David Schalkwyk

Words in the World:
The Bakhtin Circle

David Schalkwyk

Words in the World:
The Bakhtin Circle

Σ

SKENÈ   Theatre and Drama Studies

Table of contents

Foreword

After enjoying about two decades of immense popularity in the English-speaking world of literary studies and theory in the late twentieth century, the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and his companions, V.N. Voloshinov and P.N. Medvedev, now plays a much diminished role in mainstream English literary studies. Even at the height of Bakhtin's influence, only a limited selection of the writings of the Bakhtin Circle received much attention. In Anglo-American criticism and theory, Bakhtin's work on carnival was especially taken up by the new, politically motivated criticism that sought ways of liberating literary texts from the high cultural norms of certain aspects of modernism and what was perceived to be the conservative complacency of Leavisite 'close-reading' in the United Kingdom and its former colonies and the formalism of the New Criticism in the USA. The new political consciousness similarly saw in Bakhtin's theory of the novel, with its multi-vocal concepts of dialogism and heteroglossia, a way of offering a critique of both the claims of the realist novel to reflect the world and the subjectivising formal experiments of modernist fiction. But the radical theory of language proposed by Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* and also implicit in Bakhtin's view of language in novelistic fiction was overshadowed by an almost universal acceptance of Saussurean linguistics as a force for the detection

and exposure of the ideological, and therefore the essentially constructed, nature of all literary texts – which, crucially were considered to be divorced from any external world.

The mobilization of Saussure in the cause of such political liberation was ultimately incoherent.[1] The Swiss linguist's purely technical or methodological reduction of the linguistic sign to a system of pure differences with no reference to the world 'beyond' language may have seemed liberating insofar as it revealed the arbitrary nature of 'meaning', and therefore the socially constructed nature of the conjunction of signifier and signified. But without a theory of the ways in which language and literature are indeed connected to the real world in which political liberation was sought, none of the radical movements that had rightly abandoned the notion that language merely reflects the world could give a proper account of the ways in which language could gain a purchase on the reality in which political change was desired.

In this monograph I aim to revisit the work of the Bakhtin Circle to show that the work of its members may indeed have offered and may still offer a mode of conceiving of language (and therefore literature) as a force that works in and through the world. Before I embark on my argument, however, a word is needed about the very idea of the 'Bakhtin Circle'. When I first encountered the members of that circle – which includes Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Medvedev – in the 1980s it was believed by and large, at least in literary theoretical circles, that the texts bearing the names of the two

---

[1] Indeed, as Bakhtin's influence on literary studies has waned, his relevance for other disciplines has increased (see Ongstad 2004: 68; Gardiner and Bell 1998).

latter authors were in fact written by Bakhtin and were published under the names of the others to avoid prosecution and censorship. Since the 1990s, especially with the publication of Bakhtin's early work, which appeared to emphasize concepts of responsibility and "perhaps even art's detachment from life" (Bostad et al. 2004: 5), scholars now tend to suggest that these texts were not in fact authored by Bakhtin, although dissenters remain. While degrees of affinity and overlap are evident, the new argument goes, Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Medvedev offer distinct arguments, use different concepts, and have distinctive intellectual influences, even if they were close colleagues and friends who shared ideas.[2] On the issue at the centre of my analysis, the relation between word and world, the editors of *Bakhtinian Perspectives on Language and Culture* go so far as to argue that Bakhtin offers an account of the relation between the literary text and the world that moves *away* from Voloshinov's materialism towards German Idealist influences: "From the beginning of the 1930s, Bakhtin's work loses the proto-realist connections it had through the Circle as a whole, and develops in a way more thoroughly conditioned by contemporary German idealism" (Bostad et al. 2004: 6). This claim, that Bakhtin moves away from seeing a connection between literature and the world is especially significant for my project, which is to argue that the choice between neo-realism and idealism is not as stark and exclusive as may first ap-

[2] For an extended discussion of what the 'Bakhtin Circle' might mean, see Shepherd 2004, on the authorship question, see Hirschkop 2000: 126-40, and for a recent 'placing' of Bakhtin in the contemporary world, Michael Gardiner's Introduction to his four-volume Sage collection (Gardiner 2003). A useful analogy may be the Vienna Circle, which included philosophers.

pear: that there are other ways of conceiving of a relation between the literary, social reality and the material world that do not involve a choice between realism and idealism or pure constructivism, and that the Bakhtin Circle, Derrida and Wittgenstein offer related visions of such alternatives.

In *Literature and the Touch of the Real* I offer an extended critique of the neo-Saussurean orthodoxy, complemented by a reading of the later Wittgenstein and Jacques Derrida (who was persistently misread by friend and foe alike), that argues for a non-empiricist or non-realist view of the ways in which language and the world are intertwined.[3] In this monograph I use my earlier arguments regarding Wittgenstein and Derrida to demonstrate the ways in which the members of the Bakhtin Circle contribute to a non-Saussurean but also non-realist conception of the relation among language, literature and the world. I view the Bakhtin Circle through the lenses of Wittgenstein and Derrida in order to illuminate these alternative conceptions of words in the world that transcend the metaphysical antinomy of realism vs idealism, and to show how *in their own way* each member of the Bakhtin Circle sought to offer an alternative vision of the rootedness of language in the world, always mediated by human consciousness and, especially, practice.[4] It is import-

[3] For an extended argument to this effect, see Schalkwyk 2004b. See also Lachmann and Brandist 2004, who also write of the "striking" affinities between Derrida and Bakhtin (49), but in an argument different from mine.

[4] There are alternative ways of exploring this issue through the affinities between the Bakhtin Circle and philosophers in various traditions, including Materialism and Phenomenology. For an unusual example, see Michael Gardiner's discussion of Merleau-Ponty and Benjamin in relation to Bakhtin (Gardiner 2000).

ant to note that I am not concerned with tracing influences on the Bakhtin Circle (Brandist 2004a and 2004b), but rather with bringing to light hitherto unremarked or little remarked aspects of their work by looking at it alongside that of Derrida and Wittgenstein.[5] Against the recent tendency to trace the roots of the Bakhtin Circle's thought in thinkers that may have influenced them directly, I agree with Clark and Tihanov that Bakhtin transforms and transcends the concepts he inherited from others with whose work he was directly acquainted: "Bakhtin lifts the categories he employs above the conceptual constraints of their home disciplines and instills in them new life by obliterating their previous conceptual identity" (Clark and Tihanov 2011: 128).

I focus on four major philosophical issues in addition to my overarching concern with the Russian Formalists' view of literature as defamiliarization: the perception of language as form rather than substance central to the Saussurean definition of the sign; the logical (rather than the sociological) role of community and agreement in the determination of meaning; the problem of the relationship between language as a system of repeatable forms and its use in changing historical contexts; and the necessary embodiment of language in the world in which it is used. Each of these issues is a constituent part of the problem as a whole: Wittgenstein's analysis of aspect perception, for example, is related to the reduction of the material of the linguistic mark to perceived (and meaningful) form in Derrida's Husserlean reading of Saussure, while also offering a powerful account of the possibilities of defamiliarization; his rejection of the

---

[5] For a somewhat different discussion of Bakhtin in relation to Wittgenstein from mine, see Lähteenmäki 2004.

solipsistic 'I' of his early *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* in favour of the communal 'we' of the later work is integral to his reconception of language and its use in the world; and Derrida's deconstruction of the 'solitary mental life' propounded by Husserl and the theoretical exclusion of fiction from 'serious' discourse in speech-act theory are part of his reflections on the 'text' as the illimitable iterability of the sign in worldly and historical contexts.

Few modern writers have dealt in as much depth or with as much subtlety with the 'we' of the community of language users invoked by Wittgenstein and the necessary embodiment of language demonstrated by Derrida as the members of the Bakhtin Circle. They have added to these logical arguments a sociological analysis that enriches both the conception of community and the situatedness of language in that social world, but which also, as I shall argue in conclusion, misses some of the philosophical rigour of Wittgenstein and Derrida. Bakhtin's name has become synonymous with the concepts of 'dialogism' and 'carnival'. Since they have received so much critical attention I will not deal with them directly, but only insofar as they are involved in the reflections of the Bakhtin Circle on the relationship between language and the world, and especially between literary texts and the situations in which they are produced and read. But before we do that we need to take a detour along a theoretical path that is for some the apotheosis of the *exclusion* of literature from the world: Russian Formalism.[6]

---

[6] For an illuminating discussion of the relationship between Russian Formalism and the Bakhtin School in the 1920s, see Emerson 2011.

Russian Formalism:
"The road which turns back on itself"

> The crooked road, the road on which the foot senses the stones,
> the road which turns back on itself – this is the road of art.
> V. Shklovsky, "The Resurrection of the Word"

No study of the relation between language, fiction and the world can ignore the attempts of the Russian Formalists in the early part of the twentieth century to isolate the specific nature of literature – its 'literariness' – in terms of the way in which it renders perceptible the devices of its own construction. The Formalist concern with perception, especially the rendering perceptible of what is seen but not noticed – passed over in our habitual intercourse with the world and language – is related to the concept of perception in both Husserl's phenomenological reduction and the Wittgensteinian analysis of aspect perception.

The epigraph above neatly conveys two early traits of Russian Formalism. Art is defined first in terms of the degree of effort or difficulty that it enforces upon perception. It is the effort required to overcome the impediment that causes one to see, to feel, or notice what would otherwise be

passed over as a mere means to an end. The passage along the road which turns back on itself has no destination, no aim beyond the evocation of a full sensation of the journey. Self-reflexivity is thus the second defining quality of art, the material of which needs to be freed from its subservience, especially by the Symbolists, to the image, which is a destination by which art is reduced to being no more than a secondary medium or passage to a destination beyond the road travelled.

This emphasis on the self-reflexive nature of art has become a commonplace since the Formalists, and it is offered as one of the major grounds for the essential divorce between art, or literature, and the world. Shklovsky's concept of defamiliarization, however, has been imported in a much less wholesale manner into subsequent theory, perhaps because its epistemological concern with the ways of perception still ties it too closely to that which lies outside the word, what lies beyond the 'text'.[7] The point is apparent in Shklovsky's subsequent, and most well known characterization of the function of 'making-strange':

> Habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war. . . . And art exists that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone stony. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects "unfamiliar", to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged.

[7] I am using 'text' in its purely linguistic sense here; not in the rich and complex sense it carries in Derrida. Cf. Schalkwyk 2004.

> Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important. (Shklovsky 1965: 12)[8]

Notice the unprepared, not to say illegitimate, shift in the object of defamiliarization from the first to the second half of this passage. It begins with an observation that may be related to the Wittgensteinian analysis of the concept of aspect-perception concerning our habitual, unreflective 'continuous aspect perception' of the world, in terms of which we inhabit a world saturated with unreflexive human meaning (Wittgenstein 1973: 194). Only, for Shklovsky, such habitualization "devours" the objects of our perceptions and experience, numbing the senses and reducing our intercourse with the objects of our daily lives to humdrum familiarity of the merely 'known'. In the early part of the passage, life as a whole is the object of habitual perception: clothes, furniture, one's wife (sic), objects encountered in the world, are ingested perceptually without thought. On the straight road the stones go unheeded in our urgency to reach the destination at its end. But we have art, Shklovsky tells us, "that one may recover the sensation of life": that one may properly feel "things"; that the essence of the stone may be revealed in a process designed to "make the stone stony" (Shklovsky 1965: 12).

Art cleanses the gates of our perception of the world, perhaps by inducing the involuntary cry of surprise that

---

[8] The translation of the last sentence is not accurate. A better reading would be, "Art is a means for experiencing the making (деланье) of a thing, and what is made in art is not important". This shifts the emphasis from the object made to the process of making, as in Aristotle's notion of *poiesis*. I am grateful to an anonymous reader who pointed out this translation error to me and supplied the correction.

marks the dawning of an aspect for the first time, as in the
sudden cry of recognition of one of the aspects of looking
at Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit drawing: "A rabbit!" (1973:
197). Like the metaphor in which the retardation of the jour-
ney enforces the perhaps painful sensation of the stones un-
derfoot, this account focuses to a surprising degree on the
heightened sensation of material things. The next sentence,
however, effects an illegitimate transformation, from the
claim that the technique of art serves to make *objects* un-
familiar, through the intermediate suggestion that art pro-
longs and intensifies perception or sensation as an end in it-
self, to the final claim that the object itself is irrelevant: art
self-reflexively induces us to experience not the materiality
of the object but rather the 'artfulness' of art itself.

We shall have to see precisely what the last claim to
self-reflexivity entails. In linguistic terms, Shklovsky slides
uncertainly from referent through signified to signifier,
leaving it unclear as to which object of perception is re-
newed by artistic defamiliarization: the stone itself, the con-
cept of a stone, or the mere linguistic mark 'stone'. The dis-
cussion of Tolstoy's technique of "remov[ing] objects from
the automatization of perception" that follows this passage
is clearly concerned with the relationship between referent
and concept. Tolstoy "makes the familiar seem strange" by
referring to or describing objects or events not by their fa-
miliar names but rather by presenting them under unusu-
al concepts or descriptions. "The familiar act of flogging",
Shklovsky writes, "is made unfamiliar both by the descrip-
tion and by the proposal to change its form without chang-
ing its nature" (1965: 13). Citing Merezhkovsky's apprais-
al of Tolstoy as "that writer who . . . seems to present things
as if he himself saw them in their entirety, and did not al-

ter them" (ibid.), Shklovsky appears to be groping towards the paradox that is clarified in Wittgenstein's analysis of aspect-perception, namely that in the change of an aspect the object both appears to change and yet remains the same. Wittgenstein resolves the paradox by attacking the philosophically naive idea of perception as an image materialization within the mind, which as a copy clearly cannot change. Instead, he suggests, a change of aspect is the product of a differential relationship: it is an "echo of a thought in sight" (Wittgenstein 1973: 212). The object is brought into relation with other objects through the application of a different concept. It is not the picture or object that holds us captive, but rather the habitual concept under which the object is unreflectively seen in continuous aspect perception.[9]

Despite Shklovsky's characteristic repudiation of the Symbolist claim that the image is the major goal of poetry, the relationships among the literary device, which, by impeding perception, effects the making strange of the object, the tripartite concept of the sign, and the object of perception, are none too clear. If the two early, seminal essays display the tendency always to move towards concept and referent, Shklovsky and his co-formalists subsequently defined 'literariness' entirely in terms of its self-reflexive bar-

---

[9] If we are to pursue the comparison with Wittgenstein we need to note a difference in terminology here: if for Wittgenstein one knows that it is a rabbit then it means that one is not seeing it spontaneously in the grip of a concept but rather effortfully reading such knowledge off as in the interpretation of a blueprint. For Shklovsky, on the other hand, what is known is precisely what is not noticed, what does not require interpretive effort: it is what in Wittgenstein's terms would be seen as continuous aspect perception. Nothing turns on these terminological differences. We should simply note them to avoid confusion.

ing of its own devices, thereby enforcing a divorce between art and life from which their subsequent fame or notoriety springs. Considered entirely in semiotic terms, this means that literary devices do not sharpen our perceptions of the concept or the object, but rather of the material of *language*: the word or signifier. It is in this sense that the language of poetry is "a difficult, roughened, impeded language" (Shklovsky 1965: 22); language is in effect (following the manifesto of the Futurists, who wished to demolish all established or instituted meaning) 'transrational' – stripped of its usual directedness towards meaning and the referent. Such immanence extends to the literary text as a whole, which uses the 'material' of events and objects merely as motivation for the innovative deployment of the devices of literary form:

> The work of art is perceived against the background of and through association with other works of art. Its form is determined by its relation to other forms that existed prior to it. . . . A new form appears not to express a new content but to replace an old form that has lost its artistic quality. (Qtd in Steiner 1984: 56)

Shklovsky's diachronic conception of defamiliarization as the renewal of artistic form leads to a problematic distinction between canonized art, the devices of which have become habituated and so are no longer perceived, and non-canonized art, which, through its renewed process of the defamiliarization of worn-out devices, must count as art 'proper'. This problem is to some degree solved by Tynjanov, who offers a contextual, systematic and relational account of the relationship among both literary texts and the discourses of life. The individual work is 'literary' only in-

sofar as it is differentially related to other works in the literary system, and that system in turn has a shifting, dialectic relation to other systems of the culture as a whole. There is thus for Tynjanov no substantial distinction between 'life' and 'art', merely a relational one. If Shklovsky's theory of the specificity of the literary is based upon a mechanical, substantivist account of the essence of defamiliarization, as Peter Steiner suggests, then Tynjanov combines a Saussurean conception of system with Eichenbaum's notion of the 'dominant' as the crucial element which the work foregrounds and which transforms, or 'deforms' all other elements, in the process of systematic defamiliarization (Steiner 1984: 44).

Despite the relative theoretical crudity and unsystematized nature of Shklovsky's polemical pronouncements, he is important not only because of his historical status as one of the key founders of Russian Formalism, but also for his engagement with the philosophical problem of perception and its involvement with the tripartite relation of linguistic form, meaning and the world beyond language. Shklovsky's initial formulation of the notion of defamiliarization indicates the difficulty of reducing the weft of word, concept and the world to the perception of the bare word, and at the same time points to the necessity of an historical account of that interweaving.

