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Bakhtin, Author-ity and Modernism

It has become fashionable to disclose contending voices in the work of the theoretician of polyphony, Mikhail Bakhtin. This is undoubtedly a reasonable meta-operation. Even during the first western reception of Bakhtin at the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s (2), it was obvious to most that there were various conflicting tendencies in the revised Dostoevsky book, as well as clear differences both in style and content between this book as a whole and the Rabelais book. But with the second reception of Bakhtin, at the start of the 1980s, and the third, about 1990, it became increasingly clear that the variety - quantity and types of conflict - in Bakhtin's work is much greater than previously thought. Not least because several new phases became available. The second reception introduced and emphasized (3) the essays on the theory of the novel between the first editions of the Dostoevsky and Rabelais books. In the third reception, at least two new phases came in focus: the philosophical and literary theoretic works of his youth, from 1919 and until the Dostoevsky book in 1929; the linguistic and philosophical works of his old age from just before, and especially during, the decade following the revision of the two major monographs. It has thus become impossible to ignore the inner contradictions. At the same time, there is a better background against which, in a new way and from a step higher, to comprehend a coherence. The current fourth reception with the publication of the collected works in Russian and the expected rush of translations will undoubtedly vary the picture considerably, but hardly change it decisively through the appearance of new phases or comparable revisions. This will, however, soon become clear.

An understanding of Bakhtin's work and thus a coherent assessment of its utility must be based on its inner contradictions. Only against the background of a reasonably correct historical and critical picture of the developmental dynamism of his body of work and its variety, will we be able to assess the strength and limitations of the individual contributions whilst asking new questions about the consistency.

The prerequisite is, of course, a reasonable picture. Paradoxically, the recent search for contradictions in Bakhtin's work has often been guided by a reductionist attitude. The work as a whole or parts of it are classified/rejected on a basis of professional bigotry. The broad interest in Bakhtin, far beyond the literary and linguistic field to which he always relates, has resulted in Bakhtin studies of a professionally alien kind. And as a landmark in the debate on theory and culture Bakhtin's popularity (which can also give way to idolisation) calls forth ideologically idiosyncratic reactions in the form of the complete or partial rejection of his work. Some people reject his early works because of a dislike of either Neo-Kantianism or phenomenology, or both. Many dismiss the Dostoevsky book's concept of polyphony as speculative and unmanageable. Even more repudiate the Rabelais book and the carnival concept on the basis of "cultural Reaganism" or a general dislike of anything even remotely reminiscent of the 1970s, which this book is obviously thought to be. On the other hand a strong tendency meticulously and repeatedly spells out that Bakhtin is not really a Marxist. Finally, some reject all of Bakhtin on the basis of a radical dismissal of all emancipatory tendencies in 20th century humanistic thinking, which Bakhtin's work, without exception, is seen to represent, irrespective of its wretched lack of cohesion. It is an ironic fate that precisely the philosopher of dialogue, whose ultimate drive was the protest against the finalizing gaze and word on others, should end up as the object of an enormous amount of finalizing, pseudo-scientific studies. But it is also ironic that even from the self-confident ambition to demonstrate Bakhtin's absolute binding to the obsolete problematics of the past can come contributions to a placement of him in the history of ideas which are often, at least in part, interesting and useful.

This article seeks to confront Bakhtin in a Bakhtinian way, combining historical distance with an effort of dialogic understanding. Starting from the metamorphosis of the author concept through Bakhtin's work, I shall try to contribute to a more precise picture of its internal contradictions. In this way, I shall outline a reassessment of Bakhtin's relationship with modernism and his placing of Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel in this context. A decisive element in this literary-historical outline is a comparison between Lukács and Bakhtin.

Contradictions. Anti-modernism?

Gábor Bezeczky's article "Contending Voices in Bakhtin" (4) is interesting and representative in several respects. It points convincingly at several contradictions in and around the polyphony concept of the Dostoevsky book. They are contradictions to which I myself have paid attention, the first three (of those referred to below) in my introductory article "Dialogue and Tragic Farce · Mikhail Bakhtin's Theoretical Work". (5) My immediate reaction was to support most of Bezeczky's views. And I still agree with the following points of view, which I might formulate like this:
- There are manifest and latent displacements between the preserved parts of the 1929 book (which especially sets its mark on chapters 2 and 3) and the new elements in the 1963 edition (especially chapters 4 and 5).
- The personality concept of the Dostoevsky book - the relationship between hero, identity, consciousness and voice - is far from clear.
- The kind and degree of the hero's independence of the author is a complicated question, requiring further interpretation and clarification.
- There is a clear difference between the Dostoevsky book's picture of the recent history of literature - and especially of the novel - and the corresponding picture in the 1934-35 essay "Discourse in the Novel". According to the first (chapter 3), monologism fundamentally characterizes our time, according to "Discourse in the Novel" the tendency to dialogic heteroglossia dominates the recent development of the novel.

On the background of several readings, however, I have gained material for serious objections. Bezeczky's article is characterized by either-or thinking, far removed from Bakhtin's thought - and his implicit alternatives seem problematic. His contentions take the form of simple dilemmas. The simultaneity of various levels of analysis and of complementarity in any form is obviously alien to him.

