BAKHTIN'S THEORY OF THE

LITERARY CHRONOTOPE:

REFLECTIONS, APPLICATIONS, PERSPECTIVES

Nele Bemong, Pieter Borghart, Michel De Dobbeleer,

Kristoffel Demoen, Koen De Temmerman & Bart Keunen (eds.)

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Contents

The Fugue of Chronotope[1]

Michael Holquist

As the survey by Nele Bemong and Pieter Borghart introducing this volume makes clear, the term chronotope has devolved into a veritable carnival of orismology. For all the good work that has been done by an ever-growing number of intelligent critics, chronotope remains a Gordian knot of ambiguities with no Alexander in sight. The term has metastasized across the whole spectrum of the human and social sciences since the publication of FTC in Russian in 1975, and (especially) after its translation into English in 1981. As others have pointed out, one of the more striking features of the chronotope is the plethora of meanings that have been read into the term: that its popularity is a function of its opacity has become a cliché. In the current state of chronotopic heteroglossia, then, how are we to proceed? The argument of this essay is that many of the difficulties faced by Bakhtin's critics derive from ambiguities with which Bakhtin never ceased to struggle. That is, instead of advancing yet another definition of my own, I will investigate some of the attempts made by Bakhtin himself to give the term greater precision throughout his long life. In so doing, I will also hope to cast some light on the foundational role of time-space in Bakhtin's philosophy of dialog as it, too, took on different meanings at various points in his thinking.

Chronotope is an anaphoric designation in the sense that it takes its meaning from reference to another term, time-space.[2] I mention this embarrassingly obvious fact because the specific term "chronotope" is not the only form in which Bakhtin over the years wrestled with the central role that time-space play in human life. He worked on the monograph that seems to be the *ens originarum* of the specific locution "chronotope'" first from 1934 to 1937, in other words, during the period in the 1930s when he devoted all his energies to rethinking the nature of genre, and especially that of the novel.[3] Because he was a political exile at that time, the essay could not then be published. It saw the light of day forty years later, after Bakhtin's return to Moscow in his old age, appearing in a collection of his literary essays that appeared only in 1975, the year he died (Bakhtin 1975). Editing that anthology was among Bakhtin's very last efforts, and includes his own coda to the 1934 monograph on chronotope in the form of a tenth chapter of concluding remarks he wrote in 1973. I will have more to say about this concluding chapter below, but suffice it here that far from serving to sharpen Bakhtin's original definition, these comments had just the opposite effect.

The "Concluding Remarks" have this mystifying consequence because at the time they were written, Bakhtin had returned to the metaphysical interests of his youth when he sought to ground categories derived from German Idealism in the social and

physical immediacy of lived experience.[4] The tenth chapter thus expands the term chronotope from a (loosely) literary application (typical of his middle period) to an all-embracing epistemological category.

To account for clashes in meaning between the essay and its conclusion, we must look to a difference in chronology between the date of composition of the original nine chapters and the date of composition of the appended tenth chapter. The different dates of the two unequal parts of FTC represent varying – and in some measure contradictory – assessments of the significance of time-space in human existence. Much confusion has resulted from trying to extract a unitary definition of chronotope based on monologic readings of what are, in effect, two quite different versions of the term's meaning defined by Bakhtin himself. We here confront one of the central problems in any attempt to conceive a coherent account of dialogism: the gap between Bakhtin's intellectual (and decidedly non-teleological) evolution and the very different chronology of his works' publication dates. The two levels of meaning in the chronotope essay – essentially literary in the nine chapters written in 1934, and ascending to the metaphysical in the "Concluding Remarks" written 40 years later – are not irreconcilable. But their integration requires exquisite philological as well as theoretical sensitivity to internal differences if we are to arrive at a – dialogically – unified conception able to incorporate both.

As one possibility for pursuing such a course, I propose a musical metaphor that seeks to integrate both Bakhtin's life of thought and the chronology of when his works were published. Instead of the linear narrative pattern by which cumulative bibliographies and unidirectional calendars are organized, Bakhtin's career as a thinker is better grasped as itself a dialog, more specifically the particular kind of dialog known in musicology as a fugue. A fugue in the musical – not the psychological – sense is a contrapuntal composition in which a short initial melody or phrase (for which the term of art is "the *subject*") is introduced and then interwoven with others (technically called "*voices*"). As new entries come into the composition, the *subject* is repeated in different keys. Such entries are alternated until the "final entry" of the subject, by which point the music returns to the opening key, known as the "tonic", all of which is sometimes followed by a *coda*. In similar fashion, to pursue the melody of any particular idea in Bakhtin's works it is necessary to relate it to the nuances, variations, and interweavings it experienced in relation to its own recurrences and to other subjects in the larger composition of Bakhtin's total oeuvre. Time-space, as I have said, is a recurring concern in Bakhtin throughout his career, so it behooves us to consider the subtle shadings that accrue to the topic as it comes into the fugue at different points in its unfolding.