Chapter 2

The Signifier as Pure Form

The question of what is being perceived when one sees a mark or hears a sound as a word may be fruitfully approached via Derrida's deconstruction of Husserl, where the idealist exclusion of the 'external world' is deconstruction's main target. Derrida begins his critique of Husserl with an examination of the interrelation of the concepts of ideality and representation which is ignored, or contradicted, by Husserl's distinction between 'indicative' language, on the one hand, and 'expressive' language, on the other. The concept of the 'idea' or the 'ideal' plays an indispensable role in the way in which phenomenology considers perception and language. First, because the reduction of the 'natural standpoint' involves the suspension of 'actual' existence of the intentional object, its 'real' existence as object of consciousness is necessarily ideal in the strictest sense that it exists nowhere in the material world. This reduction applies equally to language. For the signifier to be perceived as signifier rather than as merely sensory object, it must be constituted as idea, and this is a function of the necessary repetition that marks the possibility of language as such. As Derrida puts it:

> A signifier (in general) must be formally recognizable in spite of, and through, the diversity of empirical characteristics that may modify it. It must remain the same, and be

able to be repeated as such, despite and across the deforma-
tions which the empirical event necessarily makes it under-
go. A phoneme or grapheme is necessarily always to some
extent different each time that it is presented in an opera-
tion or a perception. But it can function as a sign, and in
general as language, only if a formal identity enables it to
be issued again and to be recognized. This identity is neces-
sarily ideal. (1973: 50)

The ideality of the signifier, which is the recognition of
its identity across repeated token-instances, is constitut-
ed through iteration: not merely repetition, but repetition
across and with difference. Only through the re-presenta-
tion of each occasion of signification can the formal ideali-
ty of the signifier be established; and the signifier has to be
established as an idea because it may be materially differ-
ent on each occasion of its reappearance. The same kind of
ideality informs the signified, which, as concept or mean-
ing, is similarly constituted through the acts of re-presenta-
tion as repetition of the signifier. Ideality and representation
as repetition are therefore inextricably interwoven, over and
above the usual synonymy of *Vorstellung* (as idea) and rep-
resentation (as re-presentation). In fact, the representative
ideality of *Vorstellung* as idea is always split by the differ-
ence imposed by the necessary differential nature of repe-
tition or iteration. Ideality thus involves representation, 1)
as *Vorstellung*, the locus of ideality in general, 2) as *Verge-
genwärtigung*, the possibility of reproductive repetition in
general, and 3) as *Repräsentation*, insofar as each signifying
event is a substitute for the signified as well as for the ideal
form of the signifier (Derrida 1973: 50).

Derrida's point is structurally similar to Wittgenstein's
exploration of what it means to follow a rule (Wittgenstein

1973: 202 passim). For ideality to be possible, representation as iteration is indispensable. Language is at all times involved in 'unlimited representation' as the very condition of its being. Its structure of repetitive substitution means that it necessarily re-presents itself. Derrida shows, against Husserl but always through him, that these two forms of representation are equally necessary for the supposedly 'pure ideality' of *Vorstellung* – the intentional or ideal object whose presence to consciousness phenomenology claims to reveal – to be at all possible. This is strikingly similar to Wittgenstein's displacement of mental images or processes from their traditional position at the centre of meaning to a new, subordinate status in terms of which they become epiphenomena, as it were, of the customary practice of repeated use. But how does Wittgenstein treat the process of seeing, and interpreting, images?

Chapter 3

Seeing as: Wittgenstein's Duck-rabbit

Wittgenstein's analysis of the ways in which we see an object (like Jastrow's duck-rabbit figure) *as* something (a duck or a rabbit) shows that in such aspectual perception we are in the grip of particular concepts that are part of the weave of human life. To be able to see something, then, we need to have mastered a technique – a way of doing things that comes with the acquisition and use of language. And a change of aspect involves the replacement of one concept by another. The new concept draws different internal relations between the object perceived and other objects. Whereas Shklovsky raises an important question about the capacity for art to renew perception, he remains philosophically confused about the ways in which the conceptual and the referential, thought and sight, are related in his theory of defamiliarization.

When we see Jastrow's duck-rabbit (Wittgenstein 1973: 194) now as a duck, now as a rabbit, nothing changes in the *material* image.
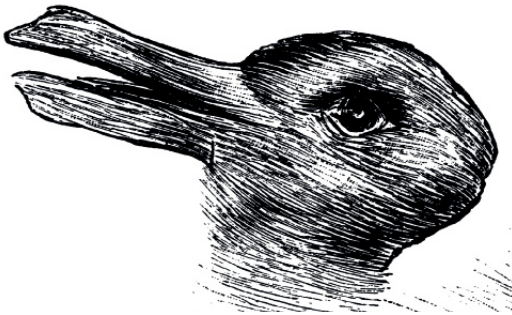
An exact copy of what is seen would be the identical drawing. And whatever "internal" image that duck-rabbit causes in us would be no different. We are inclined to say, pointing at the internal image, "I am seeing *this*", but what is "it" and "this"? Pointing to the drawing and saying "I am seeing *it* like *this*" offers no more information: "The temptation is to say 'I see it like *this*,' pointing to the same thing for 'it' and 'this'" (207):

> "What I really *see* must surely be what is produced in me by the influence of the object" – Then what is produced in me is a sort of copy, something that in its turn can be looked at, can be before one; almost something like a *materialization.* (199)

The visual impression of the aspect is not an image carried within the self that is caused by the drawing. The object of perception and the visual impression of it belong to grammatically distinct categories:

> One can't look at the impression, that is why it is not an object. (Grammatically.) For one doesn't look at the object to alter it. (That is really what people mean when they

say that objects exist "independently of us.") (Wittgenstein 1980: 1085)

The object cannot be explained by pointing to the sense-impression, nor is the sense-impression a mere reflection of the object.

Wittgenstein's argument that the dawning of an aspect cannot be explained by an appeal to an internal copy of the object of perception implicitly exposes the limitations of the phenomenological reduction. Seeing a material object *as* something means that it cannot be regarded as an internal copy of an external shape. So what is it?

Wittgenstein points out that the *concepts* of a copy, a picture, a projection – indeed, of representation itself – are not universal and monolithic. They are not given in experience but are rather "family-resemblance" (Wittgenstein 1973: 67) concepts. Once a picture becomes part of human experience it becomes *conceptual*, but this aspect is hidden from us. Take a picture of an old man walking up a steep path leaning on a stick. *How* do we see this if the *same* picture could represent a man sliding downhill (54)? Wittgenstein reminds us that a picture can hold us captive, but it does so only because particular *concepts*, rather than images, force themselves upon us. Wittgenstein's exploration of the interrelation of representation and language and its *determination* of certain kinds of experience in his discussion of aspect seeing also has a bearing on defamiliarization, whereby we are released from the grip of the concept.

When one changes from one aspect to another it seems as if the object itself has changed. But it has not. If we try to explain such a change to the way in which the object is *organized*, we encounter an old impasse:
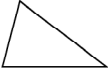
If you put the "organization" of a visual impression on a
level with colors and shapes, you are proceeding from the
idea of the visual impression as an inner object. Of course
this makes the object into a chimera; a queerly shifting
construction. For the similarity to a picture is now im-
paired. (196)

This "visual impression" cannot be explained causal-
ly. Wittgenstein instead claims that aspect seeing is a com-
bination of experience and thought – "half visual expe-
rience, half thought" (197) – or "the echo of a thought in
sight" (212). But if "thought" continues to be conceived as a
kind of picture or image it brings us no closer to a solution.
Thought has to be regarded as a way of bringing the object
under the rule of a concept. Different kinds of object or figure
will involve different degrees of conceptualization:

It is possible to take the duck-rabbit simply for the picture
of a duck, the double cross simply for the picture of a black
cross, but not to take the bare triangular figure for the pic-
ture of an object that has fallen over. To see this aspect of
the triangle demands *imagination.* (207)

"Imagination" in this context does not merely mean calling up
images, since it is precisely the image that requires explanation:

What a figure could also be – which is what it can be seen
as – is not simply another figure. If someone said

"I see as ,"

he might still be meaning very different things. (206)

This concept of imagination is akin to the abilities – the
mastery of techniques – of linguistic competence. Seeing
this object like this in *this* means that one has mastered a

range of techniques involving *other* cases. This means that one has mastered a range of language-games:

> In the triangle I can see now *this* as apex, *that* as base – now *this* as apex, *that* as base. – Clearly the words "Now I am seeing *this* as the apex" cannot so far mean anything to a learner who has only just met the concepts of apex, base, and so on. But I do not mean this as an empirical proposition.
>
> "Now he's seeing it like *this*," "now like *that*" would only be said of someone *capable* of making certain applications of the figure quite freely.
>
> The substratum of this *experience* is the *mastery of a technique*. (208; my emphasis in the last sentence)

One cannot have certain kinds of experience without having particular kinds of linguistic competence. There are no 'things themselves' that we could get back to by performing a phenomenological reduction. Seeing something as something does not lie in the object itself, or a copy of the object, or the free directedness of phenomenological intention. It depends on a difference: "an internal relation between it and other objects" (212). And this difference is the product of a language-game.

The claim that experience is informed by a concept is not new to neo-Saussureans, for whom experience simply is a *product* of language. But Wittgenstein's approach is different. He is interested in the interaction of concept and object by pursuing grammatical distinctions.[10] It is true that certain

---

[10] This is the import of the quotation from *King Lear* – "I will teach you differences" – which Wittgenstein at one stage considered using as an epigraph to the *Philosophical Investigations*. It does not show any affinity with the Saussurean conception of 'difference'. See Eagleton 1982.

experiences cannot be determined conceptually, but others *are* constituted by language:

> But how queer for this [the mastery of a technique] to be the logical condition of someone's having such-and-such an *experience*! After all, you don't say that one only "has toothache" if one is capable of doing such-and-such. From this it follows that we cannot be dealing with the same concept of experience here. It is a different though related concept. (208)[11]

Some experiences are made possible by the ability to do certain things rather than by a system of synchronic relations: "It is only if someone *can do*, has learnt, is master of, such-and-such, that it makes sense to say that he has had *this* experience" (209). Meaning and understanding are thus like abilities: they involve the mastery of certain techniques rather than independent ideas in the mind or the mental products of an abstract linguistic system.[12]

Wittgenstein does not deny the role of the world in the constitution of experience ("you only 'see the duck and rabbit aspects' if you are already conversant with the shapes of those two animals", 207). And because he sees linguistic competence as the outcome of the possibilities of prac-

---

[11] This promises to illuminate issues in literary theory (the problem of experience and discourse in feminist studies and Marxism, for example) where the protagonists are caught in a deadlock, since for one experience is a given while for another it is wholly constituted by language, ideology, or whatever.

[12] See Wittgenstein 1973: 167-8: "If I were to see the standard meter in Paris, but were not acquainted with the institution of measuring and its connexion with the standard meter – could I say, that I was acquainted with the concept of the standard meter?".

tice, the notion of discourse as a total, abstract shaping of the world and experience makes little sense. Different forms of social organization, different kinds of practice or types of action, produce different forms of seeing, speaking, and representation: "What is called an alteration in concepts is of course not merely an alteration in what one says, but also in what one does" (Wittgenstein 1980: 910). Language *on its own* thus can offer no grip for conceptual change. That is why neo-Saussurean theory is so synchronic and abstract. Without a change in modes of life, in practices and forms of social organization, changes in signifiers may not translate into a change at the level of the signified.

The analysis of aspect seeing in Wittgenstein's later work forms part of an abiding preoccupation with the "limits of the empirical". The limit of the empirical is the formation of concepts (Wittgenstein 1978: 237, 197). Since a picture can mean something only within a system of representation, when I believe that what a picture or image represents is self-evident I am not in the thrall of the picture itself but rather in the grip of a concept. A concept has *forced* itself upon me. But this conceptual aspect is not seen: only the single aspect of the picture, which is assumed to be the only possible one, is perceived. What we do not see is the background "against which whatever I could express has its meaning" (Wittgenstein 1984: 16). One may be driven to see the picture as a duck but once a different concept is brought to bear on it the perception of a different aspect becomes possible, and, moreover, switching between it and the old *at will* becomes natural.

Wittgenstein's discussion of aspect seeing shows that our seeing of objects is determined by concepts situated in social practice. In *aspect* perception one can switch to a

different aspect provided a different concept is brought to
bear on the object. The fact that a word repeated ten or fif-
teen times loses its meaning and becomes a bare sound re-
veals that we habitually experience not the bare sound but
the sound-as-meaning. Wittgenstein's speculation about a
person who is "aspect-blind" – that is to say, someone who
can decipher or interpret a duck-rabbit drawing as a duck
or a rabbit, but not *experience* the switch of aspects – re-
veals a conceptual distinction that is central to the relation-
ship between the literary, experience and the world. There is
a difference between *knowing* that a drawing of a stag with
two lines drawn on either side of its throat represents a stag
pierced by an arrow, in which case one interprets the pic-
ture as one does a blueprint, and *seeing* a stag pierced by an
arrow, in which no such deliberate 'reading-off' takes place,
but one simply reacts, apparently spontaneously, with the
shock of recognition: 'It's a wounded stag!'.

Chapter 4

The Bakhtin Circle

Although they obviously do not offer a Wittgensteinian account of the notion that in literary art what is defamiliarized is the material and form of language itself, Bakhtin and Medvedev tackle the same philosophical question, but from different perspectives. The early Bakhtin offers a quasi-phenomenological analysis, whereas Medvedev, anticipating both Voloshinov and the later Bakhtin, provides a sociological critique.[13] We shall look at each of these in turn.

In "The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art", Bakhtin takes a stand – at first glance not unlike Derrida's stand against the "inflation of the sign" – against what he calls "the metaphysics of the word":

> By endowing the word with everything peculiar to culture, that is, with all cultural validities – cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic – it is very easy to arrive at the conclusion that there is nothing else in culture but the word, that all cul-

---

[13] The works discussed are Medvedev and Bakhtin 1978; Bakhtin 1990. "The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art" is believed to have been written between 1920 and 1924, but was not published until 1975. Despite the fact that the Harvard edition of *The Formal Method* is published under both Bakhtin's and Medvedev's names I shall treat it as the work of Medvedev.

ture is nothing more than a phenomenon of language, that
the scholar and the poet are to an equal degree concerned
only with the word. (Bakhtin 1990: 291)

This account of Formalism in the early 1920s presents
an orthodoxy prevalent in literary studies at the end of the
twentieth century. Bakhtin argues that the reduction of the
cultural to the semiotic – to linguistics – misses what is dis-
tinctive not only about the "logical and the aesthetic" but
"to an equal degree, that of the linguistic as well" (292). This
insight, which contradicts a founding tradition of twenti-
eth-century literary theory, constitutes one of the most im-
portant contributions of the Bakhtin Circle to the question
of the relationship between language, literature and the
world. Medvedev, Voloshinov and Bakhtin all argue in es-
says written in the nineteen-twenties that the word as the
object of linguistics is a *reduced* phenomenon: as an ele-
ment in a synchronic system it is stripped of the engage-
ment in the world of human activity and community that
marks it as part of an utterance. Precisely this distinction
between sentence and utterance, overlooked by linguis-
tics as they knew it, marks the Bakhtin Circle's departure
from the static, self-contained structuralism of Saussurean
theory.

The distinction between sentence and utterance arises
from Saussure's methodological, and founding, claim that
linguistics should create its own object of study by exclud-
ing everything extraneous to the language system. Where-
as the sentence studied by linguistics is a purely linguis-
tic form, essentially and deliberately disconnected from any
context of use, the utterance is always at work in the world,
marked and informed by its situation, its relation to the ref-

erent, and by the evaluative intonation that accrues to it in social use. In Bakhtin's early formulation:

> A single concrete utterance is always given in a value-and-meaning cultural context, whether it be scientific, artistic, political, etc., or in the context of a situation from everyday personal life. Each separate utterance is alive and has meaning only within these contexts: it is true or false, beautiful or ugly, sincere or deceitful, frank, cynical, authoritative, etc. – there are no neutral utterances, nor can there be. But linguistics sees in them only a phenomenon of language, and it relates them only to the unity of language, and not to the unity of a concept, of practical life, of history, of the character of a person, etc. (Ibid.)

Bakhtin thus both repudiates the claim that linguistics is the ideal model for literary studies and confirms the Wittgensteinian (and Heideggerian) insight that the world and language are saturated with human meaning and evaluation. To the Formalist claim that the 'literariness' of a work lies in the further reduction of a word (in the sense of linguistics) to its material substance, Bakhtin argues that our perception of words is always informed by what we may call, after Wittgenstein, continuous aspect perception. He suggests that in the process of creating "the whole of the author's appearance, his character, his situation, the condition of his life", the linguistic and compositional aspects of the work are transformed in a fundamental way that lies beyond the reach of a merely linguistic analysis:

> They cease to be words, sentences, verses, chapters . . . That is to say, the process of realizing the aesthetic object . . . is a process of consistently transforming a linguistically conceived verbal whole into the architectonic whole of an aes-

thetically consummated event. . . . all the verbal intercon-
nections and interrelations of a linguistic and composi-
tional order are transformed into extraverbal architectonic
event-related connexions. (297)

Bakhtin concurs with the Formalist refusal of Potebn-
ya's 'imagistic' reading of the status of aesthetic meaning, al-
though he disagrees with the shape and direction of their ar-
guments. A Potebnian account of the meaning of the word
'city', namely as the image that it evokes in a poem by Push-
kin, is as prone to Husserlean attack as the Lockean view that
the concept of triangularity in general could be the psycho-
logical image of a particular triangle (Locke 1975: 585). But
if the meaning of a word in a poem is not the image that it
evokes, since any images will be fragmentary, random and
subjective, that does not mean that "the artist has nothing
to do with an object but only with words, in the present in-
stance, with the word 'city', and no more" (Bakhtin 1990: 298).