Concerning hero and consciousness, Bezeczky contents himself with a statement of the dilemma about whether a character who is described as a caricature of another can represent an equal consciousness. He avoids the problem of the doppelgänger and only scratches the surface of the interesting problem which he has raised. In an apparently general reference, he claims, "Bakhtin devoted a great deal of attention to simultaneity but ignored the temporal aspects of "being on the threshold." (6) This is, however, an absurd claim when one remembers the metamorphosis theme in the 4th chapter of the Dostoevsky book and not least in relation to the essay which is primarily about literature's "temporal aspects" and introduces the same theme, namely "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel".

Bezeczky postulates an absolute dilemma between Bakhtin's dialogical concept of truth and the view that objective conditions in the period (the modern heterogeneous complexity that asserted itself with capitalism) provided the basis for the creation of the polyphonic novel. Bezeczky's position is characterized by a violent aversion to any historical-epochal view of dialogism. But Bakhtin is always also historically-epochally orientated.

Bezeczky's characterizations and dilemmas rest on a very narrow foundation, only on a contrast between the Dostoevsky book (in both versions) and "Discourse in the Novel". The latter is idealized but on the basis of a simplified presentation. All other works are by and large ignored. The result is more a disguise than a disclosure of Bakhtin's views.

Views like Bezeczky's, mainly paying reverence to the essays on the novel, especially "Discourse in the Novel", represent a continuous trend in the Anglo-American reception of Bakhtin in recent years. In the same connection, it is quite usual to meet regret about Bakhtin's lack of orientation in modern European literature and his conservative literary tastes, which may be seen as being in contrast to the advanced implications of his theories. In a biographically-orientated lecture on Roman Jakobson and Mikhail Bakhtin at the University of Copenhagen in the autumn of 1996 Tzvetan Todorov presented an intelligent version of a similar view.

One of the sources for this view is certainly some remarks in the Rabelais book. In the "Introduction", Bakhtin claims that the grotesque tradition in literature is experiencing a "new and powerful revival" in the present century. He distinguishes two main lines: Modernist grotesque (Alfred Jarry, the surrealists, the expressionists etc.) who more or less go back to the traditions of the Romantic grotesque "and evolved under the influence of existentialism"; secondly, "the realist grotesque (Thomas Mann, Bertold Brecht, Pablo Neruda, and others). It is related to the tradition of realism and folk culture and reflects at times the direct influence of carnival forms, as in the work of Neruda." (7)

For a committed fan of modernism, such a passage is not comme il faut. Bakhtin can very well have preferred Mann, Brecht and Neruda - who on the other hand can hardly be characterized as quite normal, household realists - to Jarry. In any case, it is obvious that Bakhtin the existentialist was somewhat irritated by a certain, self-important, complacent 1950s existentialist preciousness concerning modernism. This is seen in the subsequent controversy, the sharpest in the Rabelais book, with Wolfgang Kayser's Das Groteske in Malerei und Dichtung of 1957. In this case, it is hardly a matter of tactics. But one must also take into account what Bakhtin believed he could allow himself to do in the Soviet Union in the middle of the 1960s, especially remembering the after effects of Stalin's suppression and censorship, with the well-
known unpleasant consequences for Bakhtin himself.

In any case, the picture of Bakhtin's relationship with modernism is more complicated than that. Bakhtin had a special, acute consciousness of - and constantly worked with - the cultural and literary metamorphoses which sprang from modernity and manifested themselves in modernism, in its broadest sense. His theories grew from such a consciousness, which in part he thematizes indirectly, i.e. he transposes it to previous times of unrest and upheaval; in part, he directly confronts it. With the author concept as a guiding principle, I shall try to emphasize some of the more direct forms of expression taken by this awareness of modernity.

The author as divine creator and the crisis of author-ity
Bakhtin's earliest longer work Toward a Philosophy of the Act is phenomenological and moral philosophical. (8) It expends most energy on the analysis of the relationship between I, the other and I-for-the-other which it claims that all values are grouped around. Bakhtin paints a picture of the relationship not least by means of a phenomenology of the gaze, in which, in many ways, he anticipates the youthful Sartre, although from a more hopeful picture of inter-human relationships.

The phenomenology of the gaze is especially clearly expressed in Bakhtin's next great philosophical-literary manuscript "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" from about 1924. With (conscious) reference to the theory of relativity, Bakhtin starts from the idea that every individual occupies a unique place in space (and time). We can therefore see much in each other, e.g. quite simply in each other's bodily appearance, that we cannot see in ourselves. Bakhtin calls this excess of seeing:

This ever-present excess of my seeing, knowing and possessing in relation to any other human being is founded in the uniqueness and irreplaceability of my place in the world. For only I - the one-and-only-I - occupy in a given set of circumstances this particular place at this particular time; all other human beings are situated outside me. (9)

A solid argument for individualism, but at the same time, for the indispensability of the fellow human being. With his excess, the other is indispensable in complementing me. We especially receive an experience of our bodily appearance through the reactions of others to it. We receive language not least through the loving intonations of our mother as well as through on-going dialogue altogether.

It is striking how many of Bakhtin's later central theoretical points are anticipated by this phenomenological correlation of bodies in space, of directions of the gaze, of the dialectics of seeing and being seen. Physicality. Space and time, the chronotope concept. Relativity, complementarity. The creator trope, we create each other through our excess in relationship to each other. And, naturally, dialogue, the dialogic interaction between me and the other as the basic element in being-as-event - and the starting point of the humanities.