For purposes of this essay, it will be salient to consider time-space as one of – if not the – major subjects in a fugue with three parts. The first phase opens in the 1920s, a period concluding with Bakhtin's 1929 arrest. In this stage Bakhtin is immersed in German philosophy, specifically Kant, the immediate Idealist response to Kant, and early twentieth century neo-Kantianism. A second phase unfolds during the years of

wandering and exile when Bakhtin is preoccupied with novel theory. A third phase, ending with his death in 1975, comprises the aged thinker's attempt to restate the significance of the subjects that are woven throughout his various writings over the years, providing them with a valedictory coda. Time-space is, of course, a theme that is present in all of these, but with different timbre in each. In what follows, I will briefly parse time-space in each of these three movements. I will provide a more detailed treatment of the first movement, since it is the initial appearance of the subject, on which all later occurrences are variations.

Philosophical Background

The first statement of the theme of time-space in early Bakhtin is heavily influenced by the philosophical environment of the discussion circles in Vitebsk and Nevel' that were at the center of his life in the years immediately after the October Revolution. An important participant in these debates was Matvei Isaevich Kagan (1889-1937), recently returned from Germany, where he had been a favorite of Hermann Cohen himself. The subject of Kagan's 1914 Marburg dissertation – *The Problem of Transcendental Apperception from Descartes to Kant* – was crucial in meetings of what the members conceived as "the Nevel' school of philosophy". Thus, the environment in which the young Bakhtin developed was heavily neo-Kantian, more so than this brief account can adequately represent.

It will nevertheless help to gauge the distinctiveness of Bakhtin's own unique appropriation of Kant if we remember that by the early decades of the twentieth century, Bakhtin was entering a conversation that had already been in progress for centuries. Neo-Kantianism at the point where he encountered it was merely the latest chapter in a long history of reaction to Kant's revolution in epistemology that began very soon after the publication of the first *Critique* in 1781. Kant famously argued that we do not have immediate access to things: when we think we see something, what we really perceive are merely representations (*Darstellungen*) constructed through the interplay of a priori concepts (*Begriffe*) in our mind and a posteriori intuitions (*Anschauungen)* that come to us from the outside world. This was not only a radical view of knowledge, but of human subjectivity. It followed from Kant's epistemology that the perceiving subject was defined as an activity: his term for the subject is not a noun ("self") or a pronoun ("I"), but a verb: "I-think" (*Ich-denke*), that he treats only grammatically as a noun. Moreover, Kant's "I-think" is necessarily not a *unified* subject, a conclusion that horrified his contemporary audience. It is difficult now to imagine the sense of shock caused by Kant's insistence on the absolute cut off between mind and world, evidence of which I cite below.

How did Kant arrive at his role of epistemological Copernicus? In a late essay that sought to contextualize his own intervention in German philosophy, Kant characterizes the activity of his eminent predecessors Leibniz and Christian Wolff as unsuccessful attempts to overcome the absolute nature of the knowing subject as postulated

by Descartes. Defining his place in this ongoing project, Kant in the late essay references the distinction his first *Critique* posited between the "transcendental I" and the "psychological I". He points to the crucial difference between mere quotidian *perception* and the kind of consciousness he calls *apperception*, the consciousness (*Bewusstsein*) that it is *I* and not someone else who is having this perception (*Wahrnehmung*). The transcendental I merely sees a house; the psychological I exercises apperception to see itself seeing a house.

Kant's point is that neither of these selves is absolute, in the sense of being unitary. He says clearly: "That I am conscious of myself is a thought that already contains a two-fold I" (Kant 1983: 73). Already in the paralogisms of the first *Critique*, he had argued that "nothing is more natural and seductive than the illusion of taking the unity in the *synthesis* of thoughts for a perceived unity in the subject of *these* thoughts" (Kant 1988, Vol. 1: 402; emphasis added). And he further stigmatizes this misprision as *sophisma figurae dictionis*, the sophistry of a mere figure of speech (ibid.: 402-3). Bakhtin will argue, of course, that the self is indeed a figure of the kind of speech he calls an utterance.