Everything depends on the account given of what it is to
respond to "only a word". In an analysis that finds echoes
in a phenomenological, Wittgensteinian and Heideggeri-
an reading of our perception of the linguistic and composi-
tional aspects of a literary text, Bakhtin argues that the phe-
nomenon of language as we perceive it in an utterance is
neither the bare sound or mark nor any psychic represen-
tations it may cause, but the aspect of the word *as meaning-
ful form*:

> The poet . . . in our example, has to do with the city, with
> recollection, with remorse, with the past and the future as
> ethical aesthetic values . . . although there are no values in
> his soul, but only psychic experiences. The components of
> the aesthetic object of the given work are "the city's wide

and silent streets", "the shadow of the night", "the scroll of memory", etc., but not visual representations, not psychic experiences in general, and not words. (299)

The word is not merely the immediate fusion of signifier and signified. An inevitable part of its aspect is the value that it carries as part of the broader culture in which it participates as language. The artist (and the contemplator) has to do with "the city" as expressed by the Church Slavonic form of the word (*grad*):

[T]he connotation of the Church Slavonic form relates to the ethical-aesthetic value of the city, giving great significance to that value, and it becomes the characterization of a concrete value and as such enters into the aesthetic object; i.e. it is not the linguistic form that enters into the aesthetic object but its axiological significance . . . (Ibid.)

Bakhtin's distinction between linguistic form, which is the formal identity determined by Saussure's linguistic system and the "axiological significance" of the word as an aspect of the aesthetic object, a function of the architectonics of the artistic utterance, enables him not only to repudiate Shklovsky's mechanical view of the reduction of the word to merely linguistic material in the process of defamiliarization, but also to give an account of the status of the aesthetic object that avoids locating it either in the psyche or in the material substrate of language. The claim that the aesthetic object is a phenomenon that arises from its compositional and linguistic aspects (but which is nevertheless not a psychic representation) is the closest that Bakhtin comes to offering the kind of Husserlean reduction that Derrida notes is indispensable for any account of the being heard (or seen)

of literature.[14]

As Derrida's reading of Saussure's notion of the signifier as "sound pattern" rather than sound indicates, the phenomenon of the word cannot reside empirically either in the material, as a thing, or in the psyche, as a representation or image. To be recognized as an instance of language – abstractable from this perception and repeatable across new instances of use in fresh contexts – the material substance of the signifier has to be reduced (in the Husserlian sense) to a *form* (Saussure calls this the transformation of the sound into "sound pattern") that may be both recognized and mobilized across different contexts in which differences in material substance (accent, intonation or handwriting or typography) do not make a difference but are discounted in the production, through repetition, of identity.

Bakhtin's conception of the architectonics of the aesthetic object attempts to circumvent what he calls the "completely illegitimate effort to find a purely empirical equivalent for the aesthetic object" either in "space and time like a thing" or in the subjective psyche: "There is absolutely no reason to

---

[14] See Brandist 2004a, who argues that in his early work Bakhtin moves from neo-Kantian philosophy to Phenomenology and back again: "Bakhtin's early work thus departs from the abstractions of neo-Kantian philosophy and embraces the descriptive method of phenomenology back into the neo-Kantian paradigm of values and validity" (29). See also Morson and Emerson 1990 and Clark and Holquist 1984 for different perspectives on Bakhtin's relation to phenomenology and neo-Kantian philosophy. But compare Bernard-Donalds, who argues for a strong materialist strand in Bakhtin's work: "[N]eo-Kantian phenomenology is just one of several strands in Bakhtin's thinking, one which runs alongside a pronounced sociological or materialist strand, a strand that has as its aim the examination of the constraints that inevitably guide" (1995: 42).

be afraid of the fact that the aesthetic object cannot be found in either the psyche or in the material work of art" (Bakhtin 1987: 301). To harbour such a fear would be to regress to the pre-Saussurean dilemma in terms of which the sign is bifurcated into the material sound on the one hand and the purely subjective psychic image on the other, with all its attendant problems. Despite the Bakhtin Circle's general antipathy to Saussurean linguistics, in this early text Bakhtin offers an account of the aesthetic object in terms that are close to Derrida's Husserlean reading of the Saussurean sign and the phenomenological status of the literary object.

Bakhtin's analysis of the aesthetic object is not confined to a phenomenological reading, however, for he anticipates Wittgenstein's insight that aspect perception involves "an echo of a thought in sight" (Wittgenstein 1973: 212). The following passage insists that for us see or hear an object as something the mere eye or ear is not sufficient:

> [I]t is, of course, completely impossible to see with the eyes alone a represented human being as a human being, as an ethical-aesthetic value, an image, to see his body as a value, the expression of his exterior, and so on. In general, in order to see something, to hear something – that is, something objectively determinate or only axiologically determinate, axiologically weighty – the external senses are not enough – it is not enough to have only "an unseeing eye and a noisy ear," in the words of Parmenides. (Bakhtin 1987: 300)

We should, however, be careful not to read too much into this parallel with Wittgenstein. For Bakhtin is less concerned with the ways in which the conceptual, as the function of a particular technique or socially inculcated practice,

should determine that we should see something as this rather than that, than with the freedom of an intentional activity to direct perception by way of artistic form. "For so long as we simply hear or see something", Bakhtin adds, "we do not yet apprehend artistic form" (307). In this respect he is still too phenomenological in the Husselean, intentionalist sense. Artistic form is transformational to the degree that it involves a creative, active involvement in what is perceived; it is only in this directed way that the bare stuff of linguistic study sensed by the unseeing eye becomes something that is perceived:

> [O]ne must enter as a co-creator into what is seen, heard, or pronounced; and in doing so overcome the material, extracreatively determinate character of the form, its thingness . . . I am directed in perception not towards words, not towards phonemes, not towards rhythm; rather, I am actively directed with the words, the phonemes, and the rhythm towards content. (305-6)

Rather than reducing everything to the material, form in fact constitutes an overcoming of the material. It reduces its perceptibility as material, just as a sound that has become part of language is at once seen or heard, not in its material dimension, but as the union of a sound-pattern and concept.

Fiction for the early Bakhtin arises from the directed freedom that form has to isolate or detach content from its relation to the cognitive and the ethical. He argues that to isolate something from its necessary relationships in nature – in the world as it is and as it is determined for cognition – is necessarily to destroy its materiality since materiality, thingness, is essentially relational: it is tied vertically to the links of the

past and the future, and horizontally to the affiliations of the present:

> The content of the work is, as it were, a segment of the unitary open event of being that has been freed by form from the responsibility to the future event . . . Isolation out of the unity of nature destroys all the material elements of content. . . . Isolation . . . dematerializes: an isolated thing is a *contradictio in adiecto*. So-called fiction in art is only a positive expression of isolation: an object that is isolated is by the same token a fictive object – that is, it is not actual within the unity of nature and has not existed within the event of being –. In regard to the negative moment, fiction and isolation coincide. What is emphasized in the positive moment of fiction is activeness, the authorship characteristic of form: in fiction I feel myself more acutely as actively making up the object, I feel my freedom (conditioned by my situatedness outside) to give form to and consummate the event without impediment. (306-7)

Two moments of isolation are identified here: a negative moment in which content that would normally form part of actual existence (the "unity of nature") is detached from its ties to that existence and so automatically rendered fictional, and the second, positive moment that is artistic: in which creative activity forges the isolated content into an architectonic, aesthetic object. The abstract and unusual terms of this discussion mark Bakhtin's care not to account for fictional creativity through the usual Romantic concept of the imagination or of Empiricist psychologism. The activity of the creative author allows Bakhtin to account for the subjectivity of fictional form without reducing that subjectivity to the mere processes of the psyche: "Isolation is thus the negative condition of the personal, subjective (not psychological

subjective) character of form; it allows the author-creator to become a constitutive moment of form" (308).

This account of form as necessarily marked by the subjectivity of the author indicates an important difference between the early Bakhtin and certain neo-Saussurean reflections on the "death of the author" and the antipathy to biographical criticism. For without resorting to Romantic or logocentric conceptions of the work as the result of psychological intentions, Bakhtin uses this "subjective" character to highlight what has been accepted unquestioningly between the Renaissance and the years that preceded the rise of Postmodernism, namely that works of art bear the stamps or marks of their creators. Although he does not present it in such terms, it is possible to recast this argument about the necessary imbrication of author and work in the light of both the Wittgensteinian concept of 'grammar' and the Derridean conception of the paradoxical eventfulness of the "signature" (Derrida 1991). As a non-participating, though constitutive, moment of form, the "personality of the creator . . . is both invisible and inaudible, and is experienced only from within, as a seeing, hearing, moving, remembering activity – as an embodying activity, and not as an embodied activity – which is only afterwards reflected in the shaped object" (Bakhtin 1987: 316). This activity is furthermore conceived in the now familiar terms of the eternal return of Derridean iterability (Derrida 1988), by which the unity of meaning lies not in the substance of the signified but in the rhythmical activity of the movement itself: "The unity of an ordering that is based upon the return of what is similar, even if it is the return of similar moments of meaning, is the unity of an activity which returns to itself, finding itself anew. The centre of gravity lies not in the meaning that has re-

turned but in the activity of movement (internal and external movement, that of body and soul) that engendered this meaning" (Bakhtin 1987: 310).

Although the philosophical vocabulary of this passage is not without its difficulties, especially in its undeconstructed reference to the internal and external, and to the idea that meaning may be engendered entirely by the movement of creative activity, it neither privileges the internal over the external nor claims that the return is one of exact self-presence. This is in fact an acknowledgement of the force of the syntactical over the semantic: a hint of the Wittgensteinian notion that meaning is produced through use or the Derridean active passivity of *différance.*

This imbrication of artistic form and creative activity is one of the ways in which the relationship of the literary work to life or to the world may be preserved, so that the work is seen *as work*, as the product of creative labour both conditioned by and transcending in its own way a human situatedness in the world. Another is conveyed by the Bakhtinian concept of isolation or detachment. While an object or event is isolated and so fictionalized or dematerialized from the existent world, the very notion of isolation or detachment indicates that it remains in some sense beholden to what Bakhtin calls the "unity of nature". The aesthetic necessarily works on the referential significance of words even though it transforms such significance, as it does all the other evaluative characteristics that mark the utterance in the world (as opposed to the sentence in the system of language).

Although Bakhtin's linguistic turn – his full-blooded concern with the weft of utterance and the world – was to come later, it is already clear in this essay that the isola-

tion of fiction takes place through language. It is "through the word and the word alone" that aesthetic form is able to detach content from the world, as "nonactuality" (or, in an echo of Husserl: "to be more precise and philosophically rigorous – an actuality of a special, purely aesthetic order") and turn it into the "event" of the aesthetic object (Bakhtin 1987: 315).

Bakhtin's early analysis of the "word as material" indicates five "moments or constituents" as opposed to the traditional threefold or the Saussurean twofold division of the linguistic sign. The greater richness of the Bakhtinian sign stems from the fact that, unlike Saussure or indeed the proponents of truth-conditional semantics, Bakhtin takes as his starting point language as it is used by an active speaker rather than as it is registered by the passive recipient and repository of *langue* in Saussure's speech circuit. The difference is entirely understandable given the respective projects of linguistic science and the analysis of the utterance. In order to isolate the system of language as a pure and unified object for the study of linguistics, Saussure is constrained to exclude precisely those aspects that in Bakhtin's view are central to the constitution of the literary work. Signifier and signified are respectively the least important constituents in the "active generation of the signifying word", which also encompasses "purely verbal" relations, both syntactic and paradigmatic, and the intonational or evaluative relations of the speaker's situation:

> [T]he governing movement, the focal-point of the form-giving energies here, is, of course, the fifth movement [of verbal activeness], and then, in sequential order of importance, the fourth (i.e. evaluation), the third (connections), the second (signification), and, finally, the first

(sound), which absorbs into itself, as it were, all the other moments and becomes the bearer of the unity of the word in poetry. (309)

The later Bakhtin will externalize and disseminate the "form-giving energies" now attributed to a non-psychologically conceived creative author in the much more radically linguistic terms of heteroglossia, although he will retain a perspective of the actively situated processes and activities of language in use, in deliberate contrast to both the passive associationism of Saussure's hearer and Saussure's theoretical divorce of the language system from the world.[15] The later move, which constitutes a way of transcending the false alternatives of what Voloshinov calls the "expressive subjectivism" of Wilhelm von Humboldt and his disciples, A.A. Potebnya and Karl Vossler, and the "abstract objectivism" of Saussurean linguistics (Bakhtin 1983: 31-49), is signalled by Bakhtin's later, decisive shift from poetry to the novel as exemplary literary form. We will look at this later. What we should note here is that Bakhtin combines a fairly traditional, though non-psychologistic, notion of fiction as something marked by free creativity with an unusual argument about the essential immateriality of the fictive which is directed specifically against the Formalist theory that defamiliarization in literature is the elevation of the material to the level of perceptibility. Sound as material, by absorbing into itself all the other elements in the process of all active creative form whatsoever, is transformed in a way that precludes its own materialization as the object of percepti-

---

[15] Bakhtin moves from an early restricted concept of "polyphony" to the broader notion of "heteroglossia" between the 1920s and the 1930s. See Clark and Tihanov 2011.

bility: it is the essence of sound as language, as utterance, to be immaterial or, as Saussure puts it, so be a sound-*pattern* rather than mere sound: a signifier.

Bakhtin thus wishes to show in his early essay that Shklovsky's definition of the word as a 'thing' is philosophically nonsensical. This does not mean that the signifier is merely a secondary, instrumental means to an end, as it is in logocentric theory; the 'strength' of the word in use can transform material into meaning, including all the 'values of reality', without necessarily pointing to anything beyond itself:

> The material becomes the condition: in working the material, the artist is working the values of reality isolated, and thereby overcomes the material immanently, without going beyond its bounds. The word, the utterance, ceases to expect and to want anything beyond its own bounds – action or correspondence to reality, that is, actualization in reality or verification and confirmation . . . Through its own strength, the word transposes the consummating form into content. (Bakhtin 1987: 308)

Taking a more sociological or Marxist line, Medvedev makes a similar point that as an extended utterance a work of art is part of an ideologically saturated social reality: "The work is a part of social reality, not of nature . . . It is not the physical sound or the psycho-physiological act of its pronunciation and perception that is artistically organized. What is organized is the socially meaningful sound, the ideological body of social intercourse" (Medvedev and Bakhtin 1978: 102).

Language is a system, not merely of pure differences, but of social evaluations; words are continuously recycled among utterances in concrete social and historical sit-

uations, bearing the traces of previous uses, imparting those uses to present situations, and in turn being imprinted by the evaluative traces of their situations of use. In a remarkable anticipation of a Derridean formulation, Medvedev criticizes Formalists for concentrating on the material insofar as it is present to perception, accusing them of fearing the "not-here" and "not-now" of meaning: "The fear of meaning, which, with its 'not-here' and 'not-now', is able to destroy the material nature of the work and the fullness of its presence in the here and now, is the fear which determines the poetic phonetics of the formalists" (105). Medvedev thus attacks the Formalist notion of the transrational word in terms that could be taken directly from Deconstruction: Formalists assume that it "completely coincides with itself" and is "simply present here and now" (ibid.). Unlike the sign as it is perceived as a part of the language system, the sign as part of a historically situated utterance is essentially non-self-identical: it is constantly reformed and marked by its repeated use in new contexts:

> The organic connection of sign and meaning cannot become lexical, grammatically stable, fixed in identical and reproducible forms, i.e. cannot in itself become a sign or constant element of a sign, cannot become grammaticalized. This connection is created only to be destroyed, to be reformed again, but in new forms under the conditions of a new utterance. (121)

Anticipated here is the later Bakhtinian notion of the utterance as event: the utterance is not an identical sign that is merely *recognized*, but rather a uniquely situated, historical, and social occurrence that, in contrast to the essential repeatability of the signifier, is in essence unrepeatable.

Social evaluation, especially in its form as "expressive intonation", mediates between the iterable generality of meaning that is presupposed in every utterance, and upon which Saussureans insist, and the uniqueness of the "event" of each utterance, which Derrida explores in the concepts of "literature" and the "signature". Medvedev therefore rejuvenates a term usually informed either by Romantic notions of subjective feeling or by the Positivist denigration of expression or intonation as secondary and inessential "colouring", using it instead to convey the essential imbrication of language and life, words in the world, which the Formalists ignore.

The Bakhtinian conception of such imbrication is the subject of the next section. What we need to note in conclusion is the degree to which the Bakhtin Circle differs from, but also accepts, the tenets of what it called "material aesthetics". We have traced both Bakhtin's and Medvedev's philosophical arguments, with their echoes of the Saussurean/Husserlian/Derridean analysis of the phenomenon of the "being heard" of language as language, against the reduction of language or literature to the pure perception of its material in Shklovsky. We have briefly noted the Bakhtin Circle's theoretical claim that the utterance cannot legitimately be reduced to the merely linguistic category of the sentence or word. What we need to investigate now is the way in which the Circle deals with the problem thrown up by this very conceptual distinction, namely the apparent contradiction between the logical requirement that the bearer of significance has in essence to be repeatable as the same and the translinguistic claim that the utterance in context is essentially unique.

I began with the suggestion that there is an ambiguity at the heart of the Formalist definition of defamiliariza-

tion: that it is at best unclear, in at least Shklovsky's formulation, whether what requires defamiliarization is the signifier, the signified or the referent. Bakhtin and Medvedev seek to show that the very nature of our perception of signs rules out the first of these. But they do more than that. When Medvedev states that "an object is not made strange for its own sake, in order that it be felt, in order to 'make the stone stony,' but for the sake of something else, a moral value, which against this background stands out all the more sharply and vividly precisely as a moral value" (Medvedev and Bakhtin 1978: 60), he is suggesting that there is more to the sign than is allowed by even an extension of the Saussurean model to include the referent alongside signifier and signified, namely the saturation of all of these with human value and intonation. This is, in the final analysis, where language and the world meet.

Chapter 5

Discourse in Art and Life

In this section I focus on two essays, written almost a generation apart. "The Problem of Speech Genres" (1951-52) contains Bakhtin's decisive critique of the reduction of language by Saussurean linguistics to the undifferentiated, if differential, components of an abstract system. In a remarkable echo of Wittgenstein, who had just died when Bakhtin wrote the essay, Bakhtin laments the fact that little attention had been paid not only to language as "utterance" but also to the "speech genres" (or what Wittgenstein calls language-games) that both determine and enable different uses of language within a variety of social contexts (Bakhtin 1987).