This point-of-view complementarity is linked with the creator trope:

According to this metaphor, the authors' relations to their characters are akin to the relations of God to humans. This relation, after all, is one of creators to created, which is why it is so often described in terms taken over from religion. (10)

According to Clark and Holquist, the creator trope is simply a master trope in Bakhtin's work:

The act of authorship dealt with in The Architectonics is the master trope of all Bakhtin's work. The encounter of authors with the heroes they weave into the world of their texts proves a successful form for bringing together and modelling of all Bakhtin's other categories. (11)

Against this phenomenological background, Bakhtin seeks to determine the relationship between author and hero in the novel. Partly in a kind of normative poetics. Partly descriptive in relation to special sub-genres of the novel, in relation to the orientation of specific authors and related to specific epochal conflicts. While the phenomenological views and the author trope both anticipate later positions, the poetics itself is significantly different. The main idea is that the author should be able to round off, complete, consummate the person depicted. This requires a suitable distance: the author must not lose himself in his hero, but neither must he keep such a great distance that empathy becomes impossible. The successful author-hero relationship is expressed in the interaction between `the alien gaze' and "sympathetic coexperiencing".
Through the strategy of the alien gaze, the author places himself in God's place "outside" the world: "The divinity of the artist consists in his partaking of the supreme outsideness." (AAA, p. 191). Through this keeping of a distance, the bodily appearance of the hero is revealed, as well as the world's crevices, clefts and cavities in which room is made for criticism, satire and the divine comedy.

Complementarily, the movement of identification unfolds itself: the strategy of empathy, the creative conquest of - often artificial - distance. This is incarnation, the descent of the creator from the divine remoteness to take on flesh and occupy a position in the world of mankind:

Any valuation is an act of assuming an individual position in being; even God had to incarnate himself in order to bestow mercy, to suffer and to forgive - had to descend, as it were, from the abstract standpoint of justice. (AAA, p 129)

The God-creator puts himself in the place of the human being.

A total identification with another would, however, (if it is at all possible) be to lose oneself in the other. The partial aspect of the fusion must be emphasized. Sympathetic coexperiencing is a meeting between two consciousnesses. The contemplating self can see aspects of the other that are inaccessible to that other and can, thus, complement the other. On the aesthetics of empathy, Bakhtin says:

I must empathize or project myself into this other human being who is being contemplated, see his world axiologically from within him as he sees this world; I must put myself in his place and then, after returning to my own place, "fill in" his horizon through that excess of seeing which opens out from this, my own, place outside him. (AAA, p 25)

The loving finalization of the hero - this is the opportunity and duty of the author-ity. The author is free whilst the hero is subjected to the aesthetic necessity of the creative rhythm:

The creator is free and active, whereas that which is created is unfree and passive. To be sure, the unfreedom, the necessity of a life shaped by rhythm is not a cruel necessity, not a necessity that is indifferent to value (cognitive necessity); rather, it is a necessity bestowed as a gift, bestowed by love: it is a beautiful necessity. (AAA, p119)

The interesting thing is that this emphatic defence of a classical narrative aesthetics results in Bakhtin's recognition that, from a historical point of view, author-authority is in crisis. One of the chief villains in this dissolution of aesthetic values is Dostoevsky - for approximately the same reasons as Bakhtin later advanced in defence of his status as hero. An author such as Dostoevsky is no longer concerned to paint the character's outer appearance and place him or her in their natural environment. In fact: The dialogues between whole human beings (...) begin to degenerate into self-interested disputations in which the centre of value is located in the problems debated. And, finally, the consummating moments are not unified: the author lacks any unitary countenance - it is either a scattered countenance or a conventional mask. This type includes almost all of Dostoevsky's heroes, some of the heroes of Tolstoy (Pierre, Levin), Kierkegaard, Stendahl (...) (AAA, p 19f)

Some 200 pages later, he recapitulates and expands these literary-historical observations in the section "The Problem of the Author". Here he describes "the crisis of authorship", which can take various directions. One of them is:

The very position of the author's outsideness is shaken and is no longer considered essential: one contests the author's right to be situated outside lived life and to consummate it. All stable transgressant forms begin to disintegrate (first of all in prose - from Dostoevsky to Bely; the crisis of authorship is always of lesser significance in lyric - Annensky, and so forth. (AAA, p 203)

The lack of will to take on the burden of the role of author is seen by the young Bakhtin as an expression of the fear of responsibility, which comes to aesthetic expression as a fear of boundaries. But, says Bakhtin: "Aesthetic culture is a culture of boundaries". (AAA, p 203)

Bakhtin's Copernican revolution

Between this classical aesthetic viewpoint and the new position in the Dostoevsky book as well as in the essays of the 1930s, there is in Bakhtin himself a Copernican revolution of the same kind as the one he described in Dostoevsky. A preliminary indication of some purely intellectual aspects of explanation would be that the interactive phenomenology of the gaze was expanded to language and literature at the
A main concern in Bakhtin’s approaches to Dostoevsky’s polyphony is to characterise the new author position. Especially in the treatment of the new relationship with the hero in chapters 2 and 3, but also in the genre and linguistic aspects of the subsequent chapters. It is now a decisive quality of the author that he does not seek to limit and finalize, and a decisive quality of the hero is that he does not allow himself to be objectivized. The hero is characterised by an all consuming self-awareness, is incomplete, open and indefinite. Precisely this requires a new authorial position: “Self-consciousness, as the artistic dominant in the structure of a character’s image, presupposes a radically new authorial position with regard to the represented person.” (12)

The main characters in Dostoevsky’s early works polemically assert their integrity against the alien gaze, against other people’s more or less imaginary assessments. Not least does Bakhtin emphasize Devusjkin in Poor Folk with his protest against Gogol’s finalizing, reifying picture of the little office clerk. He feels personally victimized, predetermined, surveyed, defined, “objectivized”, “finalized”. Bakhtin interprets it thus: “The serious and deeper meaning of this revolt might be expressed this way: a living human being cannot be turned into the voiceless object of some secondhand, finalizing process,” (Dost p 58). Note the use of the very same key concepts as in “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” (which could not have been noticed before this important work had been published!) - but now in reverse. I would like to emphasize that this strange mixture of continuity and discontinuity can be seen throughout the Dostoevsky book. At the same time as Bakhtin openly describes the reversal in the relationship between Gogol and Dostoevsky, he secretly accomplishes a Copernican revolution in relation to his own previous position in ‘Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity’.