The Kantian paradox of a subject defined as mere function, both split and invisible to itself in its own operation, is the ineluctable consequence of employing *apperception* as part of his explanation for how – despite the divided state of our selves – we nevertheless find it possible to create a unitary impression out of the constantly changing signals that come to us from the external environment (what Bakhtin will call heteroglossia). For consciousness to work as Kant describes it in his theory of knowledge, it must be located in *both* an "empirical I" – a subject that responds to the external environment – and a "transcendental I" that is able to organize such responses into a coherent mental representation on the basis of which the mind can then make judgments. And making judgments is how Kant defines thinking, the action of understanding.

Descartes' assumption that we are transparent to ourselves is decisively ruled out by the distinction that founds Kant's whole theory of knowledge which says that every act of perception is a synthesis (*Verbindung*). The section from Kant's first *Critique* that Bakhtin cites in FTC is significantly subtitled "On the Possibility of Synthesis in General" (1988, Vol. 2: 130), making it clear that the *fons et origo* of Kant's system is to be found in the act of joining a priori, transcendental categories in the mind with sensed intuitions coming from the external environment. This neccessarily creates a subject split between pure and empirical apperception. The classic formulation goes like this:

> […] all manifold of intuition has a necessary relation with the I think in the same subject in which this manifold is to be encountered. But this representation is an act of spontaneity, that is it cannot be regarded as belonging to sensibility. I call it the pure apperception in order to distinguish it from the empirical one, or also the original apperception, since it is that self-consciousness which, because it produces the representation I

think, which must be able to accompany all others and which in all con-
sciousness is the same, cannot be accompanied by any further representa-
tion. (1988, Vol. 2: 132)

Put very simply, *the mechanism by which we see cannot itself be seen:* "Now it is very
evident that I cannot know as an object that which I must presuppose in order to
know any object" (1988, Vol. 2: 401-2).

The radical nature of this neccessarily bifurcated (and therefore invisible) subject
must be judged in light of the whole Western metaphysical and theological tradition
that had before Kant conceived the individual person as essentially defined by having
a soul. This tradition is randomly questioned in isolated instances over the millennia
in the West, but begins to crumble only in the Radical Enlightenment of the seven-
teenth century. So Kant (who after all died in the nineteenth century, 1804, the year
Napoleon became emperor) is in a sense the late, but crushing[5] climax of this history.
His bifurcation of the self culminates a process in the West that had for millennia
glorified the singularity of the self in its doctrine of the soul.

For figures such as Augustine, the source of unity and wholeness was to be found only
in a monotheistic God whose gift to men was an equivalent singularity in their souls.
Christians were thus encouraged to see their fundamental identity, their selves, by
looking into their souls. But at a later date, devout thinkers such as Pascal, the math-
ematician who despite himself helped TO bring the Radical Enlightenment into
being, feared that humans might be quite different from Augustine's view. Pascal
longed for such a soul, and after his conversion to Jansenism, he may have carried
sewn into his coat "Fire. God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, not of the
philosophers and the scholars […]", as legend has it, but he still feared there might
be dark recesses in his innermost self that would not let themselves be seen. He was
made anxious by the thought he was a "monstre inconpréhensible" and he cried out,
"Où est donc ce moi?" (quoted in Bénichou 1948: 420, 323).

In the next century, Rousseau, despite criticism of Enlightenment dreams of the
transparency of reason, wrote: "J'aspire au moment où délivré des entraves du corps,
je serai *moi* sans contradiction, sans partage, et n'aurait besoin que de moi pour être
heureux" (Rousseau 1964: 358).

For all his admiration for Rousseau, Kant exploded the very possibility of that undi-
vided self for which Rousseau lusted. His claim that we do not have transparent
knowledge of things in themselves set off a firestorm of anxious response. There was
a rumor in Königsberg that his philosophy had driven a student insane. In Jena, two
students fought a duel over interpretation of the first *Critique*. In the swelling wave
of books directed at his work, it was claimed by other professors that Kant's works
"unsettle the powers of the understanding, spoil good principles, and poison the
source of human happiness" (Kühn 2001: 318-9).

The whole movement of German Idealism can be seen as a counter attack by other philosophers of the age against the proposition that knowledge is not immediate and that the self is divided. Thus, Fichte:

> Only in the self-intuition of a mind is there the identity of a representation and its object. Hence to explain the absolute correspondence between a representation and its object, upon which the reality of all our knowledge depends, it must be shown that the mind, insofar as it intuits objects, really intuits itself. (quoted in Beiser 1993: 12)

And he adds: "If this can be shown, then the reality of all our knowledge will be assured" (ibid.). But of course such a homogenization could in fact *not* be shown, neither by Fichte himself, nor by his opponents, Schelling and Hegel.

Schelling described himself on several occasions as a physician healing the deep wounds of consciousness, and while there are differences in his emphasis over his long life, it is clear from very early on that the specific wounds he has in mind are those inflicted on consciousness by Kant. This is most obviously the case in his 1803 *Vorlesungen über die Methode des academischen Studiums*, in which he argues that reality does not depend on an opposition between intelligence and nature (clearly alluding to Kant's distinction between categories and intuitions), but rather is guaranteed by the Absolute (grounded in Reason). The supreme law of reason, then, is not difference but identity, A=A, independent of temporal and spatial considerations. It was this ultra-monistic view that inspired Hegel to describe it as the night in which all cows are black (ibid.: 7).

Hegel's whole theory is based on the overcoming of Geist's alienation from itself. In a sense, he put Fichte's absolute ego into time – the subject might not be able to know itself today, but it *will* in the future. And when that absolute fusion of subject and object occurs, history will have exhausted its telos and time will be no more. It can be shown that from very early on, even in his early religious writings, Hegel assumed that Kant had seen a part of the truth, but only a part. It was his – that is Hegel's – duty to see the insight in Kant's blindness. Kant had argued that our thinking was legislated by categories in the human mind itself. Hegel agreed with this, but went on to argue that "the nature of our own thought and that of the reality to which Kant always contrasted it are in fact one and the same" (Guyer 1993: 171). His answer to Kant's insistence on difference was – as in Fichte – an expanded notion of unity.

First Period: Early Bakhtin

The Kantian gap between mind and world – and the consequent split between self and itself – are two aspects of a single topic that enters the Bakhtinian fugue as subject during the 1920s. In Bakhtin's first publication, the 1919 manifesto on "Art and Answerability" (Bakhtin 1990a), he posits the primordial fact of separation in human

existence and the consequent imperative to negotiate the distance between. For the rest of his life he will study at various different levels – art, ethics, metalinguistics – the utter *givenness* of this gap and the epistemological and ethical consequences that flow from it. In a major work of this period (roughly contemporaneous with "Art and Answerability"), Bakhtin goes out of his way to insist on the exceptional place that each individual human occupies in existence: "[…] 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" (Bakhtin 1990a: 23).

Bakhtin went on to specify some of the ways time-space determined the individual's *Sonderstellung.* It is the outsideness (*vnenakhodimost'*) of my unique place in being that defines life as a task – the *dannost'* that impels our *zadannost'*, as it were. The site we occupy in being is not merely a site we occupy in space and time, but a *task*, the obligation to forge relations within ourselves and with the world we live in that will keep all the separate elements from devolving into chaos. Making sense of ourselves and of the world is (I apologize for all the big words) an ontologically imposed epistemological task from which we have no alibi. Bakhtin uses "alibi", the Latin word for "elsewhere", not least because having no recourse to any "elsewhere" in existence is a way to insist on the utter fatedness of our being in the particular place where we find ourselves – and very importantly also where *others find themselves* – at any given moment. As long as we live we can never be *elsewhere* from our unique place in existence.

Thus the young Bakhtin began his career by accepting many of the consequences that flowed from recognizing the twin separations Kant had identified – the gap between mind and world, and the gap between perception and self-knowledge. But in absolute opposition to the German Idealists[6], the young Bakhtin responds to Kant's challenge *not* by denial in the form of a new affirmation of unity and transparency. On the contrary, he militantly insists on the foundational importance of a divided subject. In a series of lectures he gave on Kant in 1924-25, Bakhtin says: "The genius of Kant consisted in the destruction of […] objective unity", and he further specifies this claim by remarking: "The main danger consists in the possibility that an image [of the unity of consciousness] may become something more than subsidiary; the forgetting of the fact that the unity of consciousness is only an image – this is the main danger for philosophy" (1993: 331).

From the very beginning of his intellectual life, it is evident, then, that Bakhtin was preoccupied by the problem of how to conceive a self that is both bifurcated and invisible to itself. It is equally clear that his approach from the outset was to frame the question in the context of time and space. In his long, uncompleted manuscript on "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" – written during the same period he was lecturing on Kant – he concentrated attention on questions concerning the "spatial form of the hero" and the "temporal form of the hero" (Bakhtin 1990a: 22-52, 99-138). And, as we shall see, time-space continued to play a role in Bakhtin's thinking during the last years of his life as well.

What is most notable from the work of the 1920s is Bakhtin's use of visual metaphors as a way to dramatize the usefulness of time-space in defining the necessity of the other in formulation of the self. From a simple phenomenological analysis of two persons looking at each other, he defines two categories that will shape his approach to the conundrum of the bifurcated self. The first of these is what Bakhtin calls the "excess of seeing" (izbytok videniia/*избыток видения*):

> When I contemplate a whole human being who is situated outside and over against me, our concrete, actually experienced horizons do not coincide [why *space* is important]. For at each given moment, [why *time* is significant] regardless of the position and the proximity of this human being (человек) whom I am contemplating, I shall always see and know something that he, from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself: parts of his body that are inaccessible to his own gaze (his head, his face and its expression), the world behind his back, and a whole series of objects and relations, which in any of our encounters are accessible to me but not to him. *As we gaze at each other, two different worlds are reflected in the pupils of our eyes* […] (Bakhtin 1990a: 23; emphasis added).

He references this most quotidian example of *seeing* to make what is essentially Kant's point about the *invisibility* of the perceiving subject to himself: "For cognition, there is no absolutely inconvertible relationship of *I* and *all others*" (1990: 22-3; emphasis added); "for cognition, I and the *other*, inasmuch as they are being thought, constitute a relationship that is relative and convertible, since the cognitive *subjectum* (субъект) does not occupy any determinate, concrete place in existence" (1990a: 23; emphasis in original).

Middle Period: Novel Theory

For reasons too numerous and complex to advance within the scope of this paper, the late years of the 1920s saw Bakhtin go through a number of transformations. He moves back to urban Russia after years in the hinterlands; the discussion and reading circles that had sustained him in Nevel' began to break up; and he now turns his attention from patently metaphysical subjects to matters of interest to a much wider population. Intellectually, it is significant that what might be conceived as the beginning of this period, 1929, saw the publication of two works that mark new voices that enter into Bakhtin's time-space fugue at this point. The first was *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language.* This text was published under the name of Bakhtin's friend – and fellow member of the Nevel' Circle – Voloshinov; the degree of Bakhtin's involvement in the work is still being argued, but most experts agree that it is at least heavily influenced by him. A second publication that year, *Problems in the Work of Dostoevsky*, was published under Bakhtin's own name.

1929 was also, of course, the year he was arrested. His subsequent exile nevertheless saw him continuing to meditate his constant themes of time, space, and dialog, but now in light of the new influences that came into his life immediately before his arrest. In his work with Voloshinov he drew new strength from a newly inspired turn to language, reflected in many of the projects that occupied him in the following decades as he and his faithful wife Elena Aleksandrovna wandered from the deserts of Kazakhstan to the cultural wilderness of Saransk.

From the thirties to the fifties Bakhtin continued to think and write. Virtually all the essays and monographs from these two decades complicate the fugal development of the obsession with time-space that goes back to the tonic of his first published work in 1924. FTC is perhaps not as theoretically powerful as certain other works of this period[7], but it is far and away the most cited by later readers.

The title of the essay would appear on the surface of things to be completely forthright in proclaiming its status as purely literary category: "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes Toward a Historical Poetics". And the initial definition is equally unambiguous: "We understand the chronotope as a formally constitutive category of literature […]" (FTC: 84). However, forty years later, when the essay did finally see the light of day, Bakhtin seems to have recognized that despite the exclusive focus on literature that he claimed in his subtitle, the vast scope of topics that he had *in fact* assembled under the rubric "chronotope" might nevertheless create confusion for any reader trying to grasp the term's precise limits. He thus added a coda of several pages that sought to address possible confusion about what he himself calls the most important problem associated with the term, "the *boundaries* of chronotopic analysis" (FTC: 257; emphasis added). Despite recognizing as much, he nevertheless goes on to define chronotope so broadly as to be almost boundaryless: "We […] endow all phenomena with meaning, that is, we incorporate them not only into the sphere of spatial and temporal existence, but also into the semantic sphere" (FTC: 258; Бахтин 1975: 406). He ends by saying, "[…] *every entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope*" ("[..] всякое вступление в сферу смыслов совершается только через ворота хронотопов") (ibid.; emphasis added).

By concluding with this turn to epistemology, Bakhtin signals the distinctive place that FTC plays in the evolution of his own thinking both early and late. Time-space coordinates serve to ground what is in effect a first philosophy: they are the fundamental constituents of understanding, and thus provide the indices for measuring other aspects of human existence, first and foremost, the identity of the self. As the Nobel prize winning poet Wisława Szymborska says in her "Life While-You-Wait": "I know nothing of the role I play. / I only know it's mine, I can't exchange it. / I have to guess on the spot / just what this play is all about" (1998: 169). Bakhtin's answer to this need to orient oneself in life is the ongoing work of extential chronotopic analysis.

While it is obvious that in 1973 the overwhelmingly ethical and literary thrust typical of Bakhtin's early period now gets subordinated to a new insistence on epistemology, it does so because he has come to realize there cannot be an ethics without an underlying theory of knowledge able to underwrite valid distinctions between values: in order to grasp the consequences of agency, we need to have an understanding of the subject.

The 1973 addendum might well be read as an attempt to compensate for the shocking brevity of the original chronotope essay's second footnote, which reads in full:

> In his "Transcendental Aesthetics" (one of the main sections of his *Critique of Pure Reason*) Kant defines space and time as indispensable forms of any cognition, beginning with elementary perceptions and representations. Here, we employ the Kantian evaluation of the importance of these forms in the cognitive process, but differ from Kant in taking them not as 'transcendental' but as forms of the most immediate reality [...]. (FTC: 85; 1975: 235: "[...] формы самой реальной действительности")

Whatever else this gnomic formulation portends for later commentators, it seems relatively unambiguous that Bakhtin was here seeking to make clear his conviction that time and space are understandable only – to use Kant's own terminology – as "pure intuitions". They are unconditioned in the sense that there is no perception, no thinking or understanding of the self or the world without them. In other words, when he says "we employ the Kantian evaluation of the importance of these forms in the cognitive process", he seems to be agreeing with Kant that the other categories listed in the first critique (such as quantity, quality, relation, etc.) are secondarily derived, conditioned as they are by the necessity of the prior existence of time and space.

Understanding time-space in these foundational terms helps to clarify the importance of these concepts in Bakhtin's early philosophical texts, such as those difficult sections of *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity* devoted to the temporal and spatial form of the hero. Perceiving the central role of time-space adds as well to our sense of continuity in Bakhtin's thought where they dominate the last essays and fragments, as in the "Notes from 1970-71", when Bakhtin is once again trying to calibrate similarities and differences between partners in dialog. It is time-space that defines the primordial distinction between I and the other he defines by invoking the Kantian terms of *given/created* (*gegeben/aufgegeben*, or *дан/задан*): "My temporal and spatial boundaries are not given for me, but the other is entirely given. I enter into the spatial world, but the other has already resided in it. The difference between space and time of *I* and the *other*" (Bakhtin 2002d: 147). I and the other are, of course, the two poles of any dialog. Why does Bakhtin assign priority to time-space in defining such a fundamental concept?

As we have seen, Bakhtin famously marks a distinction between Kant's usage of time-space and his own. He begins by saying: "[...] we employ the Kantian evaluation of

the importance of these forms […]". However, he immediately adds that he "differ[s] from Kant in taking them not as 'transcendental' but as forms of the most immediate reality" ("[…] формы самой реальной действительности") (FTC: 85; 1975: 235). The phrase I render as "most immediate reality" Bakhtin emphasizes by using both Western (реальность) and native Slavic terms (действительность). He does so to drive home his point that time-space are at the heart of knowing.

His rejection of Kantian transcendence is Bakhtin's way of defining another version of the subject who – or which – is the ground zero of perception, the experimental laboratory where understanding is produced. That is, like Kant, he sees time-space as defining of the knowing subject. But Bakhtin differs from Kant in understanding the nature of the subject so defined.

Obviously, much hangs on how we interpret "transcendence", so it is well to remember that it is a term that Kant uses in many different contexts. In FTC, Bakhtin himself refers us to an early section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (henceforth CPR), the first part of the *Transcendental Doctrine of Elements* given the heading – in both editions of CPR – *Transcendental Aesthetic*. It is characterized by Bakhtin as "one of the main sections of the CPR" (FTC: 85), and indeed it is, for it is in these passages Kant establishes the rationale for the categories that are the fundamental building blocks of his system. Bakhtin draws attention to these passages in particular because they contain Kant's argument for the purity, or the *priority* of the specific concepts of time and space.

"Transcendental" in these early pages of CPR is introduced as part of the argument explaining why the categories are necessary in all acts of understanding. "Transcendental" can best be understood as meaning "beyond, or not based on experience", insofar as time and space are given *a priori*, independent of any particular instantiation of them. By definition, then, "transcendent" stands over against "empirical", a term Kant reserves for any intuition that contains sensation from the experienced world. And since such an intuition is available to mind only *after* it has been processed by the categories (especially time and space), it is always *a posteriori*.

Now, remember Bakhtin's claim for the decisive power of time-space in human beings: "*every entry into the sphere of meaning is accomplished only through the gates of the chronotope* […]" (FTC: 258; 1975: 406; emphasis added). If chronotope is understood in such all-embracing terms, does it not seem to be making something very similar to the claim for universal priority that Kant labels transcendental?

The answer must be both yes and no. However you parse them, time-space are ineluctably intertwined with the concept of *perception*, so one way to grasp the subtle, yet crucial difference Bakhtin wishes to make in his allusion to Kant, is to ask the question "*where* does time-space have its agency?", that is, "for *whom* are time-space distinctions relevant?". If we pursue this line of inquiry, it quickly becomes apparent that what is at stake in Bakhtin's dismissal of Kantian transcendence is really a difference between the two about the nature of the self.

To fully grasp the complex nature of that difference, it helps to remember two premises both thinkers begin by sharing. First, each makes the non-intuitive assumption that the subject at the heart of identity, the agent of perception, is invisible to itself. And secondly, the only self that *is* visible to the individual subject – despite its defining task of bringing the manifold variety of the world into a meaningful unity – *is not noumenal. It is a construction, moreover a construction that is itself not singular.* For Bakhtin, "self" belongs to that class of words that includes "twin": when we identify someone as a twin, we recognize that his identity is derivative: as such, it depends on the existence of another self, the secret sharer who is the other twin.

Bakhtin thoroughly absorbed Kant's lesson that there is a gap between mind and the world, but disagreed with Kant about what characterized that gap. Kant's sense of this epistemological space was that it was created by wired in mechanisms that were universally supplied to humans. But insofar as they had to be universal, they could never be particularized in experience, and so they were by definition transcendental, always outside the bounds of any possible sensibility. Bakhtin, while agreeing that a gap between mind and world exists, characterizes it in terms that are both textual and personal. He does so by invoking *transgredience*, rather than transcendence as defining the nature of the gap in being. Transgredient is a recondite term deriving from "transgress", going beyond the bounds.

Bakhtin's favorite illustration of transgredience, repeated throughout his works, is based on what he called the surplus of seeing that I mentioned earlier; when you and I face each other, I can see things behind your head you do not see, and you can see things behind my head that I cannot see. In other words, the things I cannot see are not outside experience as such, they are merely outside – they transgress – the boundaries of what is available to my sight in a particular moment. If we switch places, that which was invisible to me in my former position comes into sight, and the same happens for you when you do the same thing. Transgredience, then, is the name of a boundary that through interaction (our changing places) can be overcome – transgressed – in experience.

Bakhtin comes back to this illustration again and again because it demonstrates the self's need of the other – from the physical environment, of course, but especially a need for other people. He calls transgredient interaction between subjects an event, which permits him in Russian to play with words: event (sobytie) is a word that combines the prefix indicating sharedness "so-" with the stem that signifies "being", "bytie", which explains the frequent occurrence in Bakhtin's texts of the term translated into English as "the event of being", or "sobytie sobytiia". Use of event also helps bring out the – always relative – virtues of outsideness (vnenakhodimost'), another term that is crucial in defining the Bakhtinian subject. I can never encompass everything, thus I am condemned to being outside much – indeed most – of the things and people – and ideas – in the world. But in this condition of needing constantly to negotiate various degrees of outsideness and insideness (what Bakhtin calls appropriation, usvoenie) lies the guarantee of my freedom. As in Kant, the world is

not given to me, in the sense that so much of it is outside me and thus in need of being creatively organized into my life.

Thinking – experience – is a task for Kant, a series of never ending judgments. The tools for accomplishing the task are a priori categories and a postiori intuitions. For Bakhtin, the event of being is also a task, but the tools for accomplishing it are the subtleties of time-space. Dialog is not just a relation. Like all relations, it requires boundaries, and the tools for establishing these are for Bakhtin time and space conceived as chronotope: Bakhtin's neologism introduces a new degree of *specification* into the general understanding of time-space. First of all, as characterized by transgredience rather than transcendence, time and space in the chronotope are never divorced from a particular time or a specific space. Dostoevsky has the Underground Man use the formula 2x2=5 to insist on the importance of singularity, the ineffable unrepeatability of unique events in existence (as opposed to the normative repeatability of 2x2=4 in theory). Bakhtin introduces chronotope to name the existential immediacy of fleeting moments and places.

Thus the chronotope is, like Kant's categories and intuitions, an instrument for calibrating existence. I use the word calibrate in its technical sense, whose meaning is "to adjust experimental results, to take external factors into account or to allow comparison with other data". But, it will be asked, what would the technology look like in which chronotope is an instrument of such exquisite sensitivity? What is the *means* which permit time and space in general to take on the degree of temporal and spatial specificity demanded by the uses to which Bakthin wishes to put chronotope?

Another huge difference between Kant and Bakhtin will help us answer this question. For all of his obsessive attention to the workings of the mind in its interaction with the world, Kant famously never raises the question of language's role in negotiating appearance. For Bakhtin just the opposite is the case: he is as focused on language as Kant was dismissive of it.

Late Period: Time in Language and Language in Time

How is that relevant to our topic? Because it is precisely human language that underwrites the effectiveness of chronotopes in human cultures. The Kantian categories of time and space are so transcendental that their application – even in the most abstruse logical or mathematical formulae – already compromises their status as pure categories. Nevertheless, if time and space have their "natural" home in logic and science, chronotopes have their natural – their only – home in language. In our daily use of chronotopes the abstractness of time-space is domesticated when we deploy them in speech. The formal means for expressing subjectivity occupy a unique place in all languages. As Benveniste has pointed out, "I" is a word that has no referent in the way "tree", for instance, nominates a class of flora. If "I" is to perform its task as *pronoun*, it must itself not be a noun, i.e., it must not refer to anything as other words

do. For its task is to indicate the person uttering the present instance of the discourse containing "I", a person who is alwas changing and different. "I" must not refer to anything in particular, or it will not be able to mean everybody in general.

In Jakobson's suggestive phrase, "I" is a shifter because it moves the center of discourse from one speaking subject to another. Its emptiness is the no man's land in which subjects can exchange the lease they all hold on meaning in language by virtue of merely saying "I". When a particular person utters that word, he or she fills "I" with meaning by providing the central point needed to calibrate all further time and space discriminations: "I" is the invisible ground of all other indices in language, the benchmark to which all its spatial operations are referred, and the Greenwich mean time by which all its temporal distinctions are calibrated. "I" marks the point between "now" and "then" as well as between "here" and "there". The difference between all these markers is manifested by the relation each of them bears either to the proximity of the speaker's horizon (here and now), or to the distance of the other's environment (there and then).

This the way that language makes possible my dialog with the world from my unique place in it: the first person pronoun, coupled with indicatives such as "then", "now" and "here", "there" serve to calibrate positions in abstract space and time that are always conditioned ("thickened") in the event by the specific values that society attached to them in any particular time and place. Bakhtin praises Dostoevsky for creating a "Copernican Revolution" (1984: 49), precisely because Dostoevsky's polyphonic version of novel structure brought to the fore the complexity and utility of the first person pronoun as it is deployed in defining a self.[8]

This is the condition, which Bakhtin has in mind when he writes in his famous footnote that he differs from Kant in taking time and space "not as 'transcendental' but as forms of the most immediate reality".

Endnotes

1.   A different version of this paper will appear in a Festschrift for Nina Perlina.

2.   In "Dialogism", of course, all words are perceived as anaphoric. However, some are more semantically determined by their relation to other, specific words.

3.   The novel was at the center of everyone's attention at this time – including the government's. It achieved a kind of über-genre status as the pre-eminent example of the official aesthetic of Socialist Realism, especially after the Communist Academy's conferences on theory of the novel in 1934-35, in which Lukács played a significant role (see Tihanov 1998).

4.   For a more detailed account of these years, see Holquist and Clark (1984).

5.   During his lifetime, Kant was known (and feared) as "der Alleszermalmer".

6.   And with the hindsight gained from immersion in such later thinkers who contested Kant, such as Dilthey, Simmel, Bergson, and Cassirer.

7.   One thinks of the still under appreciated "Discourse in the Novel", from roughly the same years as the much more influential FTC.

8.   It is significant that the Dostoevsky book, as Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan has pointed out, is Bakhtin's most sustained attempt to understand the problems confronted by a subject defined by its relation to an other who *nevertheless* essays an autobiography. Professor Erdinast-Vulcan's invocation of Derrida's concept of "otobiography" in this essay is most illuminating.

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