5.1 *Speech Genres and Language Games*

In "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry" (Bakhtin 1983), written in the twenties, Bakhtin's friend Valentin N. Voloshinov attacks the Formalist notion of an entirely separate "literary language" by showing the necessary involvement of the utterance in the situation of its use and the importance of a common purview of addresser and addressee in constituting, through a shared evaluative intonation, the utterance as such. The meaning of an utterance is liter-

ally unintelligible from the perspective of Linguistics. The strength of Voloshinov's essay lies in the way it transfers the structural conditions of meaning in "life" to the literary text without merely reducing the literary to the mundane.

All members of the Bakhtin Circle are united in their critique of both psychologistic accounts of language and Saussurean linguistics, which reduces the manifold uses of language to the abstract system of *langue*. Neither "individualistic subjectivism" nor "abstract objectivism", as Voloshinov terms these opposing trends, can encompass language as a real event in the real world. Whereas Saussure seeks to reduce language to a clearly defined object of scientific study, the Bakhtin Circle wishes to complicate and extend the limits of that object by taking as their smallest unit of analysis not the "linguistic" or "conventional" units of word or sentence but rather the "real" unit of the utterance.

It may seem that Bakhtin and Voloshinov simply replace the Saussurean study of *langue* with the more messy, tangled investigation of *parole*, leaving the Saussurean antinomy intact. But as I argue in *Literature and the Touch of the Real*, the absolute distinction between *langue* and *parole* must be abandoned in any investigation of language as an event in the world rather than as a pure system abstracted from it (Schalkwyk 2004b).

Bakhtin's concept of speech genres, like Wittgenstein's language-games, not only enacts a systematic differentiation of a field which for Saussure is both entirely individual and essentially chaotic, but also shows the relatively specific determination of individual combinations of words. For Saussure the linguistic system is determinate only with regard to semantics and such idiomatic combinations of signs as have become deposited as invariable syntagmas of the

system. Having no recourse to a theory of syntax, Saussure has to assume that while language users cannot invent the signs of a language themselves, they are absolutely free to combine such signs in any way they choose. But Bakhtinian speech genres, being the necessary enabling and delimiting forms or types of language in use, cut across the distinction between both *langue* and *parole* and the paradigmatic and the syntagmatic. They provide relatively stable limits, both to the choice of words and to the ways in which they may be combined, and such limits are more flexible than the limits imposed by grammar in the usual sense of the word:

> Speech genres are much more changeable, flexible, and plastic than language forms are, but they have a normative significance for the speaking individuum, and they are not created by him but are given to him. Therefore, the single utterance, with all its individuality and creativity, can in no way be regarded as a completely free combination of forms of language, as is supposed, for example, by Saussure (and by many other linguists after him) who juxtaposed the utterance (*la parole*), as an individual act, to the system of language as a phenomenon that is purely social and mandatory for the individuum. (Bakhtin 1987: 81)

The division between *parole* and *langue* forces Saussure to vacillate inconsistently between the "abstract objectivism" of the language system on the one hand and extreme "individualist subjectivism" of individual speech on the other. In other words, by drawing our attention to the mandatory forms that constrain the active use of language, Bakhtin indicates the social, and therefore flexibly determinate, nature of what Saussure dismisses as merely individual and secondary, precisely because he considers it to be

the product of unconstrained, subjective creativity. In John
Parrington's words, "the old and apparently unbridgeable
split between the systematic features of language . . . and
their fluid contexts, can be resolved by reducing the differ-
ences between them to another set of differences, those be-
tween specific speakers in particular situations" (1997: 41).
But something further is needed to stabilize the flux of con-
text and differences between speakers: the relatively sta-
ble, normative practice-based notion of speech acts, lan-
guage-games or speech genres, which lie between system
and individual use. Like Wittgenstein, Bakhtin views the
mandatory nature of the speech genre as something both
limiting and enabling: speech genres, which precede indi-
vidual creativity, and can therefore not be the invention of
any individual, once mastered, provide the conditions and
resources of 'free' creativity: "To use a genre freely and cre-
atively is not the same as to create a genre from the begin-
ning; genres must be fully mastered in order to be manipu-
lated freely" (Bakhtin 1987: 80).

If he insists on the constraints imposed upon what Sau-
ssure regards as freely and individually active, Bakhtin al-
so offers an alternative to the mechanical passivity of the
Saussurean addressee by emphasizing the active nature of
understanding:

> Still current in linguistics are such fictions as the 'listen-
> er' and 'understander' (partners of the 'speaker'), the 'uni-
> fied speech flow,' and so on. . . . Courses in general linguis-
> tics (even serious ones like Saussure's) frequently pres-
> ent graphic-schematic depictions of two partners in speech
> communication . . . and provide diagrams of the active
> speech processes of the speaker and the corresponding pas-
> sive processes of the listener's perception and understand-

ing of speech. The fact is that when the listener perceives and understands the meaning . . . of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude towards it. . . . Any understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker. (68)

Like Wittgenstein, Bakhtin claims that understanding is not the passive registering of a code in the head but is rather akin to an ability, manifested in, rather than merely signalled by, response. To accept this account of the listener's understanding is to reject the Saussurean system at its very foundations, for it is only by splitting the speech circuit into active and passive components that Saussure can draw the distinction between *langue* and *parole* upon which the establishment of the former as the true object of linguistic study rests.

The isolation of *langue* is also the necessary condition for the Saussurean divorce of language from the world in which it is used, and it is on this issue that the Bakhtinian concept of the utterance, which cuts across the *langue/parole* distinction, is especially significant. For the concept of the utterance allows for no such split: it reveals at every point the necessary imbrication of language and the world rather than their divorce. And it does so by avoiding another debilitating philosophical dichotomy: between subject and object.

Bakhtin is concerned less with the relation between a word on the one hand and an object on the other, considered in isolation, than with the weft constituted by the utterance, the situation in which it is used, and the active relationship constituted in language between people. An utterance and a sentence may be formally identical but, like

the aspects of Wittgenstein's duck-rabbit drawing, they are perceived entirely differently. Take the string 'The grass is green'. As a conventional syntactical structure, unconnected with any use except as a grammatical example, the sentence is comprehensible. As Bakhtin puts it, in a Wittgensteinian turn of phrase, we can understand its meaning, but only as "its possible role in an utterance" (1987: 80). It is, however, a purely conventional entity unmarked by the constitutive event of an utterance: by intonation, expression, response, or a relation to a particular real situation. These aspects, as palpable in any utterance as the creaking wagon or the sound of a motorcycle are for Heidegger, are entirely missing from the sentence: they cannot be perceived without imagining the sentence as an utterance, which would involve filling in its intonational relation to a situation. The same string of words is a different object of perception as a sentence than it is as an utterance: "a sentence assumes new qualities and is perceived quite differently from the way it would be if it were framed by other sentences within the single utterance of one and the same speaker" (73). This is why the sentence, in fact a reduced utterance, is the favourite object of study of a particular kind of philosophy and linguistics:[16] it is not complicated by the inflections and variability of meaning that it automatically has in its aspect as an utterance. This would not be a problem if philosophers and linguists did not pass off the sentence as the totality of language, as if this reduced state were the whole: "When this individual sentence is analyzed, it is usually perceived

---

[16] This constitutes Wittgenstein's major objection to traditional philosophy: it feeds off a limited number of examples and passes off the truth it derives from them as the complete truth.

as a completed utterance in some extremely simplified situation: the sun really has risen and the speaker states: 'The sun has risen.' The speaker sees that the grass is green and announces: 'The grass is green'" (83).

We can recognize this reduction of the complexity of the utterance to a completely different object of perception not merely in linguistic theories that are unconcerned with the relationship between language and the world, but especially in those which, anxious to forge a connection between words and the world, impose a simplistic model of object and designation on the diverse relationships of the utterance in the world. It is precisely because utterance is reduced to sentence that what is passed off as language *in toto* can be made to appear to be final and determinate: "The sentence, like the word, has a finality of meaning and a finality of grammatical form, but this finality of meaning is abstract by nature and this is precisely why it is so clear-cut: this is the finality of the element, but not of the whole" (ibid.). Bakhtin's conception of the shortcomings of linguistic analysis in terms of part and whole here is not as apposite as the suggestions in other parts of the essay that the difference between sentence and utterance are best conceived in terms of aspect perception. For not only can the latter way of putting the issue clarify the differences between the same object, seen now as a sentence, now as an utterance; it also shows that the difference is a conceptual one. The sentence, in Bakhtin's analysis, is a conventional, grammatical form; the utterance (which is also a sentence, in the same way that the duck-drawing is also a rabbit-drawing) is a real object. An utterance exists only "among rejoinders of dialogue", in a mode that is impossible for the sentence, and it is both tied to and demarcated from the utterances that precede and fol-

low it: "The utterance is not a conventional unit, but a real unit, clearly delimited by the change of speaking subject, which ends by relinquishing the floor to the other, as if with a silent *dixi*, perceived by the listeners (as a sign) that the speaker has finished" (72).

Between utterance and sentence there is thus a conceptual difference between the real and the conventional, a distinction that arises from a grammatical investigation in the Wittgensteinian sense. Bakhtin concludes that it is conceptually impossible for a *sentence* to make any contact with reality. It is part of the concept of a sentence, in contrast with that of the utterance, that it does not do so. A sentence that responds to another, is inflected with the intonation of a user, or is concerned with the world is, *qua* definition, an utterance. Theories which restrict themselves to the sentence therefore necessarily cut themselves off from the reality in which the utterance is embodied, and those that pass off their analyses of utterances as if they were sentences misrepresent the actual object of study. That is the story of neo-Saussurean literary theory that enjoyed an almost total hegemony in the literary theory of the late twentieth century.

5.2 *The Construction of the Utterance*

To see how utterances mark and are in turn marked by the situations in which they are used, and the implications of this for literature, we turn to Voloshinov's 1920s essay, "Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry" (Bakhtin 1983). Voloshinov begins his analysis of the relationship between discourse in life and art with an account of "ordinary re-

al-life speech" (a notion that is in effect the same as the Bakhtinian "utterance"), since, in contrast to the Formalist view, he holds that the possibility of artistic form lies, not in a specifically literary language, but in the genres of everyday speech. "In real life speech", he suggests, "the social essence of discourse stands out more clearly, more distinctly, and the connection between utterance and the surrounding social environment is more readily susceptible to analysis" (10). Like Bakhtin, Voloshinov holds that the utterance is not self-sufficient but "arises out of the non-verbal real-life situation and maintains a very intimate connection with it" (ibid.). We should note here, too, that Voloshinov does not invoke the model of object and designation to explain the relationship between speech and the world. Just as Bakhtin (and Wittgenstein) speak of language as a part of the "stream of life" and practical "human activity" (Bakhtin 1987: 83), discourse for Voloshinov is filled with the life in which it is used.

Both Bakhtin and Voloshinov extend Medvedev's claim, in *The Formal Method*, that language and the world meet through expressive intonation. Intonation is conceptually part of the immediate aspect of the utterance while being absent from the sentence. It is what turns the conventional sign from the language system into the real sign of actual discourse: "it is only for the given utterance under its particular historical conditions that the unity of meaning, sign and reality is realized through social evaluation" (Voloshinov 1986: 126; see also Bakhtin 1987: 86). Voloshinov illustrates the point with the simplest but most telling examples. Taken as a purely lexical or linguistic item, the word "well" is semantically void; or rather, we understand its meaning only insofar as we know what roles it might play in an ut-

terance, and such roles may vary considerably. Certainly in this aspect the word "well", as Bakhtin puts it, "belongs to no-one" – it is inflected with no-one's voice, it resolves no situation. It is a poor, bare word. Voloshinov, however, sketches a situation in which the word "well" is used as the entire utterance, but is at once saturated with the qualities of its situation: "A couple are sitting in a room. They are silent. One says, 'Well!' The other says nothing in reply" (10). No matter how much we "fiddle with the purely verbal part of the utterance", Voloshinov remarks, we will be unable to understand its sense. Given the "spatial purview" shared by the speakers, however, the dead word, as it were, springs into life, a life it gets from neither the psychological state of the speakers nor the language system to which it belongs, but from the way in which it resolves a shared situation: It is early May; both people look at the window to see that it is still snowing despite the fact that it ought to be springtime; both evaluate the situation similarly, with annoyance and impatience.[17]

From this peculiarly Russian example Voloshinov draws the conclusion that the meaning of the word as utterance depends on three concurrent things, all, in the conventional sense, extra-verbal:

[O]n what was "visible to both" (the snowflakes beyond the window), what was "known to both" (the date was May), and what was "similarly evaluated" (boredom with win-

[17] It should be clear that I disagree with Brandist's judgment that Voloshinov's notion of evaluative accent is "subjectivised" (2004b: 120). My argument offers an alternative way of accounting for Voloshinov's struggles with meaning and reference from the stark alternatives between Realism and Materialism that Brandist offers.

ter, longing for spring); and all this was grasped in the ac-
tual meaning of the utterance, all this soaked into it yet re-
mained verbally unmarked, unuttered. (11)

I write 'in the conventional sense' only, because al-
though the shared purview is both unuttered and the word
itself remains materially unmarked by the context, the 'be-
ing-heard' or 'being-seen' of the word, to use Derrida's
phrase, is radically affected. 'Well' as an utterance in the
context above and 'well' as an entry in the dictionary are
identical both as signifier and signified, as these are con-
ceived by Saussure. But as an utterance the word takes
on an aspect that arises from the internal connections be-
tween it and its context: it becomes saturated by what is
seen, known, and evaluated, all things which, crucially, are
not present in the word as part of an abstract system: "The
snowflakes stay beyond the window, the date on a page of
the calendar, the evaluation in the mind of the speaker, but
all this is implied in the word 'well'" (ibid.).

The implied nature in the utterance of what "stays out-
side" the word leads Voloshinov to suggest that all utteranc-
es have the character of an "objectively social enthymeme".
The indirection of the enthymeme emphasizes the fact that
the relationship between discourse and its context is not
that of a causal reflection, nor is the context something that
merely surrounds the utterance, as something external to it:
"the discourse here in no way reflects the non-verbal situ-
ation as a mirror reflects an object" (ibid.). Instead, the dis-
course is perceived to interact with the situation, bring-
ing out its human significance: "the discourse rather re-
solves the situation, as it were, summing up its value" (ibid.).
We are reminded of Derrida's claim that "context is always,

and always has been, at work within the place, and not only around it" (1988: 60).

Voloshinov's notion of discourse as "summing up the value" of a situation leads to perhaps the most unconventional and interesting suggestion of the essay, that in addition to the conventional address to the human listener, the intonational thrust or reference of the utterance 'Well!' is directed towards a *third* participant, namely the situation itself: the snow, the winter, fate – what Voloshinov calls the 'hero': "the intonation here establishes the living relationship to the topic, the object of the utterance, a relation which almost becomes an address to it, as if to a living culprit in person; while the listener – the second participant – is as it were conscripted as a witness and as an ally" (Bakhtin 1983: 15).

Voloshinov stresses the "objective" and "social" character of what he calls the "enthymeme" of intonation because he wishes to avoid the implication that what is merely implied in the utterance has its real existence in the 'soul' of the speaker. Although he does not invoke the concept of speech genres here, it is precisely the speech genre as a set of socially normative possibilities of use that can conceptually bear the character of an evaluative implication (or enthymeme) shared by particular groups of people, no matter what resides in their heads or hearts: "Implied evaluations are not, therefore, individual emotions, but socially determined and necessary acts. Individual emotions can only accompany the fundamental tone of the social evaluation as overtones – the 'I' can realize itself in discourse, only when dependent upon the 'we'" (12).

Precisely because such intonations are the marks of the normative character of language in social use – of speech genres – they are neither buried in the psychology of indi-

viduals nor obliterated by the indifference of *langue*, but are publicly discernible in the actual speech situation and the possibilities that speech genres make available. Likening intonation to gesture, which requires the 'supporting chorus' of a community of participants, Voloshinov argues that it is through the publicly shared forms of evaluation which mark all utterances that language, social being, and the world as 'hero' are brought together in an objective and accessible, rather than subjective, way: "intonation and gesture are active and objective in intention . . . there is always stored in them a living, dynamic relationship with the outside world and the social environment – friends, enemies, allies" (16).

Individually inflected intonations are, of course, always possible, but as in the relationship between the user of language and the speech genre that enables such use, individual intonation is made possible by the shared forms of evaluation that form an inescapable aspect of the utterance. Intonation draws language beyond the purely verbal to the reality of what lies outside language as system, but not beyond language as utterance, which has the character of Derrida's 'text'.[18] "Even when there is an immediate verbal context", Voloshinov comments, in an allusion to the absence of such a verbal context in his example:

> [T]he intonation draws us beyond its bounds. Intonation can be fully understood only when related to the implied evaluations of the social group in question, however wide that group may be. Intonation always lies on the border of the verbal and the non-verbal, the spoken and the non-spo-

----

[18] For an account of "the text" in Derrida that regards it not as a form of linguistic idealism but rather as precisely the imbrication of world and language, see Schalkwyk 1997 and 2004b.

ken. In intonation the word comes directly into contact
with life. (14)

Voloshinov's target is clearly the Formalist divorce of life
and art, since he stresses the fact that if literary works are
utterances rather than conglomerations of sentences, then
as carriers of intonation they necessarily make contact with
life – with the world as it is inflected by the social word.
This inflection is not imposed externally upon the world,
but perceived directly in it, as a continuous aspect: "It seems
that we perceive the value of an object together with its be-
ing, as one of its qualities; in the same way, for example,
we sense the value of the sun together with its warmth and
light. And thus all phenomena of being which surrounds
us are fused together with our evaluations of them" (ibid.).
Such evaluation remains unspoken in the sense that it is
not formulated as an interpretation but rather shows itself
directly in our collective discourses, as something presup-
posed in them. Once it becomes the object of discussion,
once it ceases to organize discourse and becomes the con-
tent of a discussion or investigation, Voloshinov suggests,
it has begun to lose its power to organize our perceptions.
A process of revaluation has begun, a change of aspect is
effected which interrupts the continuous nature of usu-
al aspect perception. That which organizes perception, as it
were, loses its grip; the picture no longer holds us captive:

> Sound social evaluation remains in life and thence orga-
> nizes the very form of the utterance and its intonation, but
> in no way strives to find adequate expression in the con-
> tent of the discourse. Once an evaluation has leapt out of
> the formal events into content, we can say with confidence
> that a revaluation is being prepared. The essential evalua-

tion is thus not at all contained in the content of the dis-
course and cannot be extracted from it, but on the other
hand it determines the very selection of words and form of
the verbal entity. Its most pure expression is found in into-
nation. Intonation establishes an intimate connection be-
tween discourse and the non-verbal context. Living intona-
tion, as it were, *leads discourse beyond its verbal limits.* (13;
emphasis added)[19]

Voloshinov here anticipates the later Bakhtin's con-
ception of the way in which the authoritative voices from
which we learn language are transformed into an 'inner',
'persuasive' voice – the voice from which each socialized
person speaks without hesitation or question.