Bakhtin’s “explanation” of Dostoevsky’s creation of the polyphonic novel contains many phenomena operating at various levels. After choice, one can call this “contending voices” or an advanced attempt at imagining causality under the conditions of modernity: on several levels, from several viewpoints, on the premisses of complexity, contingency and complementarity. Among the assumptions of polyphony is Dostoevsky’s individual perception, his special ability to see everything in context and interaction. This disposition is characterized by Bakhtin as “his greatest strength, but his greatest weakness as well. It made him deaf and dumb to a great many essential things;” (Dost p 30). But also the epoch and the Menippean/grotesque realistic genre tradition were necessary prerequisites:

The objective complexity, contradictoriness and multivoicedness of Dostoevsky’s epoch, the position of the déclassé intellectual and the social wanderer, his deep biographical and inner participation in the objective multi-levelledness of life and finally his gift for seeing the world in terms of interaction and coexistence - all this prepared the soil in which Dostoevsky’s polyphonic novel was to grow. (Dost p 30f)

But, as I have done in my previously mentioned introductory article (cf note 5), one can also classify the treated aspects of polyphony according to “size”. They all have epochal links. And their convergence in the polyphonic novel is specific to the period and must be located in the “modern breakthrough” of the previous century. It is open to discussion what is required for one to speak about a polyphonic novel. A conservative assessment would be that the fully unfolded polyphonic novel requires the convergence of the factors mentioned below in a quite special discursive arrangement. And that historically it was first approximated in some of Dostoevsky’s best novels, for example Crime and Punishment and The Brothers Karamazov. However, Bakhtin’s elucidation of its assumptions have much wider perspectives:

1) The double-voiced discourse: this form of discourse, “the star” of Bakhtin’s metalinguistics is especially dominant in times of upheaval, when the authority of the official, monologic discourse has been weakened; when the conventional harmony between utterance, context and language is not present, when the prior harmony between author and addressee is no longer given.
2) Dialogue: this is fundamental in language and all human fellowship. However, modernity tendentiously transforms everyone into an ideologist and social life into a violent discussion, a “great dialogue” (related to the long-term tendency to democracy).
3) The polyphonic novel: this is a sub genre of the novel, the full development of which is (positively/negatively) linked to capitalism’s especially violent breakthrough in the relatively backward Russian society.
4) The Menippean/grotesque realist literary tradition and special genre field: this is the literary/historical, genetic viewpoint which places literature in “the great time” which Bakhtin, following the Russian literary historian, Veselovskij, describes as historical poetics.
5) The carnival as the cultural form of transformation (synchretic drama form, life form): this is the main field of Bakhtin’s cultural semiotic studies. In “Response to a Question from the Novy Mir Editorial Staff” he
says unconditionally: "Literature is an inseparable part of culture and it cannot be understood outside the
total context of the entire culture of a given epoch." (13) He especially recommends that literary
scholarship should concentrate on the powerful and deep cultural currents which - rather than the uproar
in the newspapers and magazines - have a decisive influence on the creative work of the writers. (SG p 3)

From utterance to dialogue to genre to literary tradition to cultural form. All these mutually connected
phenomena have flourished in times of upheaval. Bakhtin's picture of them is clearly conceived on the
basis of his own modern times, the times of upheaval par excellence. "The multiplicity of focuses. Bringing
distant things closer without indicating the intermediate links." (SG p 155). For good or evil, this is how
Bakhtin himself characterises his work in his "Notes Made in 1970-71". The above hints at the strength of
Bakhtin's special ability to bring together phenomena that are usually separated in time and space. The
modern - in decisive aspects modernist - perception calls up new things from the picture of classical
Antiquity and the Renaissance. Conversely, Bakhtin's original picture of the genesis of the novel in
Antiquity and the Renaissance provides important - by no means yet utilized - opportunities for an
amplification, in part a revision, of the view of modernism.

I now return to the artistic and ideological crisis of authority, expressed by the whole of the above-
mentioned set of problems. In the polyphonic novel, no single voice, not even the author's, is the
privileged bearer of the authoritative message of the work. Having suspended his author authority,
Dostoevsky seeks as his ultimate goal the authoritative word of another. But this comprises the extreme
limit of his artistic universe - and is nowhere realised. (cf. Dost p 97).

In his treatment of the authoritative discourse in "Discourse in the Novel", Bakhtin observes that it has
"never been successful in the novel. It suffices to mention the hopeless attempts of Gogol and Dostoevsky
in this regard." (TDI p 344).

