiction with each other—which means that carnival as a concept is itself dialogical. Carnival both produces and abolishes dialogism: it enforces a distance from the

official culture, but permits no distance between its participants. It is both parodic, subversive of the official ideology but necessarily remaining within its terms, and an uncensored realm of free expression, implying an originary utopic realm rather than the competing points of view of heteroglossia. It is as if carnival works according to the contradictory descriptions of both the Freudian and the Jungian unconscious. Like the former, it requires repression in order to have any force; carnival necessarily declined with the rise of democratic forms of government. Any anti-ideological function is further complicated by the frequent objection that carnival was permitted, often organized, by the state authorities and thus could be said merely to constitute an instance of repressive tolerance, a structure perfectly illustrated in Adam Smith's suggestion in *The Wealth of Nations* that the state should arrange carnivals so as to mitigate the disabling effects of capitalism—an idea he doubtless got from the contemporary practice on the slave-plantations in the Caribbean.³⁷

Despite the widespread celebration of carnival for its invocation of the social realm, it is noticeable that for Bakhtin himself the carnival in which he takes any interest remains very much within the bounds of the literary. The 'dialogic resistance' which Bakhtin promises occurs at the level of language, particularly the novel (necessarily, therefore, within discourse) and not in the realm of a 'social history' that is somehow outside it. It involves antithetical institutional discourses: carnival's 'lively play with the "languages" of poets, scholars, monks' is described as 'consciously opposed' to authoritarian literary language: 'It was parodic, and aimed sharply and polemically against the official languages of its given time. It was heteroglossia that had

been dialogized' (DI 273). Parody necessarily has to remain within the orbit of monological languages in order to dialogize them; the ordinary language of the people outside these discourses makes up a heteroglossia that has not been dialogized and therefore remains politically ineffective, simply disorganized, even if attractively anarchic:

As distinct from the opaque mixing of languages in living utterances that are spoken in a historically evolving language ... the novelistic hybrid is an *artistically organized system for bringing different languages in contact with one another*, a system having as its goal the illumination of one language by means of another' (DI 361).

The novel achieves its special status, and special perspective, by 'artistically organizing' the languages of heteroglossia. In itself heteroglossia is 'mindless', 'an opaque mechanistic mixture of languages' (DI 366); it is because of this that Bakhtin places so much emphasis on carnival. In his view carnival provides the only historical moment in which the heteroglossia of the world is dialogized. Dancing in the streets thus partakes of the utopic, nostalgic element in carnival; parody of the official discourses by contrast makes up the subversive, politically effective component. The implication of this is that while on the one hand social carnival is the realm of freedom from constraint, it is only when it is directed by being given form in the novel that it becomes politically effective. Carnival itself, as Eagleton has observed, is

a spasmodic, officially licensed affair, without the rancour, discipline and organization, essential for an effective revolutionary politics. Any politics which predicates itself on the carnivalesque moment alone

will be no more than a compliant, containable libertarianism.³⁸

Although this is probably over dismissive, it is clear that carnival is too ambivalent a concept to use as a general category of political subversion; even when dialogized, its politics are likely to be as open-ended as anything else in Bakhtin. Bakhtin's 'unfinalisability' is only subversive when open-endedness itself is subversive, as was of course the case during the Stalinism of his own day. The suppression of *Rabelais and its World* in 1946 (it was failed when submitted as a thesis) at least testifies to its potential political effectivity at a particular historical moment. Even if it was in fact prevented from making any intervention, someone in Soviet academia seems to have feared the disruptive force of carnival in Bakhtin. Dehistoricized and extracted as a concept, a quasi-metaphysical principle, or as a general axiom of revolutionary textual politics, carnival becomes less workable. This is the general conclusion of Stallybrass and White's *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, the most sustained example of the use of carnival for a transhistorical cultural study. The politics of carnival, they argue, cannot be essentialized but must depend on examination of the specific historical conjuncture at issue. For them, carnival's political and analytic force can only be preserved by considering it as merely 'one instance of a generalized economy of transgression and of the recoding of high/low relations across the whole social structure'.³⁹ Carnival therefore becomes a privileged example of the symbolic inversions in the characteristic binarisms of a class society. We have already discussed in the previous chapter the way in which Stallybrass and White end by showing how the dualism of high and low

applies equally well to the nostalgia of academics for the rough world outside the institution. Perhaps this bleak analysis explains why in the same year that *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* was published, Eagleton commented:

The concept of carnival, looked at in another light, may be little more than the intellectual's guilty dues to the populace, the soul's blood money, to the body; what is truly unseemly, indecent even, is the apparent eagerness of deans, chaired professors and presidents of learned societies to tumble from their offices into the streets, monstrous papier mâché phalluses fixed in place.⁴⁰

Bakhtin's carnival does not then, after all, enable you to leave the academy to dance in the streets. For the institutionalized critic, there is no easy passage from one domain to the other—if only because Bakhtin has broken down the distinction between the two. The academic fantasy of moving out on to the streets is itself disrupted by the carnivalization of academic disciplines.