Like Wittgenstein (1973: 212 passim), Voloshinov holds
that a private language is a contradiction in terms. His point
that even the internal speech of the poet is derived in mere-
ly linguistic and, more important, in intonational, ideolog-
ical terms from a public language, is the basis of his argu-
ment that discourse-in-life and discourse-in-art cannot be
radically separated.[20] Offering a sociological rather than
a logical account of the "construction of the utterance" as
being essentially public and social, he argues that all dis-
course, even the discourse that I direct entirely to myself,
is marked by an essentially dialogical character. Not on-
ly the words of my interior monologue, but also the unspo-
ken evaluations with which such words as even private ut-

[19] Cf. Brandist (2004a: 31 passim), who argues that Voloshinov is
influenced by Karl Bühler's theory of the speech event or speech act.
See also Brandist 2004b.

[20] See also Derrida's response to John Searle in Derrida 1988 for a
similar argument.

terances are necessarily saturated, have been given to me
through my membership of a society, which Voloshinov
conceives in hierarchical, agonistic, class terms. In this re-
spect he differs from Wittgenstein, for whom the 'we' of the
communal practice is relatively undifferentiated, more un-
problematically 'communal', following an argument that is
less sociological than logical.

When I speak to myself, Voloshinov holds, I use a lan-
guage that is always already inflected with the class evalua-
tion of the social group to which I belong. Most significant-
ly, even my interior monologue is constituted by the *a pri-
ori* possibility of all discourse, namely its directedness to a
listener who, though not necessarily an empirical being, is
always implied as an active responder. In this respect Vo-
loshinov's sociological analysis comes closer to Derrida's
non-empirical reflections on the *a priori* dialogism of the *yes*
(Derrida 1991). For Voloshinov, an individual, including the
poet, may have a closer or more distant relationship with a
particular class. But, just as a speaker is free to use speech
genres with greater or lesser creativity but not to create
the genres themselves, his or her discourse will always be
marked by this distance or proximity to a particular social
class: "Even the most intimate self-consciousness is already
an attempt to translate the self into a common language, to
take into account the point of view of another, and conse-
quently, contains within itself an orientation towards a po-
tential listener . . . consciousness . . . is not merely a psycho-
logical phenomenon, but first and foremost, ideological, the
product of social interaction" (Bakhtin 1983: 27).

Just as any utterance in life is marked *a priori* by the oth-
er of a listener, so the writer is also conditioned by an essen-
tial third person, an addressee, who is not the equivalent of

any actual, empirical public that may read the work or even to which the writer may consciously direct the work:

> We must emphasise once more that we always think of the listener as an immanent participant in the artistic event, one who determines the form of the work from within. The listener is, on par with the author and hero, an essential internal element of the work and in no way coincides with the so-called 'public', which is located outside the work, the artistic demands and tastes of which may be consciously reckoned with. (26)

The stress here on the unconscious constitution of the form of the work by an immanent, non-empirical listener indicates that Voloshinov is concerned both with the conditions of possibility of any literary work, which remain beyond and frame the conscious intentions of the author and, despite his Marxism, with an immanent rather than external literary criticism. Rather than lying outside the text, as something that surrounds it, its context is marked inside it, a trace, left by the dialogical conditions of possibility of the utterance, which are entirely absent from the word as a purely linguistic phenomenon: "We are taking the author, the hero and the listener to be within the artistic event, but only inasmuch as they enter the very perception of the artistic work, inasmuch as they are its necessary elements. These are the vital forces, determining both form and style, and can be quite precisely sensed by the competent observer" (22).

Crucial to Voloshinov's conception of the relationship between discourse in life and art is the non-empiricist argument that discourse as socially constituted is marked by or bears the indelible trace of its involvement in the world.

This involvement, including both its worldly situation and the value-laden relationship among author, hero, and listener appears as an aspect of the work itself. Art is a secondary use of and reflection upon the primary involvement of discourse-in-life; thus it cannot but carry into itself not only the intonations that mark real-life discourse but also the movement outwards into the world that characterizes such intonation. As Voloshinov puts it, "the poetic work is a powerful condenser of unspoken social evaluations" (19). Linguistics and Formalism, which treat language as the product of a disembodied system or mere material have excluded this aspect from their purview. The Bakhtin Circle's trans- or metalinguistics seeks to restore our perception of the embodiment of language in the world of human social being: it seeks to show the way in which even fictional utterances are intonationally "intertwined by a thousand threads into the non-verbal real-life context" (12), and are dialogically related to other utterances as a matter of their internal constitution rather than by mere empirical contingency: "The utterance as a whole is shaped as such by extralinguistic (dialogic) aspects . . . [which] pervade the utterance from within" (Bakhtin 1987: 109).

Because we automatically see utterances as utterances rather than as mere sentences the rich aspects to which Bakhtin and Voloshinov draw our attention are immediately apparent to us in everyday life. The concept of the speech genre emphasizes not only the boundaries between different types of utterance, but also the permeability of such boundaries: both the possibility and the necessity of each utterance's bearing the trace of another from which it differs and to which it responds: "Each utterance is filled with the echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related

by the communality of the sphere of speech communication . . . furrowed with distant and barely audible echoes of changes of speech subjects and dialogic overtones" (91, 93).

The Bakhtin Circle's rejection of the idea that each of us could have an Adamic relation to language means not only that we get our language from a social world but also that, no matter what we say, it is always already a response, and is constituted by an expected response in turn. When this idea is applied to the author in literature we begin to glimpse the full force of what the dialogic means for Bakhtin. Dialogism is not simply my response to something someone else has said; that is mere dialogue. Dialogism involves the way in which my intonation can penetrate boundaries of another's speech to permeate it with a new inflexion or overtone, but without obliterating the trace of the other, so that the new utterance rings with the complex harmonics of both voices. For the middle Bakhtin it is not poetry but the novel that exemplifies dialogism in this sense. In addition, dialogism is not simply the simultaneous preservation and penetration of the boundaries of the discourse of self and other. Whatever is spoken about, whatever object, topic, or 'hero' is addressed via the intonation of the utterance, has been addressed in many different ways by different voices many times before. When I come to it, it is already marked by the intonations of others, with which it continues to resonate: "The object, as it were, has already been articulated, disputed, elucidated, and evaluated in various ways. Various viewpoints, world views and trends cross, converge, and diverge in it. The speaker is not the biblical Adam, dealing only with virgin and still unnamed objects, giving them names for the first time" (93). For a fuller elaboration of these insights, we need to turn to Bakhtin of the

middle period, especially to the books on Dostoevsky and Rabelais and the essays on dialogism and the novel.

Chapter 6

The Syntactical Relations of Reported Speech

> Reported speech is speech within speech,
> utterance within utterance,
> and at the same time also speech about speech,
> utterance about utterance.
> V. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*

The concept of dialogism in Bakhtin's middle period sketched briefly above is best approached via Voloshinov's discussion in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1986) of the complexities of reported speech, in the forms of direct, indirect, and, most important, quasi-direct discourse. Despite the apparently dry, technical nature of the topic, the analysis is directly concerned with the philosophical issues that have been the focus of this book, and it indicates quite clearly why Bakhtin should have broken with the Formalists by upholding the novel as the exemplary form of literary art. Obviously, attention to reported speech is directly related to the Bakhtin Circle's concern with the interaction of different utterances, but in Voloshinov's hands the topic also raises the related issues of the relationship between grammar and stylistics, iterability, aspect-perception and its relation to the difference between speech and writing, reference to the world, and the place of style and grammar in history.

There is no space to reproduce Voloshinov's nuanced account of different forms of reported speech, even within the broader categories of direct, indirect, and quasi-indirect speech. It will be sufficient to note the broadly theoretical thrust of his distinctions as they relate to the relation between literature and the world. Direct and indirect speech form the extremes of a spectrum of varying grammatical and stylistic devices for reproducing the speech of others which are nonetheless radically different from dialogue in a play, for example. On this difference rests the entire, specifically Bakhtinian, concept of dialogism, and it accounts for Bakhtin's somewhat dogmatic and ill-considered opposition to drama as a literary form. The difference lies in syntax. In Bakhtin's view, dramatic dialogue contains no voice that can breach the rigid separation of each character's utterance in the dialogue. Formally, drama presents us with impermeable blocks of speech which, in Bakhtin's view, react to but cannot permeate each other. The intonations in each utterance remain separate, developing in a perhaps dialectical but not, paradoxically, in a dialogical, way. It is the syntactical form of reported speech, present only randomly and accidentally "here and there", in dramatic dialogue, but constitutive of novelistic, narrative style that not only allows for but renders inevitable the interference of one intonation by another.

Languages and historically determined forms of writing which maintain a rigid, grammatical separation between the reported speech and the reporting voice in the form of direct reported speech, delimiting one from the other with mandatory quotation marks, colons, and the like, and re-presenting the grammatical and stylistic form of the reported speech exactly, will, of course, approach the 'mono-

logism' of dramatic dialogue, even though the the two utterances are bound syntactically within the same sentence, as in: 'She said: 'I won't be there!''. Voloshinov makes the conceptual point that it is impossible mechanically to transform a directly reported speech into indirect speech: the process requires translation, a transformation that does not leave either reporting or reported speech intact. Indirect discourse is essentially analytical insofar as it has to analyse and represent both the referential content and the "emotive-affective" features of the utterance being reported (as opposed to the re-presentation of direct discourse). It not only transposes indicators of time and place grammatically and lexically, it also has to transpose evaluative form into analysed content: 'She said defiantly that she would not be here'. Indirect discourse is thus a mode of perception of an utterance, a change of aspect: it strips the aspects of intonation that we would perceive directly in the direct utterance and substitutes for them an interpretation in the Wittgensteinian sense, conveyed in different, analytically oriented, words which do not bear the aspect of the intonation directly as part of its perception:

> [T]he compositional and inflectional peculiarities of interrogative, exclamatory, and imperative sentences are relinquished in indirect discourse, and their identification depends solely on the content...Indirect discourse 'hears' a message differently; it actively receives and brings to bear in transmission different factors, different aspects of the message than do other patterns. (Voloshinov 1986: 129)

Voloshinov furthermore discerns two different modes or orientations of analysis in indirect discourse. There is, first, an orientation towards its referential content, by which the

reporting discourse "does not 'hear' or take in whatever is
in that utterance that is without thematic significance" (130),
and a strict separation is maintained between the authori-
al cognitive or ideational position and that of the report-
ed speech. On the other hand, what Voloshinov calls "tex-
ture-analysing" modes of indirect speech (in contrast to
"referent-analysing" forms), convey primarily the style, in-
tonation, and attitude of the reported speech. We should
note that the distinction between referent-analysing and
texture-analysing speech is not a distinction between dis-
course that is related to the world and discourse as mere ex-
pression or self-reflection. Despite its name, texture-ana-
lysing discourse repeats, in order to display or stage them,
types of utterance that are socially typical and specific of at-
titudes towards the world:

> The words and expressions, incorporated into indirect dis-
> course with their own specificity detectable . . . are being
> "made strange," to use the language of the Formalists, and
> made strange precisely in the direction that suits the au-
> thor's needs: they are particularized, their coloration is
> heightened, but at the same time they are made to accom-
> modate shadings of the author's attitude – his irony, hu-
> mor, and so on. (131)

The return of the Shklovskian concept of defamiliariza-
tion is especially significant, for it suggests that, for Volos-
hinov at least, it is not the concept of "making strange" as
such that is unacceptable, but rather the Formalist reduc-
tion of what is made strange in the new perception. Via its
process of analytical citation, texture-analysing indirect dis-
course forces us to see the habitual intonations of a par-
ticular kind of social utterance anew, inflecting it with a

half-alienating intonation of its own. This does not remove discourse from life, but provokes greater self-consciousness of the multiple ties that bind utterances to the context of being.

At this point it becomes apparent that indirect and direct discourse begin to shade into the forms of reported speech in which Voloshinov has the greatest interest: quasi-direct or free-indirect discourse. Grammatically, such discourse is made possible by the omission of the reporting verb ('said' or 'thought', or whatever), although Voloshinov stresses that it can be reduced neither to mere grammatical markers nor to a psychologically conceived authorial intention. Especially significant about quasi-direct discourse is the fact that it does not obey the law of the excluded middle. It is the stage, as it were, on which different intonations, those of the reporting and those of the reported speech, can engage in creative friction. The intonation of one can interfere with the other without either being obliterated, both being perceived simultaneously in the whole utterance:

> It is not a matter of one abstract form moving toward another, but a matter of the mutual orientation of two utterances changing on the basis of a change in the active perception by the linguistic consciousness of the "speaking personality," of its ideational, ideological autonomy, of its verbal individuality . . . The dike ruptures, as it were, and authorial intonations freely stream into the reported speech. (146)

Quasi-direct discourse is an example of a syntactical movement in which the distinction between 'use' and 'mention', upon which Searle insists in his attack on Derrida, is rendered undecidable, if not impossible (Searle 1977).

For if direct discourse can be held to be the mere mention of what someone else has said – in which case the force of the quoted words is not communicated to the citing utterance – this is not at all the case in quasi-direct discourse, when the forces of each utterance either reinforce or conflict with each other. For reported speech to be an "arena in which two intonations, two points of view, two speech acts converge and clash" (Voloshinov 1986: 135), Voloshinov has to offer an account of an arena in which both are perceptible simultaneously, otherwise the point of the double inflection would be lost. He is aware that the 'being heard' of oral speech precludes such doubleness, at least at the same time, because, like our perception of the duck-rabbit drawing, only one aspect, one intonation, can be heard at any moment. In another theoretical black mark against drama, it appears that the theatre of double inflection – in which we oscillate undecidably between two intonations which register with equal force – can occur only in the process of silent reading, in the space opened by the Husserlean reduction. And this 'theatre' is exemplified by the specifically modern development of a kind of writing that eschews oral performance, the novel:

> [I]n that area where quasi-direct discourse has become a massively used device – the area of modern prose fiction – transmission by voice of evaluative interference would be impossible. Furthermore, the very kind of development quasi-direct discourse has undergone is bound up with the transposition of the larger prose genres into a silent register, i.e. for silent reading. Only this 'silencing' of prose could have made available the multileveledness and voice-defying complexity of intonational structures that are so characteristic for modern literature. (156)

If Derrida were looking for an example of a contemporary writer for whom writing is preferable to speech precisely because of its capacity to register the "experience and experiment of the undecidable", he would find it here.

In this early work Voloshinov indicates two aspects of the novel that were to become synonymous with the name of Bakhtin in the latter part of the century: first, the interference and simultaneous registration of two voices in the syntax of novelistic representation (dialogism), and the open-endedness of novelistic discourse, its resistance to finality and closure. Both aspects have been adduced by postmodernists in their appropriation of Bakhtin, if not Voloshinov, as a postmodern *avant la lettre*. Without suspending a necessary suspicion of the vagueness of such labels, we should take note of the extravagance of the claim insofar as very few who make it have taken into account the centrality and indispensability of the relationship between discourse and the world for the Bakhtinian position as a whole: an indispensability with which most postmodernists are only too pleased to dispense. As the epigraph at the head of this section suggests, the opposition of representation and self-reflexivity in language is a false contrast. Reported speech is both. And to represent the speech of another is always not only to turn language back on itself but also to turn language back on the ways in which speech represents reality. It is to this issue that we now turn.

The Objects of Dialogism:
The Familiarity of the Novel

> Laughter is a vital factor in laying down that prerequisite
> for fearlessness without which it would be impossible
> to approach the world realistically.
> M.M. Bakhtin, "Epic and the Novel"

If defamiliarization is the Shklovskian gateway to what is distinctive about literature, for Bakhtin it is familiarization that marks the distinctive quality of the novel. The process of rendering relationships to people and objects familiar by obliterating the distance imposed between them by the epic marks the novel as a phenomenon of modernity, despite its classical precursors in the Socratic dialogues, Greek romance, and Menippean satire. Although both Shklovsky and Bakhtin locate the transformative role of the literary in a renewal of perception, the fact that they choose the opposite poles of the same conceptual pair indicates an important political difference between them. Quite apart from his ideological separation of art and life, Shklovsky's conception of a defamiliarizing process which operates entirely intrinsically, as a formally diachronic but anti-historical process of the interaction between habituation and seeing anew, means that there is no conceptual space for politics or ethics in his scheme. Only the more nuanced reconceptualizations

of defamiliarization in the systematic interaction between discourses of art and life offered by Eichenbaum and, especially, Tynjanov and Jakobson, could make room for a conception of politics that has more than psychological or purely aesthetic dimensions.