That Dostoevsky's proposal concerning the position of the author was a decisive problem for Bakhtin
appears with all desirable clarity from the constant references to it in "Toward a Reworking of the
Dostoevsky book" from 1961. Polyphony is seen here as a response to the crisis of the author's position,
emotion and discourse. Keeping to the terminology from "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity", Bakhtin
notes that in Dostoevsky's novels it is important that the individual positions do not merge but retain
outsideness and the associated excess of seeing. However, what is important is the use made by
Dostoevsky of this excess, which never serves to objectivize and finalize the other, but shows itself as love
and the desire for understanding.

The creator trope also receives a new twist, since the author-creator is compared with Prometheus who
creates (or recreates) living beings who are independent and equal with himself. Bakhtin points out that
the book will concern itself with questions of literary history only in so far as they are unavoidable for a
characteristic of Dostoevsky's specific artistic vision. But in the notes, the polyphonic novel is set more
clearly and more concentratedly in a modern literary historical context than in the book itself:

The problem of the author's position. The problem of the third party in the dialogue. Various resolutions to
this problem in contemporary novelists (Mauriac, Graham Greene and others). / Thomas Mann's Doktor
Faustus as an indirect confirmation of my idea. Dostoevsky's influence. Conversation with the devil.
The narratorchronicler and the main hero. The complex authorial position (cf. Mann's letters). (Dost p 284)

After my book (but independently of it) the ideas of polyphony, dialogue, unfinalizability, etc., were very
widely developed. This is explained by the growing influence of Dostoevsky, but above all, of course, by
those changes in reality itself which Dostoevsky (in this sense prophetically) succeeded in revealing earlier
than the others. (Dost p 285)

Dostoevsky, then, is placed in an epoch of upheaval and a modern literary-historical context. Another side
of the same question is the parallelisation in the revised Dostoevsky book between artistic consciousness,
implicit in the polyphonic novel and modern scientific consciousness:

The scientific consciousness of contemporary man has learned to orient itself among the complex
circumstances of "the probability of the universe"; it is not confused by any "indefinite quantities" but
knows how to calculate them and take them into account. This scientific consciousness has long since
grown accustomed to the Einsteinian world with its multiplicity of systems of measurement, etc. But in
the realm of artistic cognition people sometimes continue to demand a very crude and very primitive
definitiveness, one that quite obviously could not be true. (Dost p 272)
Lukács and Bakhtin

A comparison between Lukács and Bakhtin can illuminate both the dynamics of development - "the inner contradictions" - in Bakhtin's work and the relation with modernism. Such a comparison has been made before, and it is difficult to ignore previous attempts. Michael Holquist's very general contrasting of Lukács' Hegelianism with Bakhtin's dislike of Hegelian dialectics (14) says very little, at best, but seems rather to cloak a more complicated relationship. A significant contribution with the very comparison between Lukács and Bakhtin as its central theme is that of Galin Tihanov in his doctoral thesis *Bakhtin and Lukács: The Theory of the Novel as Social Philosophy*. (15) In connection to the thesis Tihanov has published a number of articles. (16)

Tihanov has provided an important, learned and detailed contribution to a placement of Bakhtin - and Lukács - in the history of philosophical and aesthetical ideas. Many of his observations seem illuminating and incontestable. The limitations, not to say dangers, of his approach are, however, precisely tied to his way of operating as a generalizing, classifying historian of ideas with an astronomic distance to his subject. He easily reduces the positions of Lukács and Bakhtin to an oscillation between "historicism" and "essentialism". Lukács tends to the first position, Bakhtin to the second - and Tihanov clearly finds each of them equally detestable.

In the article "Reification and Dialogue. Aspects of the Theory of Culture and Society in Bakhtin and Lukács", integrated in the thesis, Tihanov at an indeterminable level of abstraction compares Lukács' *Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein* (*History and Class Consciousness*) from 1923 with Bakhtin's essays on the novel of the 1930s. It is symptomatic what he gets out of the following interesting quotation from "Discourse in the Novel":

> all languages of heteroglossia, whatever the principle underlying them and making each unique, are specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualizing the world in words, specific world views, each characterized by its own objects, meanings and values. As such they all may be juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be inter-related dialogically. As such they encounter one another and co-exist in the consciousness of real people - first and foremost, in the creative consciousness of people who write novels. (*Di*, p 291f)

From this passage concerned with the theories of language and the novel, Tihanov manages to conclude as follows:

> Bakhtin's idea that there can be a human species superior to others by virtue of the simple fact of writing novels is the ultimate expression of his quasiRomantic belief in the omnipotence of art. Literature, being the creation of language, appears capable of solving problems which do not originate in language. (*RD* p 88 and *BL* p 89)

How can the fairly evident supposition that (some) authors of novels have a feeling for linguistic and cultural conflict be so easily stigmatized as a "belief in the omnipotence of art"? Why this reductionism and arrogance? Tihanov's "ideology criticist" hostility to art in the passage quoted reveals a radical outsideness in relation to Bakhtin which here (as so often and in defiance of Bakhtin's hopeful formulations) is far from promoting understanding. By a reference to Bakhtin's criticism of monologism in the Dostoevsky book, Tihanov displays his idiosyncracy by trying to turn Bakhtin's words against Bakhtin himself. The arrogance of the passage finds its assumed authority in a quasi-de Man-like belief in the impotence of language.

A fundamental concern of Tihanov's thesis *Bakhtin and Lukács: The Theory of the Novel as Social Philosophy* is to show the limits of Bakhtin's originality and to question the inner cohesion of Bakhtin's work. With the gaze of a finalizing (but obviously non-loving) author Tihanov joins the hunt for the "inner contradictions". It is true that in one important assumption Tihanov can be said to approach something which I attempt to substantiate in this article, namely by regarding Bakhtin's work as self-contradictory reactions to modernity. But how does he regard these contradictory reactions?