Dialogism and Dialectics

Bakhtin, therefore, offered a somewhat perilous 'way out' for Marxist criticism, although of course it all depends what kind of Marxism you're talking about. While an orthodox Marxist would consider Bakhtin's notion of the word as the guarantor of human freedom idealist, it has been considered perfectly compatible for followers of Habermas.⁴¹ Let us say instead therefore that Bakhtin involves major difficulties for a number of significant classical Marxist concepts. The eagerness to claim Bakhtin

as a major Marxist aesthetician meant that there was little sustained analysis of these problems.⁴² Bakhtin's strength, Eagleton has argued, was that he put the motifs of deconstruction 'scandalously, in a firmly social context'.⁴³ But the notion of a social and historical framework begins to seem less secure when Bakhtin explores the ways in which context and framing destabilize rather than produce fixity of meanings in a sociohistorical framework. The theories of the sign and of dialogism of Voloshinov and Bakhtin themselves break down the possibility of this conventional inner/outer, psyche/social division. Bakhtin's emphasis on the prevalence of 'reported speech' in discourse makes the whole notion of placing anything 'firmly' in context much more problematic. The point is rather that the context can always be changed:

The speech of another, once enclosed in a context, is—no matter how accurately transmitted—always subject to certain semantic changes. The context embracing another's word is responsible for its dialogizing background, whose influence can be very great. Given the appropriate methods for framing, one may bring about fundamental changes even in another's utterance accurately quoted. (*DI* 340)

Bakhtin argues that the transmission of speech provides a means for 'an interpretive frame, a tool for reconceptualization and reaccenting' (*DI* 339); it is only through the fluidity of context, which allows a constant decontextualizing and reframing, that the sign can be multiaccentuated rather than monological. This means that texts can never be anchored to a particular context, social or otherwise:

There cannot be a unified (single) contextual meaning. Therefore, there can be neither a first nor a last meaning; it always exists among other meanings as a link in the chain of meaning.... In historical life, this chain continues indefinitely. (SG 146)

The fixity of meaning produced by social context is therefore the very thing that Bakhtin's work disallows. In the same way, the refusal of teleology in favour of repetition goes directly against any conventional Marxist account of history. Indeed history itself loses all stability as it becomes dialogized: 'Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all)—they will always change' (SG 170). History as a form of understanding cannot therefore be said to constitute either a ground or a context.

Above all, though, there is the difference between dialogism and dialectics. There have been attempts to assimilate the two. In *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Fredric Jameson readjusted Bakhtin's dialogism so that it could be employed as a description of straightforward class-struggle within the overall framework of dialectical materialism. Because Bakhtin's work was, he claimed, restricted to the notion of carnival, it was

necessary to add the qualification that the normal form of the dialogical is essentially an *antagonistic* one, and that the dialogue of class struggle is one in which two opposing discourses fight it out within the general unity of a shared code.⁴⁴

Jameson then went on to argue that Bakhtin's dialogism was indistinguishable from orthodox Marxist dialectics—'the basic formal requirement of dialectical analysis is

maintained, and its elements are still restructured in terms of *contradiction*' (85). Such an argument that Bakhtin's ideas were restricted to carnival and therefore needed to be extended—into a traditional dialectics—signals a move of annexation and limitation. Bakhtin himself in fact frequently stressed that dialogism should not be confused with Hegelian or Marxist dialectics. Dialogism cannot be resolved; it has no teleology. It is unfinalisable and open ended. It defines itself by its refusal of all forms of transcendence, all attempts to unify. Bakhtin always maintained a distrust of what he called 'Hegel's monological dialectic'.⁴⁵ So, for example, he criticized Engelhardt's analysis of Dostoevsky precisely on the grounds that he attempted to turn the novelist's dialogism into a transcendent dialectics:

Engelhardt ... monologises Dostoevsky's world, reduces it to a philosophical monologue unfolding dialectically. The unified, dialectically evolving spirit, understood in Hegelian terms, can give rise to nothing but a philosophical monologue. (DP 26)

In Bakhtin's own terms, any individual elements that are contained will be set against each other unmerged, rather as in Dante's world where 'multi-leveledness is extended into eternity' (DP 27).

As early as 1966, Kristeva had argued that an 'other logic' permeates Bakhtin's work, a logic of non-exclusive opposites and permanent contradiction that transgresses the monologic true/false forms of Western rationalism. This was in accordance with Bakhtin's claim to have identified 'the special logic revealed in Dostoevsky's works' which cannot be understood 'in the usual referentially logical, systematic plane' of ordinary

philosophy (*DP* 299). Dialogism is not finite: it is open, and seeks neither final resolution nor synthesis. Its fundamental structure is one of alterity: poles stay apart, 'regulated by the co-ordinates I and another' (*DP* 299) as in Buber's I-Thou relations. Dialogism, as Kristeva saw, should not be confused with dialectics (*WDN* 88-9, *RP* 110). A few years later Bakhtin himself obligingly spelt it out, describing the mechanism whereby dialogism is reduced to monologism in doing so:

Dialogue and dialectics. Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that's how you get dialectics. (*SG* 147)⁴⁶

Bakhtin came to attribute the 'special logic' of dialogism to the novel in general. For Kristeva, it was this discovery of 'a logic of distance, relativity, analogy, nonexclusive and transfinite opposition' (*WDN* 85-6) which constituted the particular significance of his work.

The Novel

In a similar way, Bakhtin offers a very different theory of the novel from others in the Marxist tradition. Unlike most theorists since Lenin, he conceives the novel not as a reflection of society but as a site which heteroglossia 'enters'. He rewrites the orthodox imperative, 'the novel must be a full and comprehensive reflection of its era' accordingly:

The novel must represent all the social and ideological voices of its era, that is, all the era's languages that have any claim to being significant; the novel must be a microcosm of heteroglossia. (*DI* 411)

The novel doesn't actually take us into the streets but *represents* them, in a microcosm of the macrocosm. Bakhtin implies that all the different discourses and positions in society are necessarily depicted in the novel, speaking and contesting in the novel as in the world outside. Although he emphasizes at times that the novel presents a typified image of language (*DI* 336-7), at the same time there is also a constant implication that the novel in fact manages to avoid representation altogether because it merely stages, rehearses, or repeats the actual language of the everyday, which 'enters' the novel from the outside (if language is already a form of representation, it does not itself have to be represented in the novel). Thus Bakhtin characteristically tends to slide indiscriminately between the two, having it both ways, rather in the way that he often blurs the distinction between actual medieval carnivals and their representation in Rabelais' text.⁴⁷

This breakdown of distinctions occurs at another level with the novel itself. This is because the novel, which alone of all the literary genres resists monologism through the dialogism of heteroglossia, is really a metagenre, strictly speaking not a genre at all, identified not so much with the novel's more usual manifestations on the bookshelf, but rather as a transhistorical form with a protean ability to synthesize and subsume other genres and discourses. The carnivalesque is also carnivorous: the novel is a carnivore, ingesting and devouring. Whereas

most other genres constitute themselves through forms of exclusion, the novel alone incorporates all others as others and yet maintains its separate status as 'it fights for its own hegemony' (*DI* 4). The more carnivorous it is, the more it resists monologism, for like carnival, the novel is itself dialogical. It is thus an anti-authoritarian, democratizing art form which represents the multiplicity of conflict around representation in the life which it re-enacts, resisting all totalizing narratives or theories while itself being driven towards totalization by its ability to absorb and restage the heteroglossia of society as a whole.

The idea that language in society, as in the novel, is heteroglot and fully represents 'the coexistence of socio-ideological contradictions' allows no space, however, for what a novel does not say, for things which cannot be said. Or to shift from Macherey to Foucault, it assumes that there are no groups in society that are voiceless or silent, that none have been excluded from speech as such.⁴⁸ Carnival, as Stallybrass and White point out, in fact 'often violently abuses and demonizes *weaker*, not stronger, social groups—women, ethnic and religious minorities, those who "don't belong"—in a process of *displaced abjection*'.⁴⁹ In other respects Bakhtin is close to Foucault: for both thinkers, society consists of competing contradictory discourses (though as we have seen the presence of reported speech means that for Bakhtin discourses can never be as stratified as for Foucault), each of which express a different order of things that successively strive for and resist totalization. Both continue to endorse a broadly Marxist perspective in the argument that a dominant power structure will seek to impose monologism. In Bakhtin, however, instead of Foucault's total interdependence of power and resistance,

we have the promise of an dynamic oscillation between the forces of totalization and detotalization.

Dialogism does not of itself offer any theory of power. Aside from his more metaphysical inferences, Bakhtin always explains the operation of the struggle between centripetal and centrifugal forces in terms of the heteroglossia inherent to language. According to Bakhtin each of society's conflicting discourses attempts to dominate the others in order to produce a monologic unitary state. The drive towards 'concrete verbal and ideological unification' (*DI* 271) develops in intrinsic connection with the processes of sociopolitical and cultural centralization. Simultaneously, however, society's other linguistic stratifications work against this towards decentralization:

Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward. (*DI* 272)

Language always provides the fulcrum for such conflict of power, its diversity producing an irreducible antagonism that begins more to resemble Nietzschean conflictual forces than the class struggle or economic contradiction. If heteroglossia needs to be dialogized in the novel to become effective, there nevertheless seems to be a benign trust expressed here that whether individuals are aware of it or not absolute monologism is impossible, for heteroglossia will always ensure decentralization. At times this almost seems to imply that the diverse languages of different social groups will in effect do our politics for us.

Identity and the Other

As we have seen, it was the Nietzschean aspect of Bakhtin that Kristeva isolated as early as 1966 in her discussion of the negativity of the carnivalesque. Beyond its well-debated qualities of ideological subversion, she saw in carnival itself the consequences of Bakhtin's dialogism of non-exclusive oppositions:

A carnival participant is both actor and spectator; he loses his sense of individuality, passes through a zero point of carnivalesque activity and splits into a subject of the spectacle and an object of the game. Within the carnival, the subject is reduced to nothingness, while the structure of *the author* emerges as an anonymity that creates and sees itself created as self and other, as man and mask. The cynicism of this carnivalesque scene, which destroys a god in order to impose its own dialogical laws, calls to mind Nietzsche's Dionysianism. (WDN 78)

The carnivalesque dismembers the identity principle: the participants lose their identities and no longer coincide with themselves. So too, if 'other voicedness' is always a condition for voice, then the self is always constituted by the other, the otherness of discourse, by the voices of the dead. 'It is customary to speak about the authorial mask. But in which utterances ... is there a *face* and not a *mask*?' (SG 152). A self must always already be internally dialogized because it must always speak through another's mask, like the fools and clowns at carnival time, except that in speech there can only be an unending series of masks, for the other's mask itself speaks through

another mask, itself the mask of a mask *ad infinitum*.⁵⁰ There is never an originary moment for speech or for the self, never an original voice, which also means that there can never be proper meanings, originary or final truths: only echoes, pastiches, parodies, myths, ghostly and ghastly repetitions.

As Bakhtin describes it:

The limit of precision in the natural sciences is identity ($a=a$). In the human sciences precision is surmounting the otherness of the other without transforming him into purely one's own (any kind of substitution, modernization, nonrecognition of the other, and so forth). (SG 169)

This suggests the attractions of Bakhtin's work for certain forms of minority politics. It opens up the possibility of an opening to the other which does not construct it as an absolute other or transform it into the same. In addition, heteroglossia offers a means of breaking up the dominant monological discourses of oppressive systems, be they patriarchal, colonial, or neocolonial, and allowing other voices to speak. Thus, for example, Bakhtin has recently been invoked optimistically in anthropology, colonial discourse theory, minority and subaltern studies, as having made available a way in which a dialogue can be set up so that while speaking to the other, the other can also speak and be listened to.⁵¹ At this point it begins to seem that if Bakhtin's project resembles any other, it must be that of Levinas, for its consistent ethical endeavour is to respect the alterity of the other and to resist the monological drive to incorporate it within the same. But for all their resemblances, particularly in the stress of both upon dialogue, Levinas always assumes an

authentic speech—which is the very possibility that Bakhtin undermines.⁵²

The trouble is that the straightforward notion of dialogue in the sense of conversation remains within the very terms of the binary oppositions which Bakhtin's work also breaks down. Dialogism, Bakhtin even admits, 'cannot ultimately be fitted into the frame of any manifest dialogue, into the frame of a mere conversation between persons' (*DI* 326). All discourse will rather enact the more complex radical experience of the 'voiced otherness' which Bakhtin first isolated in Dostoevsky. To the extent that it overruns the identity principle, dialogism questions the very possibility of sameness and otherness as such in language. Here Bakhtin comes closer to Derrida than Levinas—which is not to identify them, not because of any simple opposition between speech and writing but rather because any similarities are dislocated by the exotopy that necessarily enforces a radical exteriority between dialogism and deconstruction. Dialogism names voice as the basis of language's conflictual basis, its ambivalence and doubledness, its irreducible alterity which produces a 'dialogic correlation between identity and non-identity' (*SG* 159). There therefore can be no same and no other as such. Voice can only be achieved through other voices. Instead of allowing the self or the other to speak, dialogism refracts authorial intention, producing a 'mutual outsidersness' (*SG* 168) of both same and other. This opens up

the possibility of never having to define oneself in language ... of saying 'I am me' in someone else's language, and in my own language, 'I am other'. (*DI* 315)

'Not-I in me' (SG 146): dialogism cannot offer the ability, in Philip Lewis' formulation, 'to bespeak the other without compromising its alterity' but only because it must mean that there is no discourse of the other as such—for if there is no same neither can there be an other.⁵³

This radical alterity makes Bakhtin tricky to use in conjunction with any conventional model of the Other, because with him sameness and difference become imbricated together. The same difficulty holds for theory. As David Carroll has stressed, representation, narrative or theory cannot encompass dialogism without it becoming monological; in this sense they have the same function as poetry, against which the novel is defined, and will only reduce heterogeneity to sameness.⁵⁴ Unless, that is, they are themselves dialogized, in which case, those who saw a 'way out' in Bakhtin were in a sense right after all. Bakhtin's position may conflict with the central tenets of many an orthodoxy, indeed of the very project of 'theory' itself, but he does facilitate a move into the promised realm of the social. Not however by helping us to leave the academy to dance in the streets, but by breaking down the very dualism on which this opposition is predicated. For Bakhtin enacts in his work the process of exotopy: 'not merging with another, but preserving one's own position of *extralocality* [exotopy] and the *surplus* of vision and understanding connected with it' (DP 299). If Bakhtin enables and sustains this recognition of and identification with irreducible otherness, of sameness with difference, it also means that the social will not be recognizable as 'the social' any more. It will have rather become what Stallybrass and White identify as a form of 'the grotesque': 'a boundary phenomenon of hybridization or inmixing, in which self

and other become enmeshed in an inclusive, heterogeneous, dangerously unstable zone' (193). The self has become other, and the social is a part of the self: since a Marxist criticism will always consider the self to be part of the social, this could represent the resolution of the long-running argument that Marxism neglects the sphere of subjectivity.

Bakhtin, therefore, undermines the distinction between insides and outsides on which so much cultural criticism is predicated. He shows the operation of a conflict that has become even more complex than tracing the effects of social antagonism in the torn halves of culture, but at the cost of breaking down the divisions from which critique can be constructed. It is one thing to sustain irresolvable contradictions in the manner of an Adorno, another to operate a criticism as a form of the grotesque, dissolving all distinctions, and therefore any ground for criticism as such. The draw of the binary is too strong, its appeal too seductive. Without it, political positions, identities, even of cultural hybridity, seem unsustainable. Is it impossible to reconcile this requirement with the far-reaching consequences of dialogization? In short, does dialogism disable dialectics?

Although the diversity of languages will ensure that totalization never occurs, for Bakhtin political critique and intervention comes with the added component of dialogization. At the same time, we have seen how Bakhtin also claims that the dialogic principle operates everywhere without specific voluntaristic intervention. His argument oscillates between the two. From the perspective of Adorno, it could be maintained that dialogism, in its primary form, enacts and stages the antagonistic conflicts within society itself. Its dynamism, derived from the diversity of languages, is the result of

social conflict, and need not therefore rely on a philosophical principle. But even if it begins in this way, as we have seen Bakhtin insists that it does not operate dialectically. Indeed, not only does it not work towards a final resolution, it does not even sustain the conflict that is the product of its own generative social situation: dialogics works remorselessly towards ever greater decentralization and dispersion. At the same time, it is noticeable that Bakhtin never formally abandons the central antimony of centrifugal and centripetal forces, a structure of totalization and detotalization in some ways comparable to Adorno's dialectic of transcendent and immanent critique. But whereas Adorno stresses that for an effective cultural criticism the two must necessarily be deployed at once, sustaining each other even while each shows how the other is individually impossible, Bakhtin identifies only one of his torn halves as the basis for criticism, and then emphasizes the detotalizing force of dialogics to the extent that he begins to undo the original generative dialectic on which his argument was originally predicated. The over-reaching consequences of dialogism, operating within a dialectic of centripetal and centrifugal forces, but then turning against dialectics as such, meant that it apparently ended up by dissolving all boundaries so that conceptual distinctions as such became impossible to sustain. Dialogism, in other words, when pushed to its logical conclusions, seems to go too far, to make criticism impossible.

The question that remains, however, is whether its operation within the dialectic of centripetal and centrifugal forces means that dialogism sustains or dissolves the tension between them. The whole 'struggle over Bakhtin', between apparently incompatible different versions of his work, suggests that *dialogism is itself*

dialogical. In other words, dialogism is also two-faced, two-voiced: a 'double-accented, double-styled *hybrid construction*' (DI 304); it does not merely describe such doubling, it stages and enacts it in its full incompatibilities. Dialogism works as an internally riven economy, whereby in one domain it consists of the benign openness of intersubjective exchange between multiple voices, while in another it also enables a critical, subversive, contestatory challenge to monological, hegemonic forms of authority which it shows can be transgressed and contested. Dialogism thus itself involves a dialogic hybridity: of a dissonant heterogeneity which retains a critical, dialectical cutting edge. Its own antimonies, which seem always on the brink of dissolving each other, operate within an oscillating dynamic of centripetal and centrifugal forces not as the irresolvable flux of a Nietzschean *agon* but in a dislocating fissure that is simultaneously contrapuntal and antagonistic: sameness and difference, dialogue in one sphere, contestation in another. Its irreducible conflictual structure therefore provides that very differential, reversible fulcrum which, Adorno argued, enables effective cultural critique.

Notes

1. This chapter has been overshadowed by the death of Allon White in 1988. My interest in Bakhtin developed in a spirit of friendly though always polemical dispute with Allon—a dialogue which began with his interventions at the first Southampton ‘Theory and Text’ Conference of 1981 (see, for example, *Oxford Literary Review* 5 [1982], 74-5). ‘Back to Bakhtin’ marked a return intervention at Sussex, where Allon worked; it was first given as a seminar paper there in 1984. A shorter version was published in *Cultural Critique* 2 (1985-6), and produced a vigorous response from Allon, ‘The Struggle Over Bakhtin’, which set out his later position. With Allon’s tragic illness all desire for continuation of our debate ceased on my part. In revising the article for inclusion here, I have removed the critique of his work, but have not wanted to excise all evidence of our altercation, to turn his death into a silence without trace. This chapter is dedicated to his memory.

2. This passes over a third political position, namely of Trotskyism. It is a moot point, however, whether the Fourth Internationalists can ever claim to have established a literary critical position. For an example of an attempt, see Slaughter, *Marxism, Ideology and Literature*. and certain moments of post-Althusserian revolutionary enthusiasm in the writings of Terry Eagleton, particularly *Walter Benjamin*.

3. Today the History Workshop conference continues to thrive, while the Essex conference, after a lapse of many years, has recently been revived—but now defensively takes

place behind closed doors, by invitation only. For the arguments between the two camps in the seventies see Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory*; Nield and Seed, 'Theoretical Poverty or the Poverty of Theory'; Hirst, 'The Necessity of Theory'. For the autocriticism see Rancière, *La leçon d'Althusser*; Althusser, *Essays in Self-Criticism*; Hindess and Hirst, *Mode of Production and Social Formation*; Cutler, Hindess, Hirst, and Hussain, *Marx's 'Capital' and Capitalism Today*; Hirst, *On Law and Ideology*; and Benton, *The Rise and Fall of Structural Marxism*. In *White Mythologies*, I suggest that Hindess and Hirst's critique, which effectively ended British Althusserianism, was based on a serious misreading of his argument.

4. Widdowson, *Re-Reading English*. For a more extended discussion of this book see my 'Re. Reading *Re-Reading English*'.

5. For further discussion of the problem of Marxism and history, see my *White Mythologies*.

6. John Hoyles, 'Radical Critical Theory and English', in *Re-Reading English*, 44-5 (my emphasis).

7. Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, 35-42 (Williams invokes Voloshinov's theory of language for his new 'cultural materialism'); Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism*; Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin*, and 'Wittgenstein's Friends'; Forgacs, 'Marxist Literary Theories'; White, 'Bakhtin, Sociolinguistics and Deconstruction'.

8. Pechey, 'Bakhtin, Marxism, and Post-Structuralism', 237. Pechey's argument differs, however, from those cited

in notes 6 and 7 insofar as he recognizes the complicity between Bakhtin and poststructuralism rather than suggesting that the one constitutes an answer to the other.

9. Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language*. Jameson first mentions Bakhtin, in a discussion of the relation of the carnivalesque to modernism, in 'Wyndham Lewis as Futurist', 303-6.

10. Bennett, *Formalism and Marxism*, 95. The most sustained treatment of Bakhtin in relation to Formalism is that of Frow in *Marxism and Literary History*, 125-69.

11. David Lodge, 'Double Discourses; Joyce and Bakhtin', 1. For further thoughts see Lodge's *After Bakhtin*.

12. Wayne Booth, 'Freedom of Interpretation'; Carroll, 'The Alterity of Discourse'; de Man, 'Dialogue and Dialogism'; reprinted in *The Resistance to Theory*, 106-14; LaCapra, 'Bakhtin, Marxism and the Carnavalesque', in *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 291-324. For special issues on Bakhtin see *Critical Inquiry*, 'Forum on Bakhtin', reprinted with additions as *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on his Work*, ed. Morson; *Etudes françaises*, 'Bakhtine mode d'emploi'; *Studies in Twentieth Century Literature*; and *University of Ottawa Quarterly*. For a comprehensive survey of Bakhtin criticism in English, see Hirschkop's 'Critical Work on the Bakhtin Circle: A Bibliographical Essay', in Hirschkop and Shepherd, eds, *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, 195-212.

13. de Man, 'Dialogue and Dialogism', 104.

14. Weber, 'The Intersection', 111. For other discussions

of the relation between Bakhtin and Derrida see Michael Holquist, 'The Surd Heard: Bakhtin and Derrida', in Morson, ed., *Literature and History*, 137-56, and McCannell, 'The Temporality of Textuality'. For Bakhtin and Derrida on 'context' see Sprinker, 'Boundless Context'.

15. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 161. Bakhtin's objection to structuralism, 'I am against enclosure in a text' (169) also seems similar to Derrida's, until we remember that the latter rather demonstrates how the closure necessary for structuralism's system can never in fact be achieved. Clearly many of the comparisons that are drawn between the two are fairly impressionistic. For a detailed critique of the strategies of the humanist appropriation of Bakhtin, see Ken Hirschkop, 'A Response to the Forum on Mikhail Bakhtin', in Morson, ed., *Bakhtin*, 73-9. Bakhtin's work, together with that of Medvedev and Voloshinov, will be cited as follows: MPL: Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*; FMC: Voloshinov, *Freudianism: A Marxist Critique*; FM: Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*; DP: Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*; RW: Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*; DI: Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*; SG: Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*.

16. Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin*, 150.

17. DI xxii-iii. For discussion of Bakhtin's relation to Husserl and Heidegger see de Man, 'Dialogue and Dialogism', 103-5.

18. Ken Hirschkop has suggested (private communication) that such a transformation depends 'in

large part on confusing a neo-Kantian and phenomenological critique of the formalist position with a lame humanist denial of anything remotely “scientific”’. As evidence, he cites the fact that the one essay from *Vosprosy* not translated in *The Dialogic Imagination* is the heavily phenomenological/neo-Kantian article on formalism: ‘the danger is that a very technical philosophical Bakhtin, mired in German epistemological speculation, would be every bit as “theoretical” and frightening to the Anglo-American humanities as structuralism’.

19. The authorship question—which makes one aware that the history of Bakhtin’s reception in the Soviet Union has been even more complicated than in the West—was initiated by V.V. Ivanov in 1973 (translated as ‘The Significance of M.M. Bakhtin’s Ideas on Sign, Utterance and Dialogue for Modern Semiotics’, in Baran, *Structuralism and Semiotics*, 186-243). For a detailed discussion of the issues, see Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtine*, 13-26, or *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, 3-13. See Hirschkop, ‘Critical Work on the Bakhtin Circle’, for bibliographical references for the whole debate.

20. Michael Holquist, ‘The Politics of Representation’, in *Allegory and Representation*, ed. Greenblatt, 171, 173.

21. Clark and Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin*.

22. Hirschkop, ‘Critical Work on the Bakhtin Circle’, draws attention to the editorial preface of a Russian reprint of *The Formal Method* where this hypothesis is advanced. The story of Bakhtin staying gnomically silent while his

wife tells a visitor that Bakhtin himself wrote the Voloshinov/Medvedev books seems to be a piece of Soviet urban mythology.

23. Discussions of the contributions of Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929, English translation 1973, French translation 1977) can be found in Williams' *Marxism and Literature*, 35-42 (the earliest sustained analysis of Voloshinov by a British Marxist), and in Houdebine, *Langage et Marxisme*, 161-73.

24. Eagleton, 'Wittgenstein's Friends', 78. Further references will be cited in the text.

25. In fact Eagleton himself dismisses carnival eleven pages later as 'no more than a compliant, containable libertarianism' (90).

26. White, 'The Authoritative Lie', 312. A contemporary example of such academic carnivalesque inversion would be Sharratt's *Reading Relations* (1983) which interrogates the claims of Marxist criticism through a parody of Eagleton's *Criticism and Ideology* (1976).

27. 'The Authoritative Lie', 312. The status of Bakhtin's own language is also discussed by Kristeva in her introduction to *La poétique de Dostoïevski*, 21 ('The Ruin of a Poetics', ll6-17); further references will be cited in the text as *RP*).

28. Holquist, 'The Politics of Representation', 171.

29. For a full discussion of the implications of Saussure's

distinction, see Derek Attridge, 'Language as History/History as Language: Saussure and the Romance of Etymology', in Attridge, Bennington, and Young, eds, *Post-Structuralism and the Question of History*, 183-211. For the most sophisticated analysis of Voloshinov, see Weber's 'The Intersection'.

30. Cf. 'Discourse lives outside itself, in its living directedness towards the object; if we detach ourselves completely from this directedness all we have left is the naked corpse of the word, from which we can learn nothing at all about the social situation or the fate of a given word in life. *To study the word as such, ignoring the directedness that reaches out beyond it, is just as senseless as to study psychological experience outside the context of that real life toward which it was directed and by which it is determined*' (DI 292, translation modified).

31. Pechey, 'Bakhtin, Marxism, and Post-Structuralism', 241. Weber here contrasts Voloshinov to Habermas whose theory of communicative competence 'proceeds from a concept of the subject which remains largely unproblematized' ('The Intersection', 97).

32. MPL 90. With Voloshinov's idea of the unconscious as an encrypted foreign body in the psyche, compare Abraham, 'The Shell and the Kernel', and Derrida, 'Fors'.

33. It might be tempting here to identify the sign with the tropes of allegory or metaphor. Bakhtin, however, always argues for the separation of trope from dialogism; see de Man, 'Dialogue and Dialogism' 105, for the

argument that this reveals 'the metaphysical *impensé* of Bakhtin's thought'.

34. Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtine*, 165. In *The Dialogic Imagination* Bakhtin remarks that even monoglossia's 'perception presumes heteroglossia as a background, and even it interacts dialogically with various aspects of this heteroglossia' (*DI* 375).