The concept of familiarization, on the other hand, contains a political dimension from the beginning. Bakhtin defines the familiarizing process of the novel against the politically distancing roles of the epic, a genre which, in contrast to Lukács, he does not see as the celebration of an ideal human communality, but rather as the enactment of a totalitarian, static, and monological world. The epic is constrained by its essential relation to an unchangeable, unapproachable, and transcendental past, which, by being cut off from the future, precludes the open-endedness of forward time and the positive relation to iterability in the novel. Although Bakhtin would have to concede that the epic cannot escape iterability as such, its generic impulse, like the logocentric discourses deconstructed by Derrida, is to conceal its own dependence upon this condition. The epic relation to time, like that of the mythic narrative that establishes the social bond in Lyotard's account of the Cashinahua, is that of the cycle in which no difference, no potentially disruptive relation to memory, is allowed (Lyotard 1989). The epic occurs in the "absolute past", which is totally removed, at a hierarchical distance, from the time in which it is read or narrated as event: "it is a world of 'beginning' and 'peak times' in a national history, a world of fathers and founders

of families, a world of 'firsts' and 'bests'" (Bakhtin 1981: 13).[21]

The distance that the epic imposes upon both its singer and its listener is first, one of time, second, one of political and social respect. Narrator and listener may share the same time and may be social equals, but they are separated in time and by the hierarchical relationships from the world contained in epic narrative: "The represented world of the heroes stands on an utterly different and inaccessible time-and-value plane, separated by epic distance" (14). Because the epic speaks the traditions of a unified society, the listener and representer may be familiar with the epic world in the epistemological sense that they know it. They are, however, absolutely precluded from the social familiarity which, as the adage goes, "breeds contempt". It is to effect familiarity in the latter sense that the novel reduces the distance between the narrator/reader on the one hand, and both the time and the objects of representation in the narrative on the other. As Graham Pechey puts it, the novel for Bakhtin is "both an empirical phenomenon and a transcendental category" (2007: 105). Both as philosophical idea and historical genre it brings about a political as much as an epistemologi-

[21] Compare the lovely passage which opens Lukács 1971: 29: "Happy are those ages when the starry sky is the map of all possible paths – ages whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars. Everything in such ages is new and yet familiar, full of adventure and yet their own. The world is wide and yet it is like home, for the fire that burns in the soul is of the same essential nature as the stars; the world and the self, the light and the fire, are sharply distinct, yet they never become permanent strangers to one another, for fire is the soul of all light and fire clothes itself in light". This epic world in which everything exists *sub specie aeternitatis* is the very opposite of the mundane, multi-voiced world of becoming that characterizes the Bakhtinian novel.

cal revolution in terms of the way in which it effects the re-
lationships among author, reader, language and the world:
"To portray an event on the same time-and-value plane as
oneself and one's contemporaries . . . is to undertake a rad-
ical revolution, and to step out of the world of the epic into
the world of the novel" (Bahktin 1981: 14).

Epistemology and politics are inseparable for Bakh-
tin, and the dawning of the modern era means the appear-
ance of the conditions of possibility of science as the mun-
dane, secular fool that holds the piety of epic relationships
up to ridicule. If, as Bakhtin claims, epistemology becomes
the dominant discipline when the novel becomes the domi-
nant genre, it is because the political irreverence of both the
novel and science effects a familiarity, in both senses of the
word, with objects that before maintained a hallowed dis-
tance from any impertinent probing. Historically, the novel
is allied to the popular rituals of irreverent laughter, which
destroy the epic by reducing the valorizing distance upon
which it depends to an intimate familiarity, by which the
objects of the epic can be brought into the arena of contem-
porary contact. Allied to the laughter which is the soul of
the carnival, the novel represents a point of absolute, fear-
less contact with the world:

> Everything that makes us laugh is close at hand, all com-
> ic creativity works in a zone of maximal proximity. Laugh-
> ter has the remarkable power of making an object come up
> close, of drawing it into a zone of crude contact where one
> can finger it familiarly on all sides, turn it upside down, in-
> side out, peer at it from above and below, break open its
> outside shell, look at its centre, doubt it, take it apart, dis-
> member it, lay it bare and expose it, examine it freely and
> experiment with it. Laughter demolishes fear and piety be-

> fore the object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it. Laughter is a vital factor in laying down that prerequisite for fearlessness without which it would be impossible to approach the world realistically. As it draws an object to itself and makes it familiar, laughter delivers the object into the fearless hands of investigative experiment – both scientific and artistic – and into the hands of free experimental fantasy. (23)

"Fear and piety". In a different study one might speculate about the relationship of this passage to the Stalinist fear and Russian Orthodox piety with which Bakhtin lived.[22] For the present we should note how radically this passage develops the idea expressed by both Medvedev and Voloshinov that the point of contact between the world and language is made through intonation or evaluation. The revelation of the object as it is in all its aspects is achieved for Bakhtin precisely by giving free rein to the expressive intimacy of an apparently irrational impulse, rather than from the dogmatic stance of a single form of discourse. Laughter is the way to "things themselves". But precisely because Bakhtin refuses to draw the distinction here between the human and the natural sciences that he invokes in his early essays (he insists on laughter as the essential condition of both artistic and scientific experiment), we should not restrict the concept to the belly laugh. It is a more general concept – of which the guffaw and chuckle may be species – of a particular relation to the world which is the condition of familiar investigation, and of which the novel, whether comic or not, is the artistic apogee.

---

[22] For differently inflected accounts of Bakhtin's relation to Russian Orthodoxy, see Clark and Holquist 1984 and Emerson 1990.

Furthermore, although Bakhtin celebrates the proximity of the new, anti-epic contact with the object, this is not done in the spirit of metaphysical "presence". The passage suggests that the contact is never static, never present in an absolute here and now, but is always being displaced by the diachronic character of changing perspectives. For Bakhtin the novel is the genre quintessentially involved in spatial and temporal phenomena, which it both represents and resolves in the form of historical and subgenre-specific chronotopes.

Chapter 8

Dialogization of the Object

> Discourse lives . . . beyond itself,
> in a living impulse towards the object.
> M.M. Bakhtin, "Discourse in the Novel"

The Bakhtinian concept of the chronotope will be the subject of the next section. For the moment, let us look at the implications of novelistic dialogism for the more specific relations between fiction and the world. If laughter familiarizes objects by reducing the intonational distance imposed by particular political or religious moments in history, that still does not clarify the relationship between discourse in general (and discourse in the novel in particular) and worldly or material objects. We have already seen that the Bakhtin Circle's Heideggerian view of the imbrication of discourse and world through the concept of the utterance means that they are able to avoid the problematic philosophical model of word and designation. Taking that as read, we can nonetheless draw a further, perhaps more conventional but nonetheless interesting, argument about specific ways in which discourse becomes engaged with particular objects. In one of the few studies that has focussed directly on the question of reference in Bakhtin, Ann Jefferson correctly begins by arguing that dialogism would be an empty concept without an at least implied reference to the world. She concludes

that the Bakhtinian concept of dialogism, far from avoiding reference, in fact intensifies reference, rendering it absolutely unavoidable.[23] Novels may consist essentially of representations of specific languages, which bring out or resonate with or against their social typicality, but the members of the Bakhtin Circle never doubt that such represented languages or voices are primarily directed referentially at the world. As Jefferson puts it, "the struggle which the discourses of heteroglossia are engaged in . . . is an all-out fight over that familiar object of debate – the referent" (1986: 175). We need to distinguish two levels of representation here: one is the relationship between the novel and the world it represents; the other is the relationship between represented utterances themselves and the world. There are thus two levels of representation, both a representation of the real world. The classic neo-Saussurean move by which representation to the second power negates the very concept of "original" representation does not operate. For if the discourses represented by the novel are particular forms of representation of the world, they are themselves aspects of that world when they are objects of representation in the novel itself. The novel does not lose contact with the world through representing discourses rather than things; rather it engages ever more closely with it.

Especially in the Dostoevsky book, Bakhtin holds that the world represented by the novel is not invented but created. By this he means that the "stuff" of novelistic fiction is not merely the purely self-reflexive representation

---

[23] Jefferson (1986: 182): "intensification and heightening of the inherent dialogism is matched by, indeed depends upon, an equal intensification of representation and the referential impulse of language".

of mere words, of only other novels, as many neo-Saussureans hold, but is a representing transformation of the social world of the novelist. He is curtly dismissive of purely self-reflexive fiction precisely because it reduces the dynamic open-endedness of real life to trivial and static images of the "literary":

> The way of perceiving objects and expressions peculiar to this novelistic discourse is not the ever-changing world view of a living and mobile human being, one forever escaping into the infinity of real life; it is rather the restricted world view of a man trying to preserve one and the same immobile pose, someone whose movements are made not in order to see better, but quite the opposite – he moves so that he can turn away from, not notice, be distracted. This world view, filled, not with real-life things but with verbal references to literary things and images, is polemically set against the brute heteroglossia of the real world and painstakingly . . . cleansed of all possible associations with crude life. (Bakhtin 1981: 385)

We should take care not to accept this rather sweeping evaluation as a knock-down condemnation of what has come to be known as the postmodern novel in general, but there are pertinent theoretical observations to be gleaned from it. First, it suggests that the championing of neo-Saussurean self-reflexivity is an ideological, polemical position rather an epistemological truth. More important, the Bakhtinian conception of both the open-endedness of historical reality and the multifarious, agonistic representations of that reality offers a concept of realism that is marked by neither the straw man of stultifying political complacency nor the crude epistemology that neo-Saussureans set up in their attacks on

"bourgeois realism". Like Robert Weimann in a different context, Bakhtin shows that worldly representation can in certain contexts be the most liberating, "subversive", venture for the novelist, while self-reflexivity may be most dead, trivial, and inward looking (Weimann 1984). But representation and self-reflexivity are not incompatible for Bakhtin.

I shall show in a moment that the self-reflexivity of the novel at its best shows its own imbrication in the world. This reveals the spuriousness of a standard argument which holds that the Saussurean revelation of the arbitrariness of the sign opens the way to literary self-reflexivity. Such self-reflexivity is then held to be the properly epistemological critique of an ideological realism, which passes its essentially arbitrary significations off as a natural reflection of reality. But if language has no relation to any referent it is difficult to see how the reflexive revelation of the emptiness of reference can offer any kind of epistemological or political liberation. Without a theory of reference the political gestures of neo-Saussureanism are as empty as the signifiers it chases. In contrast, Bakhtin insists that both the representing form of the novel and its represented content are completely engaged in its historical and ideological moment, even though that engagement will come to be seen differently by the subsequent "renewing" and always-also-engaged moments of its reading. This interaction between the time-in-space and space-in-time of writing and that of reading is expressed in the concept of the chronotope, which is the subject of the next section. All we need to note for the moment is Bakhtin's view that Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel, for example, is made possible by the "condition of [the] society" in which he is writing: that both the state of society-in-the-world and the novel-as-genre-in-the-world

render the dialogized heteroglossia of the Dostoevskian novel possible: "The multileveledness and contradictions of social reality was present as an objective fact of the epoch. The epoch itself made the polyphonic novel possible" (Bakhtin 1984: 27).

For Bakhtin, then, an utterance is always directed, indeed constituted, by its active movement outward, to another, whether this is a referent, another person, an intonation, or a context. This is what makes it different from the mere word or sentence, and it is because Bakhtin maintains a careful distinction between the word as part of a system and its use in life, that he can claim that "discourse lives . . . beyond itself, in a living impulse towards the object" (Bakhtin 1981: 292). He goes on: "if we detach ourselves completely from this impulse 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" (ibid.).

If Bakhtin claims somewhat sweepingly in the Dostoevsky book that ordinary discourse is generally "directed towards the referential object of speech" (Bakhtin 1984: 185), that directedness is complicated by the traces that use always leaves in that discourse: "Each word tastes of the context and contexts in which it has lived its socially charged life, all words and forms are populated by intentions" (Bakhtin 1981: 293). As a representation of such discourses, a novel will incorporate into itself that diverse population of intentions and inflections, half showing them up as objects or images of representation, half allowing their own representing force to speak, in the mode of quasi-direct discourse, a kind of citation that refuses an absolute distinction between "use" and "mention". The relationship between showing and telling is therefore highly complicated in Bakhtin: the nov-

el essentially does both, mobilizing and bowing to the force of the discourses with which it simultaneously interferes, shows, and allows to speak.

At the same time as these discourses are treated as objects of representation, their complex orientation towards the world is also refracted in the novel. Discourse's outward orientation towards a referent is retained as a trace, along with the marks of ideology and response that characterize its being in the world. "Any concrete discourse", Bakhtin writes,

> finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist – or, on the contrary, by the 'light' of alien words that have already been spoken about it . . . The word, directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse, may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile. (276)

The realistic attitude towards the world for which Bakhtin commends the novel is thus not the static reflection of a monolithic and monological world outside language, but rather the inseparable tangle of word and world, charged with the intonation of different points of view. The novel enables us to see the world-as-text but also, equally importantly, the text-as-world by self-reflexively making us aware of the way in which objects are always the site of different evaluations. The reflexivity of the novel thus arises from the

fact that it presents us with the images of discourses which carry a history of always appropriating reality in particular ways. It achieves the possibility of freedom, of breaking the hold of a specific unreflexive form of continuous aspect perception, which characterizes the way in which the authoritative language of our social initiations has been turned into unquestioned internal voices of habitualized thinking and seeing, precisely through the liberating power of representation. An authoritative discourse by definition can only be transmitted, not represented. By representing such a discourse as one among many, the novel is able to make us see it differently, to evaluate the objects that it in turn represents in a different way: to see the "multitude of roads and paths that have been laid down in the object by social consciousness" (278).

This is a very different, and very powerful, conception of the novel's essentially realistic impulse, and one which is beyond the reach of the poststructuralist critique of difference. Even when Bakhtin shifts from the Heideggerian perspective of the world speaking through language to the relation between world and object, his concepts of the utterance, heteroglossia and dialogism means that words and objects are not related in immediate and singular ways but rather form a weft of different threads which, because the tapestry is always being woven, cannot be arrested in any single picture, any frozen theme.

This brings us back to one of the most illuminating of Bakhtinian concepts, the chronotope.

Chapter 9

Chronotopes, or the Space/Time of Representation

> Time becomes, in effect, palpable and visible; the chronotope makes
> narrative events concrete, makes them take on flesh . . .
> It is precisely the chronotope that provides the ground essential
> for the showing forth, the representability of events
> M.M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel"

If, as Pechey suggests, the Bakhtinian concept of the novel straddles both empirical and transcendental realms, the notion of the chronotope extends Bakhtin's concern with phenomena and concepts that negotiate borderlines (Pechey 2007). The chronotope is both a neo-Kantian condition of representation as such, insofar as all representations of whatever kind have to occur within the necessary framework of time-in-space and space-in-time, and a particular, empirical, and historical instance of such representation.[24] In other words, like Derrida and Wittgenstein in their own ways, Bakhtin gives a historical dimension to the conditions of possibility which for Kant are ahistorically transcendental. Time, space, and representation are inextricably imbricated with each other,[25] but such imbrication takes

[24] See Scholtz 1998 for a discussion of the concept's Kantian roots.

[25] For a discussion of the ways in which this necessary imbrication of time and space in the chronotope impacts on the relation between language and world, see Allan 2003.

no universal, transhistorical form. All novels, for example, of whatever period or culture, in addition to being produced in a specific time and space, also represent a particular relationship of time and space, but the particular nature of that relationship will vary across time and place. Thus, in addition to the transcendental time/space relation which is built in to representation as such and the specific form of the time/space relation that is represented in this or that novel, a chronotope has a two further dimensions: the time/space relations which inform the novel's production on the one hand and its reception on the other. No empirical content can be given to the first of these since it is, to use a Wittgensteinian term, the "grammatical" necessity of all representation, but each of the other three may have different relationships with each other. The chronotope represented in the novel will probably have a close relation to the chronotopes prevalent in the society in which it is produced, although it does not have to, whereas the chronotope of its reception will obviously vary, depending on how far the time and the space of reception are from the chronotope of production. This is not the place for a full, or even abridged, account of the almost three hundred pages that Bakhtin devotes to the analysis of novelistic chronotopes. Fascinating as those observations are, I shall concentrate on the "Concluding Remarks" that Bakhtin added to the chronotope essay in 1973 for their broad philosophical connections with my concern with the relation between language, literature and the world.

By distinguishing the chronotopes of representation, production, and reception and analysing their historical relationships, Bakhtin is able to clarify two vexed issues regarding fictional representation: first, the relationship be-

tween the world represented in the work and the world in which the work is produced and received, and, second, the related issue of the relationship between the actual author who writes and the image of the author that the work presents. On the first issue he has the following to say:

> The work and the world represented in it enter the real world and enrich it, and the real world enters the work and its world as part of the process of its creation, as well as part of its subsequent life, in a continual renewing of the work through the creative process of listeners and readers. Of course this process of exchange is itself chronotopic: it occurs first and foremost in the historically developing social world, but without ever losing contact with changing historical space. We might even speak of a creative chronotope inside which this exchange between work and life occurs, and it constitutes the distinctive life of the work. (Bakhtin 1981: 254)

The ineluctable relationship to actual reality of all language – though not in terms of the model of object and designation that forms the parameters of both neo-Saussureans and many analytical philosophers – is contained in the concept of the chronotope as the condition of all representation, and it is this necessary condition of representation that allows Bakhtin to insist on the fact that the world in which the work is produced enters the world of the work. In turn, it is precisely because the space/time relationship of chronotopes of representation are the products of a specific culture and historical moment – of space and time – that representations may modify the chronotope prevalent at that moment. In other words, the worlds that novels represent are not only grounded in the cultural chronotopes in which

they are produced, they also affect and "enrich" those chronotopes, contributing to a changing sense of the relationship between space and time in the real world. Through their necessary, but historically specific, chronotopicity and the creative freedom that they enjoy as fiction to experiment with chronotopes, novels change the ways in which a particular culture perceives, conceptualizes, and represents the world.