Tihanov clearly sees an insoluble conflict between the praise which Bakhtin in his theories of the novel offers to the multilingual, cosmopolitan world, which through the novel liberates itself from the norms of the past to the advantage of the open present - and on the other hand, the essentialism mentioned above, which Tihanov also calls phenomenological ahistoricism. That Bakhtin, in various works, has a positive attitude to both Goethe and Rabelais, he regards as a tribute to mutually exclusive social ideals. Goethe's gigantic and complicated work is simply and conveniently reduced by Tihanov to a defence of liberal values in a traditional, bourgeois individualism. Bakhtin's picture of Rabelais is branded by Tihanov - in an
interesting common stance with Morson and Emerson - as "extolling the anonymous body of the human species (rodovoe telo) in a dubious act of regressive utopianism." (17)

To him, all the mentioned positions are clearly equally offensive and their mutual relationships he judges or condemns on the basis of formal logic. To regard them from such viewpoints as relativity or complementarity is quite alien to him. How one can be reconciled with phenomena such as many-voiced utterances and dialogue without adopting both historical and general viewpoints is a mystery to me. And why should not Rabelais and Goethe, each from his own historical and aesthetic point of departure, represent equally valuable - in some ways alternative, mutually supplementary - positions? And each one with his interesting contribution to the creation of a literary gestalt of time, constitute an alternative to Dostoevsky who obviously had little sense of this important dimension of existence? Tihanov's statement of Bakhtin's contradictory relation to Rabelais and Goethe makes it difficult to explain why one of the main sources for Bakhtin's philosophical interpretation of carnival in the Rabelais book is Goethe's Italienische Reise.

In Tihanov's picture of Bakhtin - "locked in a firm embrace" with Lukács, to quote the final words of the doctoral dissertation (BL p 302) - the following theses seem among the most fundamental: 1) Any work by Bakhtin (as well as by Lukács) can be explained as some mixture of currents such as mainly Neo-Kantianism, philosophy of life, Hegelianism, Romanticism and Christian utopianism. 2) Lukács's and Bakhtin's intellectual careers "followed strikingly similar paths." (BL p 299). 3) Through all phases Bakhtin as well as Lukács were deeply aesthetically conservative. 4) Bakhtin and Lukács are inescapably caught in the crippling antinomy between essentialism and historicism. In the following I would at least like to question 2) and 3).

The full formulation of Tihanov's thesis 2) about Lukács and Bakhtin is this: "Their intellectual careers, despite the differences in their outward status, followed strikingly similar paths." (ibid). In my opinion, there are, in fact, elements of continuity between the two, including regular influence of Lukács on Bakhtin who, among other things, is known to have read Lukács' Theory of the Novel. The influence is obvious if, on a suitable level of abstraction, one compares The Theory of the Novel of 1920 with Bakhtin's essays on the theory of the novel of the 1930s; it is especially true of his most 'Lukácsian' utterance, the lecture 'Epic and Novel' of 1941.

I will, however, briefly attempt to make probable that one can, with just as much right, talk about Lukács' and Bakhtin's contrary, opposite courses of development. It is correct that on a certain level of abstraction and by ignoring important all-pervading differences, one can find related positions in Lukács and Bakhtin. But not at the same time. I will thus claim that their mutual relationship describes an exchange of positions, a crossover or peculiar inverse proportionality.

In The Theory of the Novel, in many ways Lukács adopts a modern or a downright modernist position. The work is built over a 'figure of decline' looking back with veneration on an abandoned condition of harmony, but at the same time without illusions, since the development described is regarded as irreversible. Lukács looks back at the epic with much sympathy as an adequate expression for a self-contained, complete, organic condition. This is, however, the starting point for a definition of modernity as an extension of that of Nietzsche. There is no way back. In relation to the novel, there is a hint of Lukács' later sympathy for the "classical" narrative, realist novel in his positive characteristic of the Danish novelist (and Nobel Prize winner) Henrik Pontoppidan's Lykke-Per (Peter-in-Luck). Otherwise, the striking impression is of a quite different view of the novel and almost consistently, an opposite evaluation of novelists than he had later.

The novel as a genre is characterized by flexibility and process: "Thus the novel, in contrast to other genres whose existence resides within the the finished form, appears as something in process of becoming." (18) Unlike epic poetry it is not "something that is homogeneously organic and stable" but something that is "heterogeneously contingent and discrete". It is distinguished by the self-awareness of subjectivity and thus of self-revocation, called by the aesthetes of Romanticism (Lukács refers especially to Friedrich Schlegel) irony: "The irony of the novel is the self-correction of the world's fragility; inadequate relations can transform themselves into a fanciful yet well-ordered round of misunderstandings and crosspurposes, within which everything is seen as many-sided (...)" (TN p 75).

In the chapter "The Historico-philosophical Conditioning of the Novel and its Significance", Lukács' formulation is especially Nietzschean-modernist and anticipates Bakhtin. "The novel is the epic of a world that has been abandoned by God. The novel hero's psychology is demonic" (TN p 88). "The writer's irony is a negative mysticism to be found in times without a god." (TN p 90). We find the creator trope in its
fullest form. To what extent is the novel hero free of the author? asks Lukács and answers with Hebbel: "To the extent that man is free in his relationship to God." In Luciferian defiance, the hero can realize himself, and "Normative man has achieved freedom in his relationship to God". (TN p 91). But "that part of it which is the most specific essence of freedom (...) remains inexpressible". (ibid). The arch-modernist theme of silence joins the creator trope: Lukács sees the novel as a necessary "detour by way of speech to silence". (ibid).