35. Bakhtin, 'Rabelais and Gogol', 46.

36. A tendency noticeable in Jameson, Eagleton, Pechey, and White. Bennett and Forgacs are the exceptions.

37. Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, V.i.g.15.

38. Eagleton, 'Wittgenstein's Friends', 89-90; the same point is made in *Walter Benjamin*, 148. White's subsequent defence of its political effectivity does not altogether succeed in answering Eagleton's objections. White puts forward the GLC 'people's festivals' as a contemporary instance of carnival as a form of effective political opposition ('The Struggle Over Bakhtin', 240). The problem with this example, however, is that the GLC, though at that time enjoying a socialist majority, was nevertheless itself a state apparatus which employed its festivals as a oppositional tactic. Once the GLC had been abolished by Mrs Thatcher—despite its carnivals—the so-called people's festivals ceased. By contrast it is striking that in all their discussions of the politics of carnival neither Eagleton nor Stallybrass and White ever mention London's annual Notting Hill Carnival—the second largest carnival in the world (after Rio) which involves up to a million

participants. For a full history, see Owusu and Ross, *Behind the Masquerade: The Story of Notting Hill Carnival*. An altogether different view of carnival is advanced by Kristeva who contends that its laughter is serious, 'the only way that it can avoid becoming either the scene of the law or the scene of its parody, in order to become the scene of its other' ('Word, Dialogue, and Novel', in *Desire in Language*, 80), hereafter cited as *WDN*.

39. Stallybrass and White, *Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 19.

40. Terry Eagleton, 'Bakhtin, Schopenhauer, Kundera', in Hirschkop and Sheppard, *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, 178-9.

41. For a comparison of 'the Bakhtinian programme' with that of Habermas, see Ken Hirschkop's 'Bakhtin and Cultural Theory', in Hirschkop and Shepherd, *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, 1-38.

42. Discussions of the status of history in Bakhtin include Anchor, 'Bakhtin's Truths of Laughter'; DeJean, 'Bakhtin and/in History'; and Howes, 'Rhetoric of Attack'.

43. Eagleton, *Walter Benjamin*, 150 (following White).

44. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 84. A less restricted reading is briefly suggested at 285.

45. SG 162. Cf. Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtine*, 160.

46. Bakhtin's formulation here can be usefully

compared to Kristeva's redefinition of the object of linguistics (which is obviously as much indebted to Bakhtin as to Jakobson) in 'The Ethics of Linguistics', *Desire in Language*, 24-5. Some have criticized Kristeva's reading of Bakhtin, particularly her strategy of withdrawing 'the kernel which links up with the most advanced contemporary research' from the 'worn-out ideological husk' that surrounds it. What remains extraordinary, however, is that as early as the sixties, she recognized Bakhtin's work as 'a hitherto unknown precursor, unaware of its role', of a movement that had hardly begun and had certainly yet to be termed poststructuralism or deconstruction (*RP* 107). At the end of her first essay on Bakhtin, she predicted the growing importance of a movement concerned with isolating and exploring the extensive implications of that different kind of logic of alterity:

The path charted between the two poles of dialogue radically abolishes problems of causality, finality, et cetera, from our philosophical arena. It suggests the importance of the dialogical principle for a space of thought much larger than that of the novel. More than binarism, dialogism may well become the basis of our time's intellectual structure. (*WDN* 89)

47. Stallybrass and White discuss this problem in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* 59-61; they themselves sharpen up Bakhtin's method considerably through their use of Babcock's notion of 'symbolic inversion' (17).

48. Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*; Foucault, 'The Order of Discourse', trans. Ian McLeod, in Young, ed., *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, 48-77; Foucault,

The History of Sexuality. See SG 133-4, however, for some comments on the relation of silence to speech. In comparing Bakhtin to Foucault it should be noted that, with the possible exception of the Rabelais book, Bakhtin does not analyze the operations of power according to the sovereignty model of repression that Foucault criticizes.

49. Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 19.

50. Compare Descombes' account of Klossowski's 'liquidation of the identity principle', *Modern French Philosophy*, 183.

51. See, for example, Bauer, *Feminist Dialogics*, Pechey, 'On the Borders of Bakhtin', and Clifford, 'On Ethnographic Authority', in *The Predicament of Culture*, 21-54. Bhabha, on the other hand, in 'Signs Taken for Wonders' (*The Location of Culture*, 102-22) employs the concept of hybridity in order to suggest the complex movements of alterity in the colonial text. For Bakhtin's and Bhabha's use of 'hybridity', see my *Colonial Desire*, 20-26.

52. For a more extended account of Levinas' position, see *White Mythologies*, 12-18.

53. Lewis, 'The Post-Structuralist Condition', 14.

54. Carroll, 'The Alterity of Discourse', 78.

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