As the passage above claims, the changing relationship between work and reception is itself chronotopic: the work is always received in a specific matrix of space and time and in terms of a cultural chronotope that may be different from that which informs the world of the work itself. The work "lives" in its reception across time, in a further "exchange between work and life" which affects both the chronotopes of its production and its representation. This "lived" moment is the chronotope of its reception: always on the move, the knot which ties all forms of space/time relations – *a priori*, production, representational, and reception – together in the lived experience of the reader. This is very close to Derrida's reflections in the interview with Derek Attridge on the engagement of literature with the historical world and the specificity of the countersignature of the reader in *Acts of Literature*, although Bakhtin offers a more detailed literary and sociological account of the relationship (Derrida 1991).

Not unlike Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* when he claims that a proposition cannot represent the general relationship to reality that is the condition of its representational capacity (Wittgenstein 1975), Bakhtin concludes that although different chronotopes may interact or even contradict each other in the same novel, the relationships that they have in

the course of the novel cannot be contained in any chronotope within the novel itself. This is an important limit on the scope of self-reflexivity, which is not an inherent quality of the text, but rather the function of its combination of chronotopes and the chronotope in terms of which it is read:

> The relationships themselves that exist among chronotopes cannot enter into any of the relationships within chronotopes. The general characteristic of these interactions is that they are dialogical (in the broadest sense of the word). But this dialogue cannot enter into the world represented in the work, nor into any of the chronotopes represented in it; it is outside the world represented, although not outside the work as a whole. It (this dialogue) enters the world of the author, of the performer, and the world of the listeners and readers. (Bakhtin 1981: 252)

The chronotopes of author and reader (or listener) are presented firstly in the "dead" materiality of the work as book, but more importantly as a "speaking, signifying" utterance in which "we can always hear voices (even while reading silently to ourselves)" (ibid.). Although he does not say so specifically, it is clear that the voices which we hear in the work are rendered perceptible in the form of the process of the "being-heard" that Derrida finds in both Husserl and Saussure. If in reading the work "we always arrive, in the final analysis, at the human voice", this is not the logocentric voice of Husserl's solitary mental life nor of metaphysics in general seeking to reduce the sensible to the intelligible (252-3). Such reading, which belongs neither entirely to the material of the sign nor to the ideal realm of signification, lies at borderline of "nature" and "culture", rendering a total opposition between them impossible. It

is itself constituted by a chronotope in which the work as meaning is created:

> . . . the text is always imprisoned in dead material of some sort . . . But inscriptions and books in any form already lie on the boundary line between culture and nature. . . . In the completely real-life time-space where the work resonates, where we find the inscription or the book, we find as well a real person – one who originates spoken speech as well as the inscription and the book – and real people who are hearing and reading the text. Of course these real people . . . may be located in different time-spaces, sometimes separated from each other by centuries and by great spatial distances, but nevertheless they are all located in a real, unitary and as yet incomplete historical world set off by a sharp and categorical boundary from the represented world of the text. Therefore we may call this world the world that creates the text, for all its aspects – the reality reflected in the text, the authors creating the text, and the performers of the text (if they exist) and finally the listeners or readers who recreate and in so doing renew the text – participate equally in the creation of the represented world in the text. Out of the actual chronotopes of our world (which serve as the source of representation) emerge the reflected and created chronotopes of the world represented in the work (in the text). (253)

If Bakhtin criticizes Formalists for ignoring the meaningfulness of an utterance as part of its continuous aspect perception in his early work, he here gives an added, chronotopic dimension to that argument which also cuts across crude realist and reader-response attempts to deal with the process in which a literary work is "brought alive". Even though, as he insists in the final sentence above, the world

represented in the work emerges out of the "actual chronotopes of our world", that does not mean that the work can be explained as a mere reflection of the world (or even the world mediated by chronotope) of its production. Nor is the world represented in the work reducible to either the biographical author or to the "passive reader or listener of one's own time" (ibid.). The voices which, again as a matter of "grammatical" necessity, we find and realize in every text are the product of interacting chronotopes: those of production, reception, and the chronotopes that are always deposited as traces in the formal structure of the work, and which are reactivated in its reception, no matter how far removed that may be from the original space-time of production. To invoke a distinction that we have used elsewhere, Bakhtin draws a categorical boundary between the represented world in the text and the world in which readers help to recreate that world, but without imposing a gap between them: "However forcefully the real and the represented world resist fusion, however immutable the presence of that categorical boundary line between them, they are nevertheless indissolubly tied up in continual mutual interaction" (254). They are tied up precisely because, as Derrida points out, "the literary character of the text is inscribed on the side of the intentional object, in its noematic structure . . . and not only on the subjective side of the noetic act" (1991: 44). Unread, the text is mere material-nature. It comes into being as text through the chronotopes of different moments of its reception, which are located in a "real, unitary and as yet incomplete historical world" (Bakhtin 1981: 253). The world of the work may have been finalized by the author but the world of its reception, precisely because it is the real, historical world, is unfinalizable. This ensures a continuous process

of recreation of the text – itself a product of a real histori-
cal moment – at further moments that are as imbricated in
space and the reality of human existence as the moment of
the text's production.

The impossibility of arresting the text at any one mo-
ment of reception accounts for the fact that the voices that
are activated in reading are not logocentric, not sufficient or
present unto themselves, as Bakhtin is careful to underline
in one of his last pieces of writing:

> *There can be no "contextual meaning in and of itself" – it ex-*
> *ists only for another contextual meaning, that is, it exists on-*
> *ly in conjunction with it.* There cannot be a single unified
> (single) contextual meaning. Therefore, there can be nei-
> ther a first nor a last meaning; it always exists among oth-
> er meanings as a link in the chain of meaning, which in its
> totality is the only thing that can be real. In historical life,
> this chain continues infinitely, and therefore each individu-
> al link in it is renewed again and again, as though it were
> being reborn. (Bakhtin 1987: 146)

The affinity of the underlined sentence with Derrida's
claim that there can be nothing outside or beyond the (con)
text is telling (Derrida 1988: 136), not only because it sug-
gests that Bakhtin is concerned in a Derridean way with the
continuous displacement of meaning, but also because it un-
derlines the fact that Derrida's concept of the (con)text is re-
lated to Bakhtinian notions of the historical and worldly as-
pects of representation.

Bakhtin's relationship to a Derridean reading of Husserl
is more specific still. At the very end of the "Concluding Re-
marks" added to the chronotope essay, Bakhtin ponders,
like Husserl, the fact that certain semantic elements must

be timeless in order to express concepts like those of geometry, logic or mathematics, which are not empirical phenomena. In other words, some concepts crucial for thought cannot be subject to spatial and temporal determinations, and so would seem to fall outside the claimed universality of the chronotope. Even art requires the semantic abstraction of such meanings, and this seems to threaten the ineluctability that Bakhtin claims for the chronotope in artistic works.

Bakhtin's solution is brief, perhaps even cursory, but we can see in it the outlines of a familiar argument:

> For us the following is important: whatever these meanings turn out to be, in order to enter our experience (which is social experience) they must take on the form of a sign that is audible and visible for us (a hierograph, a mathematical formula, a verbal or linguistic expression, a sketch, etc.). Without such temporal-spatial expression, even abstract thought is impossible. Consequently, every entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope. (Bakhtin 1981: 258)

This reiterates Derrida's claim regarding the necessary embodiment of Husserlean expression via the material of the sign, no matter what specific form that material may take: without temporal-spatial expression no expression, no thought, is possible. If Bakhtin shows a Derridean grasp of the open-endedness of meaning because it cannot take place outside a worldly context (which includes the movement of the noematic structure as it is realized in a noetic act of consciousness), he combines this with a Wittgensteinian understanding of the determining and enabling structures of genres both in everyday life and literature as a whole, and

the necessity of deep agreement or understanding that is given less attention in Derrida's writing.

It is precisely the possibilities offered by genres that enable language to retain chronotopic traces even across great distances of space and time. Words and phrases that are used frequently within a genre are stamped with the mark of the generic chronotope and carry that stigma with them into new contexts, where they are reactivated and put to a new use which always bears the traces of the old genre and context: "Always preserved in the genre are undying elements of the archaic . . . preserved in it only thanks to their constant renewal, which is to say, their contemporization. A genre is always the same and yet not the same, always old and new simultaneously" (Bakhtin 1984: 106). This is why the word cannot be a "material thing but rather the eternally mobile, eternally fickle medium of dialogic interaction". But words are not merely a medium of such interaction; they are constituted by the traces that they retain of both their general generic possibilities and the actual contexts in which they are used:

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

Husserl, the later Wittgenstein, Derrida, and Bakhtin are united in their view that the fundamental problem of meaning is that of iterability: the apparent paradox that, as a matter of necessity, language can be constituted as identity only

across different instances of repetition. The difference that Saussure confined to the semantic axis between signifiers by introducing the distinction between *langue* and *parole* operates on the syntactical plane as well, as the worldly vagaries of embodied contexts ensure that no word is ever identical in every respect with any other token of its use. The question is: what to make of this? If the word is not identical in every respect, it may still retain enough of the traces of its previous uses to maintain its status as a signifier of the same thing.

John Searle and Edmund Husserl, in different ways, but following a similar metaphysical impulse, seek to reduce Derrida's "iterability" to mere *repeatability*, while the later Wittgenstein, Derrida, and Bakhtin all insist that difference cannot be eradicated entirely from representation in the broadest sense of the word. Bakhtin argues that it is precisely the limited and limiting perspective of Saussurean linguistics that obscures the differences between utterances from view. If the word as a conventional instance of *langue* appears to be totally repeatable, the word as utterance is essentially unique: "as an utterance (or part of an utterance) no one sentence, even if it has only one word, can ever be repeated: it is always a new utterance (even if it is a quotation)" (Bakhtin 1987: 108). Bakhtin might appear to be claiming for the utterance an "allegedly rigorous purity of every event of discourse" which Derrida holds to be not only impossible but also the mark of all logocentric philosophy (Derrida 1988: 18). But Bakhtin is as aware as Derrida or Wittgenstein that meaning lies on the borderlines of speech and system, between or across the uniqueness of an event and the repeatability of a sign. In other words, structural repeatability makes signification as such possible, while the

unconditional uniqueness of a context renders inevitable the new, the unexpected, the different, or the creative, which are as much a part of language as its synchronic identity.

Bakhtin is close to Derrida in pondering the role of spacing in both constituting the perception of language and opening it to future possibilities: "Silence – intelligible sound (a word) – and the use constitute a special logosphere, a unified and continuous structure, and open (unfinalised) totality" (Bakhtin 1987: 134). If the pause makes the perception of the word possible (enabling us to see it as a word), we are also able to take language for what it is only by seeing it along the planes of both the repeated and the unrepeatable:

> Understanding-recognition of repeated elements of speech (i.e. language) and intelligent understanding of the unrepeatable utterance. Each element of speech is perceived on two planes: on the plane of the repeatability of the language and on the plane of the unrepeatability of the utterance. Through the utterance, language joins the unrepeatability and unfinalised totality of the logosphere. (Ibid.)

Bakhtin's Wittgensteinian conception of normative speech genres enables him to bridge the division between the repeatable and the unrepeatable, for the trace that is always left in the utterance by its generic constitution (an aspect visible only in the utterance rather than the sentence) is absent from words as "linguistic elements". Only the view from Linguistics can make it seem that words have total freedom of movement: "Linguistic elements are neutral with respect to this division into utterances: they move freely without recognizing the boundaries of the utterance, without recognizing (without respecting) the sovereignty of voices" (114).

Iterability as Bakhtin conceives it means that words gather fresh layers of intonation with every new use, resonating with the traces of diverse intentions and contexts. Since words are essentially for use on more than one occasion, they are marked by the diverse occasions of their use: they are essentially of the world, but not in any single moment of presence. They are constituted as traces of multiple intonation and intentionality, not filled by a single, controlling intention or fixed by a univocal relation to a thing in the world. This is an extremely promising enrichment, via the added aspects of "verbal activeness" and "evaluation" to the sign, of Derrida's account of the production of the signified through iterability, and it gives real content to Derrida's claim that context is "at work *within* the place, and not only *around* it" (1988: 60).

We are accustomed to hearing that in order to determine the meaning of an utterance we need to look at the context of its use. But from a Bakhtinian perspective we should also be able to reconstruct something of the contexts and the situations of use of any utterance. And indeed we do so every time we read a literary text, filling out what is not present in the book through the saturated richness of its discourses. Instead of regarding the infinite openness of context and history as the inevitable loss of meaning, Bakhtin claims that such loss (or, at best, its infinite deferral) seems to be inevitable only in the narrow purview of "small time" ("the present day, the recent past, and the foreseeable [desired] future" (Bakhtin 1987: 169). Viewed from the perspective of great time one can never be sure that any meaning will be "lost":

> There is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless

past and the boundless future). Even past meanings, that is, those born in the dialogue of past centuries, can never be stable (finalized, ended once and for all) – they will always change (be renewed) in the process of subsequent, future development of dialogue. At any moment in the development of the dialogue there are immense, boundless masses of forgotten contextual meanings, but at certain moments of the dialogue's subsequent development on the way they are recalled and invigorated in renewed form (in a new context). Nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its homecoming festival. (170)

There is a subtle but decisive difference between Derrida's concept of "dissemination" and Bakhtin's of "renewal". In the light of this distinction, we need to add a cautionary note about the extent to which the saturation of an utterance or word with its uses in the world is evident or traceable. We will recognize only those evaluations and voices with which we are familiar, even if they are different. The truly different will remain unheeded. And it is in his unwillingness to face up to the strangeness of the truly different that the Bakhtinian treatment of the "event" is problematic. Derrideans who celebrate the untrammeled free-play of language are reading Saussurean linguistics, which is blind to utterances or speech genres because they are aspects of *parole*, into Derrida's conception of writing.

For Wittgenstein it is a condition of the possibility of using language (and therefore of differing in the opinions that we have) that there should be agreement in judgments

(though not of what he calls "opinions").[26] Bakhtin also recognizes that the *agon* of dialogism is possible only upon a condition of deep agreement which shows itself, as it does for Wittgenstein, in the finest shadings of tone and behaviour:

> The narrow understanding of dialogism as argument, polemics, or parody. These are the externally most obvious, but crude, forms of dialogism. Confidence in another's word, reverential reception (the authoritative word), apprenticeship, the search for the mandatory nature of deep meaning, agreement, its infinite gradations and shadings (but not its logical limitations and not purely referential reservations) the layering of meaning upon meaning, voice upon voice, strengthening through merging (though not identification) the combination of many voices (a corridor of voices) that augments understanding, departure beyond the limits of the understood, and so forth. These special relations can be reduced neither to the purely logical nor to the purely thematic. (Bakhtin 1987: 121)

This repudiation of the crudity of parody and conflict for the subtle but essential dialogism of the rich "varieties and shadings" of agreement seems to be a departure from Bakhtin's middle period only to readers who believe that Bakhtin had not encountered, or made some contribution to, Voloshinov's concept of the shared purview which the latter claims to be the condition of the utterance in his 1925 essay. As it is formulated in 1971, the hero to which the evaluation is addressed in the early analysis becomes the *a priori* third addressee, a "superaddressee . . . whose absolutely

---

[26] See Wittgenstein (1973: 242): "If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also (queer as this may sound) in judgments".

just responsive understanding is presumed" (Bakhtin 1987: 126). This superaddressee is a transcendental concept that allows Bakhtin to express both the intrinsic orientation towards another that constitutes all utterances, and the agreement that must be presupposed for dialogism in general to be possible. The third party can be found in the utterance, rather than merely outside it (126-7). Furthermore, the agreement conveyed by the superaddressee is – like Wittgenstein's argument that for disagreement about opinions to be possible there must first of all be agreement in judgments (Wittgenstein 1973: 242) – neither part of logic nor available to complete cognitive, thematic comprehension by any utterance: it is rather the condition of both.

I conclude with Bakhtin's last remarks on the impossibility of the division between the fictional and the real. All of Bakhtin's middle work on the concept of carnival emphasizes what we might call the realism of the fiction of the carnival: removed from "everyday life", a breach in the process of what we call reality, carnival ritual remains incorrigibly a part of lived experience, of life and the everyday. Its familiarization, like that of novelistic fiction, makes possible changes of aspect that can be called wholly realistic:

> The rupture between real life and symbolic ritual. How unnatural this rupture is. Their false juxtaposition. They say: at that time everyone travelled in troikas with bells, that was real everyday life. But the carnivalistic overtone remains everyday in life, and in literature it can be the main tone. Pure everyday life is a fiction, a product of the intellect. Human life is always shaped and this shaping is always ritualistic (even if only "aesthetically" so). (Bakhtin 1987: 154)

In this remarkably Wittgensteinian remark, Bakhtin expresses a Derridean thought regarding the impossibility of the pure distinction between everyday life and the fictional. The real is always contaminated by a fiction, even by the fiction of the concept, the thought. Fiction, like carnival, cannot be "derived" (Derrida 1988); but then nor can the "real" be reduced to the "fictional".

Conclusion

In Clark and Tihanov's perceptive summary of Bakhtin's intellectual contribution they suggest that it lies in "what could be called humanism without subjectivism . . . Bakhtin is probably the single most gifted and persuasive exponent in the twentieth century of that particular strain of humanism without belief in the individual human being at its core, a distant cosmic love for humanity as the great survivor and the producer of surviving and recurring meanings that celebrate their eventual homecoming in the bosom of great time" (Clark and Tihanov 2011: 131). In a perceptive account of the relationship between Wittgenstein and Bakhtin, David Rudrum argues that Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia and dialogism is vitiated by humanist faith in communication that assumes that the voices engaged in dialogism will always address each other, will always meet, even if it is to clash (Rudrum 2001). That is to say, in Rudrum's view, Bakhtin's notion of agreement as the condition of possibility of communication is not thought through sufficiently rigorously. What dialogism cannot comprehend, Rudrum argues, is disagreement so fundamental that people can no longer communicate. Given Wittgenstein's famous hesitation over whether communication is the point of language at all (1973: 491 and 1992: 392) and Lyotard's development of

the Wittgensteinian notion of language games to compre-
hend the *différand* (Lyotard 1989), which Rudrum discuss-
es extremely perceptively, this is a telling argument. I shall
give a slightly different spin to it.

My point is that despite the Bakhtin School's rejection
of nomenclaturist and instrumentalist conceptions of lan-
guage, the resolutely sociological nature of their theory of
language misses the conceptual or philosophical subtlety
and import of Wittgenstein's *Investigations*. However much
Wittgenstein's relatively non-political discussion of lan-
guage-games may occlude differences of power, his sense
that things in the world are part of the conceptual apparatus
of language through a continuous activity of appropriation,
and his further analysis of the ways in which aspects of the
world are instituted as authoritative criteria, adds a dimen-
sion to the ideological formations of language that are apt
to be overwritten by the language of class struggle. The 'we'
to which Wittgenstein appeals through his examples of the
'grammar' of certain concepts may be naively untheorized,
but the Bakhtinian notion of discursive struggle is under-
mined by a certain complacency of its own.

The problem with a resolutely social (and sociological)
theory of language (especially evident in the texts that fall
under Voloshinov's signature) is its systematic incapacity
to conceptualize groups or voices in terms of *internal* differ-
ence and blindness: however many different voices are re-
leased in novelistic heteroglossia, they remain a homoge-
nous grouping of 'usses' and 'thems'. Each of these groups
is *at home* in its own language or discourse, comfortable
with its own set of (class determined?) intonations. Voloshi-
nov writes:

> Native word is one's 'kith and kin'; we feel about it as we
> feel about our habitual attire or, even better, about the at-
> mosphere in which we habitually live and breathe. It con-
> tains no mystery; it can become a mystery only in the
> mouths of others, provided they are hierarchically alien to
> us – in the mouth of the chief, in the mouth of the priests.
> (1986: 75)

Wittgenstein, too, is fascinated by the way in which
words are comfortable or uncomfortable, or the ways in
which a name and a face or a piece of music (Schubert, for
instance) seem to belong inextricably and naturally together
(Wittgenstein 1973: 215). But his fascination arises from the
fact that such habituation is itself a mystery. Despite Witt-
genstein's desire to bring language 'home', what he reveals
about the grammar of "our language" (*unser Sprache*) and
its relation to the world is extremely discomfiting, unhome-
ly, uncanny, in Freud's terms, *heimlich* – it loses us in "a lab-
yrinth of paths" (203).[27] The wildness that Wittgenstein re-
veals in language lies not in the wilderness of *others*' voices
or evaluations; it resides in the garden at the front door.

Bakhtin assumes that to know the object in all its as-
pects, we can expect nothing more than an arena of freely

[27] See Schalkwyk 2004a. But see also Erdinast-Vulcan 2003 for a
perceptive discussion of Bakhtin's own homesickness: "His nostal-
gia for a state of naïveté is symptomatic of the modernist homesick-
ness and the quest for a name. Knowing only too well that there is no
'internal sovereign territory' where the subject can name itself, that
'self-nomination is imposture', he looks back to that pre-lapsarian re-
gion where 'the organizing force of the I is replaced by the organizing
force of God: my earthly determinateness, my earthly name, is sur-
mounted, and I gain a clear understanding of the name written in the
Book of Life – the memory of the future'" (132).

clashing voices. Since intonation is the ground of referential meaning, and is the place where the utterance makes contact with the real, the interaction of different kinds of intonation will familiarize the object sufficiently to effect a necessary and liberating (de)familiarization of the world. Let a thousand voices speak, and the world will reveal itself in all its (dissonant) richness. But this *merely* social view of language, while extraordinarily rich and liberating in one sense, misses entirely the logical thrust of Wittgenstein's analysis, which necessitates a *grammatical* examination that cannot be reduced to class analysis, however far-ranging, sophisticated, or subtle. In that sense, dialogism is still too indebted to Empiricism. The strangeness of *our* language lies not in the other but in itself, and in the blindness that is the condition of our being able to express anything. It may be traced along a labyrinth of conceptual and not merely social relations: in the unheeded transformation of aspects of the world (including human behaviour) into "criteria for a thing's being so", and along the paths debarred from enquiry, which it "makes no sense" to doubt or question. These matters are philosophical rather than sociological, and are therefore liable to be overlooked by a social theory of language that pays little attention to the distinction between the empirical and the logical, and the *political* role that this distinction plays in our lives.

To sum up. The Bakhtin School offers a critique of the Formalist conception of defamiliarization that, like Derrida, uses Phenomenology to show that neither the word nor the aesthetic object can be reduced to the pure materiality of the word. Paradoxically, that argument shows that the 'ideal' mode of perception of language as it is used in concrete

situations is always marked by the world-bound nature of the utterance (in contrast with the abstract, linguistic concept of the sentence). Bakhtin, especially, offers a powerful conception of the novel's essentially *realistic* impulse, which escapes the usual neo-Saussurean critique of the 'realistic effect'. He does so by conceiving of language as an event in the world, constituted as a response – even when one speaks to oneself – to others. That event is marked by the traces of its passage through the world, so that the touch of the real is always evident in the utterance, even when it is appropriated and represented fictionally. Indeed, such representation, especially in the form of quasi-direct discourse, brings the evaluative intonations, which mark all discourses in their relation to other human beings and things in the world, into dialogical tension. Words in use are overlaid with contrasting intonations which are themselves the outcomes of an essentially worldly social existence.

Even when Bakhtin shifts from the Heideggerian perspective of the world speaking through language to the relation between world and object, his concept of the utterance means that words and objects are not related in immediate and singular ways. They form a weft and weave, a text of different threads that, because the tapestry is always being woven, cannot be arrested in any single picture, any frozen theme. Both the representing form of the novel and its represented content are completely engaged in its historical and ideological moment, even though that engagement will come to be seen differently by the subsequent 'renewal' and always-also-engaged moments of its reading.

The late Bakhtin's Wittgensteinian concept of speech genres enables him to give a relative specificity to linguistic practices, as opposed to the monolithic abstraction of Saussure's language system. Such speech genres are the enabling conditions for different kinds of discourse (allowing speakers and writers a relative, creative freedom that does not, however, extend to the freedom to create the conditions of linguistic production). But nowhere does he offer the kind of detailed *conceptual* mapping that Wittgenstein achieves through the cognate notion of language-games. Speech genres for Bakhtin offer modes of different linguistic use; language-games for Wittgenstein offer the material for a conceptual mapping of the 'grammar' of our language, which, in fact tells us what kind of object anything is, and which are the repositories of "essences" (Wittgenstein 1973: 371, 373). Such a conceptual mapping achieves two things: rather than offering a social theory of language, it shows that a relation to others is *logically internal* to the concept of language. It also shows that the pictures that hold us captive as speakers of a language are not confined to the prejudices or evaluations of particular class or social opinions. They form a level of deep agreement that makes differences of opinion possible, and that can be traced only at a conceptual level.

The Bakhtin School shows no interest in essences, even in the radically reconstituted form in which Wittgenstein recasts them. Derrida, we must note, is deeply interested in essences, like Wittgenstein, in a deeply *critical* way. In this sense, then, the Bakhtin Circle is perhaps too complacent about both the security of the home that language affords to each social group (however much different groups may find

each other's homes distinctly alien), and the homecoming of "meaning" in the fullness of "great time".[28]

[28] For a very different critique, see de Man 2003: "Bakhtin modulates irrevocably from dialogism to a conception of dialogue as question and answer of which it can be said that 'the speaker breaks through the alien conceptual horizon of the listener, constructs his own utterance on alien territory against his, the listener's, apperceptive background'. . . . Again, there is no trace of dialogism left in such a gesture of dialectical imperialism that is an inevitable part of any hermeneutic system of question and answer. The ideologies of otherness and of hermeneutic understanding are not compatible, and therefore their relationship is not a dialogical but simply a contradictory one" (345-6). Indeed, although de Man opens with the "relationship between fiction and reality in the novel" (340), by the end of his discussion of Bakhtin the opposition has been replaced by "the more fundamental question of the compatibility between the descriptive discourse of poetics and the normative discourse of hermeneutics" (347).

Works Cited

Allan, Stuart (2003), "'When Discourse Is Torn from Reality': Bakhtin and the Principle of the Chronotope", in Michael Gardiner (ed.), *Mikhail Bakhtin*, Sage Masters of Modern Social Thought, London: SAGE Publications: 119-44, vol. 2.

Bakhtin, Mikhail M. (1990), *Art and Answerability. Early Philosophical Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press

— (1987), *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. trans. by Vern W. McGee, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.— (1984), *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. by Caryl Emerson, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

— (1983) *Bakhtin School Papers: Russian Poetics in Translation*, ed. by Ann Shukman, Oxford: Oxford Publishing.

— (1981), *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. by Michael Holquist, trans. by Caryl Emerson, Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.

Bernard-Donalds, Michael (1995), "Bakhtin and Phenomenology: A Reply to Gary Saul Morson", *South Central Review*, 12 (2): 41-55.

Bostad, Finn, Craig Brandist, Lars Siegfred Evensen, and Hege Charlotte Faber (eds) (2004), *Bakhtinian Perspectives on Language and Culture: Meaning in Language, Art and New Media*, Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Brandist, Craig (2004a), "Law and the Genres of Discourse: The Bakhtinian Circle's Theory of Language and the Phenomenology of Right", in Finn Bostad, Craig Brandist, Lars

Evensen, and Hege C. Faber (eds), *Bakhtinian Perspectives on Language and Culture*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan: 23-45.

— (2004b), "Voloshinov's Dilemma: On the Philosophical Roots of the Dialogic Theory of Utterance", in Craig Brandist, David Shepherd, and Galin Tihanov (eds), *The Bakhtin Circle: In the Master's Absence*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press: 97-194.

Clark, Katerina and Michael Holquist (1984), *Mikhail Bakhtin*, Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Clark, Katerina and Galin Tihanov (2011), "Soviet Literary Theory in the 1930s: Battles over Genre and the Boundaries of Modernity", in Evgeny Dobrenko and Galin Tihanov (eds), *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism. The Soviet Age and Beyond*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press: 109-43.

de Man, Paul (2003), "Dialogue and Dialogism", in Michael Gardiner (ed.), *Mikhail Bakhtin*, Sage Masters of Modern Social Thought, London: SAGE Publications: 340-7, vol. 4.

Derrida, Jacques (1991), *Acts of Literature*, London: Routledge.

— (1988), *Limited Inc.*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

— (1973), *Speech and Phenomena and Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Eagleton (1982), "Wittgenstein's Friends", *New Left Review*, 135: 64-90.

Emerson, Caryl (2011), "Literary Theory in the 1920s: Four Options and a Practicum", in Evgeny Dobrenko and Galin Tihanov (eds), *A History of Russian Literary Theory and Criticism. The Soviet Age and Beyond*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press: 64-89.

— (1990), "Russian Orthodoxy and the Early Bakhtin", *Religion & Literature*, 22 (2/3): 109-31.

Erdinast-Vulcan, Daphna (2003), "Bakhtin's Homesickness: A Late Reply to Julia Kristeva", in Michael Gardiner (ed.), *Mikhail Bakhtin*, Sage Masters of Modern Social Thought, London:

SAGE Publications: 119-35, vol. 2.

Gardiner, Michael (2000), "'A Very Understandable Horror of Dialectics': Bakhtin and Marxist Phenomenology", in Craig Brandist and Galin Tihanov (eds), *Materializing Bakhtin: The Bakhtin Circle and Social Theory*, Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan: 119-41.

— (ed.) (2003), *Mikhail Bakhtin*, 4th edition, London, Thousand Oaks, CA, and New Dehli: SAGE Publications, vol. 2.

Gardiner, Michael and Michael Mayerfeld Bell (eds) (1998), *Bakhtin and the Human Sciences: No Last Words*, London, Thousand Oaks, CA, and New Dehli: SAGE Publications.

Hirschkop, Kenneth (2000), *Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jefferson, Ann (1986), "Realism Reconsidered: Bakhtin's Dialogism and the 'Will to Reference'", *Australian Journal of French Studies*, 23 (2): 169-84.

Lachmann, Renate and Craig Brandist (2004), "Rhetoric, the Dialogical Principle and the Fantastic in Bakhtin's Thought", in Finn Bostad, Craig Brandist, Lars S. Evensen, and Hege C. Faber (eds), *Bakhtinian Perspectives on Language and Culture. Meaning in Language, Art and New Media*, Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan: 46-64.

Lähteenmäki, Mika (2004), "Between Relativism and Absolutism: Towards an Emergentist Definition of Meaning Potential", in Finn Bostad, Craig Brandist, Lars S. Evensen, and Hege C. Faber (eds), *Bakhtinian Perspectives on Language and Culture. Meaning in Language, Art and New Media*, Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan: 91-113.

Locke, John (1975), *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

Lukács, György (1971), *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. by Anna Bostock, London: The Merlin Press.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois (1989), *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Medvedev, Pavel Nikolaevich and Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1978), *The*

Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics by M.M. Bakhtin, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Morson, Gary Saul and Caryl Emerson (1990), *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Ongstad, Sigmund (2004), "Bakhtin's Triadic Epistemology and Ideologies of Dialogism", in Finn Bostad, Craig Brandist, Lars S. Evensen, and Hege C. Faber (eds), *Bakhtinian Perspectives on Language and Culture. Meaning in Language, Art and New Media*, Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan: 65-88.

Parrington, John (1997), "In Perspective: Valentin Voloshinov", *International Socialism*, 75 (2nd s.): 117-50.

Pechey, Graham (2007), *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Word in the World*, London and New York: Routledge.

Rudrum, David (2001), "Wittgenstein and the Theory of Narrative", unpublished PhD thesis, University of London.

Schalkwyk, David (2004a), "Wittgenstein's 'imperfect Garden': The Ladders and Labyrinths of Philosophy as Dichtung", in John Gibson and Wolfgang Huemer (eds), *The Literary Wittgenstein*, London and New York: Routledge.

— (2004b), *Literature and the Touch of the Real*, Newark: University of Delaware Press.

— (1997), "What does Derrida mean by 'the text'?", *Language Sciences*, 19 (4): 381-90.

Scholtz, Bernhard F. (1998), "Bakhtin's Concept of the 'Chronotope': The Kantian Connection", in David Shepherd (ed.), *The Contexts of Bakhtin: Philosophy, Authorship, Aesthetics*, Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers: 141-72.

Searle, John R. (1977), "Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida", *Glyph*, 1: 198-208.

Shepherd, David (2004), "Re-introducing the Bakhtin Circle", in Craig Brandist, David Shepherd, and Galin Tihanov (eds), *The Bakhtin Circle: In the Master's Absence*, Manchester and

New York: Manchester University Press.

Shklovsky, Victor (1965), "Art as Technique", in Lee T. Lemon and Marion J. Reis (eds), *Russian Formalist Criticism: Four Essays*, Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska: 3-24.

Voloshinov, Valentin N. (1986), *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press.

Weimann, Robert (1984), *Structure and Society in Literary History: Studies in the History and Theory of Literary Criticism*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1984), *Culture and Value*, ed. by Georg H. Von Wright, trans. by Peter Winch, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

— (1980), *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

— (1978), *Remarks on the Foundation of Mathematics*, ed. by Georg H. von Wright and Rush Rhees, trans. by Gertrud Elizabeth M. Anscombe, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

— (1975), *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. by David F. Pears and Brian F. McGuiness, London and New York: Routledge.

— (1973), *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by Gertrud Elizabeth M. Anscombe, Oxford: Blackwell.

Index

This book explores the ways in which members the Bakhtin School (Michail Bakhtin, Valentin Voloshinov, and Pavel Medvedev) conceive of the relationship between language and literary fiction and the "world beyond language". Beginning with the Russian Formalist definition of the literary as that which defamiliarizes our familiar perception of the world, it uses Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of phenomenological perception and Ludwig Wittgenstein's analysis of aspect perception to illuminate the Bakhtin School's arguments that the world and language make contact through shared or contested evaluative intonation in the situated context of the utterance rather than the abstract, purely linguistic notion of the sentence. Saussurean linguistics and Russian Formalism, which treat language as the product of a disembodied system or as mere material, have excluded this aspect from their purview. The Bakhtin Circle's trans- or metalinguistics seeks to restore our perception of the embodiment of language in the world of human social being: it seeks to show the way in which even fictional utterances are intonationally "intertwined by a thousand threads into the non-verbal real-life context", and are dialogically related to other utterances as a matter of their internal constitution rather than by mere empirical contingency.

David Schalkwyk is currently Academic Director of Global Shakespeare, a joint venture between Queen Mary and the University of Warwick. He was formerly Director of Research at the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington D.C. and editor of the *Shakespeare Quarterly*. Before that he was Professor of English at the University of Cape Town, where he held the positions of Head of Department and Deputy Dean in the faculty of the Humanities. His books include *Speech and Performance in Shakespeare's Sonnets and Plays* (Cambridge, 2002), *Literature and the Touch of the Real* (Delaware, 2004), and *Shakespeare, Love and Service* (Cambridge, 2008). His most recent book is *Hamlet's Dreams: The Robben Island Shakespeare*, published in 2013 by the Arden Shakespeare. His new book on love in Shakespeare, *Shakespeare, Love and Language*, is forthcoming from Cambridge University Press.

Cover:
Joseph Jastrow's duck-rabbit figure ("The Mind's Eye", *Popular Science Monthly* 54, 1899).