With this view of the novel follows a canon of novelists, where Lukács' later heroes appear as villains and vice versa. Among the heroes is Flaubert - whom Lukács was later to repudiate so energetically as one of those mainly responsible for the deterioration of the novel into naturalism and modernism. A leading villain is Tolstoy, later to become a super-hero. And this characteristic resembles remarkably that which we find in Bakhtin's Dostoevsky book. (cf eg Dost p 69ff). Tolstoy is criticized for his illusionary, unsuccessful attempt at writing epics in a time which has historically removed the basis for them; therefore, "his epic intention was bound to end in a problematic novel form". (TN p 146). This fixation with the past manifests itself in Tolstoy's constant focus on death. In Tolstoy's novels, Lukács writes "these crucial moments of bliss are the great moments of dying". (TN p 149). This characteristic corresponds closely with Bakhtin's in the Dostoevsky book. Finally, Lukács places Tolstoy as "the final expression of European Romanticism." (TN p 151). His intimations of a new epoch "remain polemical, nostalgic and abstract." (TN p 152).

The modern alternative is personified by none other than Dostoevsky:

It is in the words of Dostoevsky that this new world, remote from any struggle against what actually exists, is drawn for the first time as a seen reality. That is why he, and the form he created, lie outside the scope of this book. Dostoevsky did not write novels, and the creative vision revealed in his works has nothing to do, either as affirmation or as rejection, with European nineteenth-century Romanticism or with the many, likewise Romantic, reactions against it. He belongs to the new world. (ibid)

Pure Bakhtin! Compare it for example with this extract from the Dostoevsky book:

Neither the hero, nor the idea nor the very polyphonic principle for structuring a whole can be fitted into the generic and plot-compositional forms of a biographical novel, a socio-psychological novel, a novel of everyday life or a family novel, that is, into the forms dominant in the literature of Dostoevsky's time and developed by such of his contemporaries as Turgenev, Goncharov, and Leo Tolstoy. (Dost p 101)

In The Theory of the Novel, Lukács presents what, all in all, must be called a modernist view of the literary situation and the role of the novel in it: the novel corresponds to a situation in which the shared values are in dissolution and there is a crisis of authority. His evaluation of Tolstoy is primarily negative because of his orientation towards the past and attempts to write epics, a form which has been undermined by modernity. The evaluation of Dostoevsky, who represents the literary form of a new epoch, is on the contrary extremely high. In very many basic respects, this conception corresponds to Bakhtin's view of the same matter, starting with his Copernican revolution in 1929.

Up to this point, however, the young Bakhtin lays claim to a traditional aesthetics of the novel - based on narrative, distance and the authority with which the author manages to present his values and finalize his picture of the hero. To be sure, the crisis of author-ity increasingly asserts itself and one of the main villains in this process of dissolution is Dostoevsky. In many important ways, this view corresponds to the position of the mature Lukács starting with the 1930s essays on realism and the historical novel - and the accompanying rejection of naturalism and modernism.

A criss-cross figure, a chiastic exchange of positions: the young Bakhtin corresponds to the mature Lukács - the young Lukács corresponds to the mature Bakhtin. The first position is anti-modernist, the second one pro-modernist.

The invisible author and the literary history of silence

Finally, I want to outline Bakhtin's attitude to the above-mentioned themes in the last period of his authorship. The surprisingly inventive notes of the 1970s include some of his most exciting thoughts about these problems: the position of the author in the modern novel and a positioning of Dostoevsky and the polyphonic novel in the history of modernism.

We can start with Bakhtin's thoughts about the previously-mentioned arch-theme in modernism, that of silence. The intense preoccupation with (non-)phenomena such as zero, silence, nothingness, negation,
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addition, he places the polyphonic novel in an historical poetics context (cf the change of title from 1929 book but that is also an important point of view in the second edition. In spectrum of very different views of literary polyphony. He powerfully stresses Dostoevsky’s original conception which seems to me to have been rather overlooked. Bakhtin’s collected works contain a wide theoretical elucidation of authorship and to the history of modernism. With respect to Dostoevsky and the

In his various thoughts about author-ity and its crisis, Bakhtin has made a contribution to a literary-theoretical elucidation of authorship and to the history of modernism. With respect to Dostoevsky and the polyphonic novel, I have now drawn attention to the crucial extension of the epoch-literary-historical conception which seems to me to have been rather overlooked. Bakhtin’s collected works contain a wide spectrum of very different views of literary polyphony. He powerfully stresses Dostoevsky’s original contribution in the 1929 book but that is also an important point of view in the second edition. In addition, he places the polyphonic novel in an historical poetics context (cf the change of title from Problems of Dostoevsky’s Art to Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics) by disclosing its roots in an ancient

Quietude and sound. The perception of a sound (against the background of quietude). Quietude and silence (the absence of sound and the beginning of the word. The disturbance of quietude by sound is mechanical and physiological (as a condition of perception); the disturbance of silence by the word is personalistic and intelligible: it is an entirely different world. In quietude nothing makes a sound (or something does not make a sound); in silence nobody speaks (or somebody does not speak). Silence is possible only in the human world (and only for a person). Of course, both quietude and silence are always relative. (...) Silence - intelligible sound (a word) - and the pause constitute a special logosphere, a unified and continuous structure, an open (unfinalized) totality. (SG p 133f)

A later comment outlines a literary history of silence, since silence is seen as one of the solutions to a long-lasting literary crisis of authority, identity and language:

Quests for my own word are in fact quests for a word that is not my own, a word that is more than myself; this is a striving to depart from one’s own words, with which nothing essential can be said. I myself can only be a character and not the primary author. The author’s quests for his own word are basically quests for genre and style, quests for an authorial position. This is now the most critical problem of contemporary literature, which leads many to reject the genre of the novel altogether, to replace it with a montage of documents, a description of things, to bookishness [lettrizm], and, to a certain degree, also to the literature of the absurd. In some sense, all these can be defined as various forms of silence. These quests led Dostoevsky to the creation of the polyphonic novel. He could not find the word for the monologic novel. A parallel path led Leo Tolstoy to folk stories (primitivism), to the introduction of biblical quotations (in the final parts of his novels). Another route would be to cause the world to begin speaking and to listen to the word of the world itself (Heidegger). (SG p 149)

It is a basic feature of modernity that the primary author cannot appear author-itatively, he is invisible and silent: “The word of the primary author cannot be his own word (...) Therefore, the primary author clothes himself in silence. But this silence can take on various forms of expression, various forms of reduced laughter (irony), allegory, and so forth.” (SG p 148f). “Irony has penetrated all languages of modern times (especially French)”, he claims elsewhere in the notes. "Modern man does not proclaim; he speaks. That is, he speaks with reservations. Proclamatory genres have been retained mainly as parodic and semi-parodic building blocks for the novel.” (SG p 132).

These epochal-literary-historical considerations go hand-in-hand with a more general theoretical description of the invisibility of the authorial agency in practically all the later texts. In still another variation of the creator trope, one of the very latest ("Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences") he poses the problem thus:

A work’s author is present only in the whole of the work, not in one separate aspect of this whole, and least of all, in content that is severed from the whole. He is located in that inseparable aspect of the work where content and form merge inseparably, and we feel his presence most of all in form. (...) The author-creator cannot be created in that sphere in which he himself appears as the creator. This is natura naturans [creative nature] and not natura naturata [created nature]. We see the creator only in his creation, and never outside it. (SG p 160f)

Precisely because of the creator trope - the analogy between author-creator and God - we can glimpse a connection between Bakhtin’s and Nietzsche’s pictures of modernity. Just like the divine, the literary author-ity is dead or at least reduced to being deus absconditus, to invisibility and silence. This is due to a loss of positive, proclamable and shared compelling values, of an inevitable, undeniable authority.

In his various thoughts about author-ity and its crisis, Bakhtin has made a contribution to a literary-theoretical elucidation of authorship and to the history of modernism. With respect to Dostoevsky and the polyphonic novel, I have now drawn attention to the crucial extension of the epoch-literary-historical conception which seems to me to have been rather overlooked. Bakhtin’s collected works contain a wide spectrum of very different views of literary polyphony. He powerfully stresses Dostoevsky’s original contribution in the 1929 book but that is also an important point of view in the second edition. In addition, he places the polyphonic novel in an historical poetics context (cf the change of title from Problems of Dostoevsky’s Art to Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics) by disclosing its roots in an ancient
carnivalistic/Menippean cultural and genre tradition. This does not, of course, prevent him, in the discourse chapter, from also regarding the polyphonic novel as a privileged expression of language's own inherent dialogicity. But in addition, there is the important dimension which I have sought to emphasize, namely an epochal-literary-historical view that places the polyphonic novel as one of several special cases and 'solutions' in the problematic history of modernism.

Against this background, I can confirm the thesis of Holquist and Clark that the author concept is a key concept and the creator trope a master trope in Bakhtin's work. I can add that the author concept (already outlined in Toward a Philosophy of the Act and fully developed from "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity") appears with a terminological consistency, rare in Bakhtin. And this applies not only to the first and last philosophical phases, but to all the works lying in between.

At the same time, I see the intellectual somersault with the Dostoevsky book and the continued subsequent shifts in Bakhtin's view of the author concept as a key to the inner contradictions in his work. This is often underplayed by Holquist. The contradictions must be taken seriously - which to me comprises both critical-historical distance and efforts of dialogic understanding. The inner contradictions in Bakhtin's work and the complex relations between him and Lukács illuminate one another. They constitute an indispensable starting point for an understanding of Bakhtin, not least his attitude to modernism.

Notes

1. An abbreviated version of this paper was presented at the Ninth International Bakhtin-Conference in Berlin, July 1999. It is based on my Danish article "Bachtin, autor-iteten og modernismen", in K&K 86, Vol. 26, Number 2, 1998, p 63-83, a special issue on Bachtin (of 192 pages), edited by Nina Møller Andersen, Jørgen Bruhn, Anker Gemzøe and Jan Lundquist. Of the editorial preface (p 7-12) I am especially responsible for p 7-9. The present English version is significantly revised and contains important additions and precisions.


3. With the most important start in the anthology The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin. Edited by Michael Holquist, University of Texas Press, Austin 1981 (hereafter DI).


8. Toward a Philosophy of the Act, University of Texas Press, Austin 1993.


16. Some previous articles are integrated in the thesis, a number of later articles can be seen as extensions from it. Apart from the semi-published thesis - which is presently under full publication - I here primarily relate to two previously published articles, both integrated in the thesis:

