

Neo-Kantianism in cultural theory

Bakhtin, Derrida and Foucault

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Nous sommes tous néokantiens.

Michel Foucault¹

In the 1980s and early 1990s, when poststructuralism set the agenda in cultural theory and shaped the way in which theorists from other traditions were received, the work of the Bakhtin Circle was often seen as anticipating contemporary concerns to a quite uncanny extent. While some adopted Bakhtin as a poststructuralist *avant la lettre*, others seized on Bakhtinian ideas as an alternative way of dealing with the very issues poststructuralism had raised without disappearing into the poststructuralist void of Derrida's 'outside text' or partaking of Foucault's metaphysics of power. Gradually, it became apparent that despite a reiterated adherence to the 'concrete event' and 'social context', Bakhtinian theory was itself as thoroughly anti-realist as the poststructuralists themselves.

Few were prepared to search for the grounds of perceived correspondences in intellectual history, partly because, in a common effort to maintain a politically radical public profile, all three theorists kept their own philosophical sources well out of sight. Indeed, despite Foucault's above-mentioned invocation of neo-Kantianism, the extent to which he or Derrida realized the traditions behind their own ideas is unclear, since they only considered their immediate theoretical ancestors. Bakhtin was rather more aware of his place in intellectual history and it is recent research into the sources of his ideas that has made the current investigation possible.² I shall argue here that these three figures share roots in a common philosophical tradition: neo-Kantianism, specifically that of the Marburg School.

Few in the Anglophone world are primed to recognize neo-Kantian traits in cultural theory these days. Sustained works on neo-Kantianism in English are

rather scarce, and those that trace its influence on social and cultural theory have focused on the influence of Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert on Max Weber. The Marburg School's influence on Durkheim via Charles Renouvier (1815–1903), Léon Brunschvicg (1869–1944), Octave Hamelin (1856–1907) and Emile Boutroux (1845–1921) has been given much less attention than the influence of Comte and Spencer.³ Whilst a recent upsurge of interest in the work of Georg Simmel has given rise to work on his sociological writings, his distinctive and no less influential forays into neo-Kantianism and *Lebensphilosophie* have been rather less well served. The work of the late Gillian Rose is a notable exception, providing learned assessments of the traces of both Baden and Marburg School neo-Kantianism in some areas of classical sociology, Western Marxism and poststructuralism.⁴ Many of Rose's critiques are, however, little more than sketches, and the unfamiliarity of neo-Kantian ideas – coupled with her own very dense, Hegelian proclivities and juridical focus – mean that her work has not been widely received.⁵

Bakhtin studies have, however, brought neo-Kantianism and the philosophies it spawned back into focus, allowing us to reassess recent intellectual history and better diagnose the malaise afflicting much contemporary theory. While the Baden School has been relatively well served by translations in English, with the exception of the work of Ernst Cassirer and the late Jewish writings of Hermann Cohen, that of the Marburg School remains largely untranslated. The earliest translated work by Cassirer, *Substance and Function*, marked the beginning of his divergence from the School and his convergence with a specific variety of neo-Hegelianism.⁶ Bakhtin began reading the central Marburg School texts quite early, encouraged by his

friend Matvei Kagan, who had studied in Marburg under Cohen and Paul Natorp and with Cassirer.⁷ In the 1930s, Bakhtin followed Cassirer towards Hegel, and also maintained a definite connection with key elements of the Marburg method. The Marburg influence on Derrida and Foucault come via different routes – including Husserl, Heidegger, Brunschvicg and classical sociology – so materializes in different ways. There are definite points, however, where the shared heritage is apparent.

When Roy Bhaskar notes that Derrida has an ‘unfortunate tendency to elide the referent in the semiotic triangle ... which deconstructs his own practice which cannot thereby be theoretically sustained’, it is the neo-Kantian basis of the method that has been identified.⁸ Even the corporeally insistent historical works of Foucault and Bakhtin are rather different to the materialist works they once appeared. The subtitle of Foucault’s 1963 *The Birth of the Clinic* illustrates this well: *An Archaeology of Medical Perception*. The book deals with the production of an object of knowledge according to ‘new forms of the mathematical a priori’, a consideration of which also brings his methodological opus, *The Order of Things*, to a close. In the case of both Bakhtin and Foucault, the body is a historically changing object of knowledge. In the Renaissance the individual body is a microcosm of the universe, with life and death having a cosmic significance. Over the next two centuries the individual life is separated and the cosmic co-ordinates lost.⁹ This is the way the transformation of perception – medical and otherwise – occurred, and all other considerations are beyond knowledge. This characteristic ‘bracketing’ is clearly stated in the following comment by Bakhtin:

Three centuries ago the ‘whole world’ was a unique symbol that could not be adequately represented by any model, by any map or globe. In this symbol the ‘whole world’, visible and cognised, embodied-real, was a small and detached patch of earthly space and an equally small and detached chunk of real time. Everything else unsteadily disappeared into the fog, became mixed-up and interlaced with other worlds, estranged-ideal, fantastic, utopian. The point is not that the other-worldly and fantastic filled-in this impoverished reality, combined and rounded reality out into a mythological whole. The otherworldly disorganized and bled this present reality.¹⁰

The world literally *was* that symbol, bled and disorganized by mythical thinking. The symbol did not represent the world badly, but it *was* the world itself. That symbol could not be represented, it could not appear *for itself* but existed only *in itself*. Culture had

no self-consciousness because the power of mythical thought was sufficient to prevent any such objectification. To understand the nature of these intellectual enterprises we must turn to their philosophical roots.

The Marburg School project

Neo-Kantianism was a rather misleading term since the revisions of Kant were fundamental. Where Kant argued that *concepts* are validated in their a priori application to the empirical world, the neo-Kantians, following the work of R.H. Lotze, argued that the validity (*Geltung*) of *propositions* is established independently, by logic. The realm of values and validity is now akin to Plato’s Ideas so that what has validity (*was gilt*) is quite different from what is (*was ist*) and there is no point of transition between them. The ramifications of this move were brought out in the work of Cohen, the leader of the Marburg School, who argued that it no longer made sense to speak of a ‘thing in itself’ if validity was autonomous. ‘Objectification’ meant not the relationship between the mind and an empirical world, but the *production* of the object by and in thought. Cohen was uneasy about the term ‘produce’ since this implied production of and from ‘something placed outside’; instead he adopted the term ‘origin’ (*Ursprung*). Cohen’s intention was later clarified by his student Cassirer:

The primacy of activity over possibility, of the independent-spiritual over the sensible-thinglike, should be carried through purely and completely. Any appeal to a merely given should fall aside; in place of every supposed foundation in things there should enter the pure foundations of thinking, of willing, of artistic and religious consciousness. In this way, Cohen’s logic became the logic of the origin.¹¹

Marburg neo-Kantianism was militantly anti-psychologistic, and this made it a powerful influence on the development of ‘transcendental phenomenology’. Paul Natorp, the second major Marburg neo-Kantian, argued – in an article that Husserl cited as the catalyst of his own anti-psychologistic turn – that the ‘thing in itself’ was at best a limiting concept which organized thought, ‘an unknown *X* that we endlessly define’. However, he also argued that the ‘objective validity’ of that definition is ‘independent of the subjectivity of knowledge ... what is to be objectively valid, is to be valid apart from the givenness of its representation in this or that consciousness.’¹² Validity is established in accordance with the ‘factual validity’ (*faktische Geltung*) of the mathematics that

underlies each science, with the consequence that, as Cohen put it, genuine actuality consists of science in ‘published books’.¹³

Where Kant argued that dogmatism begins with an analysis of being, and criticism with an analysis of knowledge, the Marburg School argued that the difference lay in the perceived task of cognition. The dogmatic method regards the object of knowledge as given (*gegeben*) and takes the task of cognition to consist in the cognition of that object, drawing closer to it, revealing what is given in experience from the given object. The critical method, on the other hand, regards experience only as the occasion for the production of the object; the object is not given but set as a task (*aufgegeben*). This is a never-ending task (*unendliche Aufgabe*) because all thought is in becoming (*das Werden*). Despite the Marburg School’s humanism, it is possible here to see the seeds of Heidegger’s critique of ‘presence’, which plays such a central role in Derrida’s work.¹⁴ In the Marburg formulations Kant’s transcendental logic now becomes a pure logic (Cohen) or a general logic (Natorp), methods in which the object can and should be ‘produced’ from and in thought.

This is an uncompromising anti-realism incompatible with any form of reference to the empirical world, no matter how self-critical or fallibilistic. *Being* is now equated with *being known*; ‘metaphysics’, as the French neo-Kantian Brunschvicg put it, ‘may be reduced to the theory of knowledge’.¹⁵ The divergence between, on the one hand, the neo-Kantian approach to language and experience and, on the other, analytical philosophy with its concentration on reference, can be traced back to the initial divergence between Lotze and Frege.¹⁶ But it is in the work of the Marburg School that the implications of the divergence become apparent: all knowledge of the empirical world is excluded in principle. As we shall see, the Bakhtinian and poststructuralist philosophies of language are typical developments of neo-Kantianism, which in their own ways transform the object of cognition – the signified



– into a never-ending task validated by the object domains of individual sciences.

Derrida: the origin of *différance*

With his famous – or notorious – declaration that ‘there is no outside-text’, Derrida undertakes a neo-Kantian reworking of structuralist linguistics startlingly reminiscent of Marburgian *Geltungsphilosophie*. Where Brunschvicg had developed a Marburgian ‘modality of judgement’ in which knowledge constitutes a world for us, Derrida’s ‘Il n’y a pas de hors-texte’ does not posit an ontological ‘nothing’ outside the text¹⁷ but claims that language constitutes the world for us beyond which nothing can be justifiably posited. Both Foucault and Bakhtin agree with this banishment of ontology and attack on representation as mimesis in their own respective neo-Kantian moves; all three effectively present their work as ‘Copernican revolutions’ in philosophy, deconstructing the ‘copy theory’ of relations between language and a ‘given’ object in favour of an investigation into the discursive constitution of the

object of knowledge.¹⁸ For all three, the object can only be known as signified, but never finally and entirely known since it is never actually present. In the case of Derrida, presence is eternally disrupted by the ‘play of absence and presence’ within a constantly shifting signifying system.

Rose has shown that Saussure’s *Course in General Linguistics* proceeds along Kantian lines, with the *langue/langage* distinction corresponding to that between the a priori (precondition) and the empirical (conditioned). Saussure’s distinction between ‘concept’ and ‘sound-image’ further corresponds to Kant’s distinction between concept and (given) intuition/representation; Saussure’s account of linguistic value to Kant’s move from ‘description’ to transcendental reconstruction where concept (signified) and sound image (signifier) are shown to be a construct of signification.¹⁹ The Derridean critique of Saussure actually follows many of the moves of the neo-Kantians in their critique of Kant. *Langue* (a priori) now ‘produces’ language (empirical), but the subject is no longer able to halt the play of difference to achieve a stable meaning (object of cognition). That meaning is *produced* by the play of difference (the process of becoming). Where the neo-Kantian object of cognition is never finally defined (present) but is constantly being produced, Derridean presence is endlessly deferred. Difference-ruled deferral famously becomes *différance*, a Derridean version of Cohen’s ‘origin’, which also ‘differentiates’.²⁰ This is the ‘originary difference’ between Kant’s *quid facti* and *quid juris* recast in Lotze’s contrast of what is and what has validity to become an opposition between being and meaning, the elision of which constitutes metaphysics. As Vincent Descombes – one of the only writers to recognize the influence of neo-Kantianism on Derrida – argues, the identity of being and meaning is, for Derrida, only ‘at infinity’, infinitely deferred like neo-Kantian ‘infinite tasks’ and ‘interminable “teleologies”’. Derrida’s notion of ‘trace’, which highlights ‘the sign left by the absent thing after it has passed’, is a mark of this originary delay. As Descombes puts it, without reference to Cohen: ‘if every present bears the trace of an absent which circumscribes it (and by which, in this sense, it is constituted, produced and given to be what it is), then paradoxically an “originary trace” must be conceived of; that is, a *present trace* of a *past which never took place* – an “absolute past”.’²¹ Furthermore, Habermas, another neo-Kantian thinker, refers to Derrida’s temporalized *Ursprungsphilosophie* (philosophy

of origin) that is rooted in Jewish mysticism.²² This is again reminiscent of Cohen, whose philosophy was a particular convergence of neo-Kantianism and Jewish mysticism, the messianic aspects of which one also finds in Bakhtin’s notion of carnival.

The Bakhtin Circle: neo-Kantian philosophy of language

The Bakhtinian linguistic development of neo-Kantianism is very different, not least because it is not based on Saussurean linguistics. The Bakhtin Circle subscribed to a philosophy of language that stressed subjective spontaneity in communication while opposing the psychologism of Romantic linguistics. In a recently published plan for Valentin Voloshinov’s *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Cassirer’s 1923 work *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms vol. 1: Language* is hailed as initiating a new phase of neo-Kantianism:

‘the word’ becomes a *partition* [*sredostenie*] between transcendental validity and concrete actuality, a ‘third realm’, as it were, lying between the cognising psycho-physical subject and the empirical actuality surrounding him on the one hand, and the world of a priori, formal being on the other. At the same time, the form of the sign and significance (symbolic form) is common to all regions of cultural creativity, uniting them. Such is the systematic place of the word in the teachings of the neo-Kantians.... It is precisely on the ground of the philosophy of language that the Marburg School’s abstract scientism and the Freiburg School’s abstract ethicism is now being overcome. By means of *the inner form of language (as a semi-transcendental form)* movement and historical becoming is being introduced into the petrified realm of transcendental-logical forms. It is also on this basis that an attempt to re-establish the idealist dialectic is being made.²³

Voloshinov here signals the neo-Kantian appropriation and adaptation of Wilhelm von Humboldt’s organicist philosophy of language in its evolution towards a type of neo-Hegelianism. In this new adaptation, language becomes a ‘partition’ between ‘life’ as understood by *Lebensphilosophie* and objective culture (validity). Where in Bakhtin’s early work the ‘act of our activity, of our experience, like the two-faced Janus, looks to both sides: at the objective unity of cultural realms and at the unrepeatable singularity of experienced life’, so now language embodies the ‘partition’ between these ‘mutually impervious’ worlds.²⁴ This development is key to overcoming what Simmel had called

the ‘tragedy of culture’ resulting from the confrontation of life and objective culture. The circularity of precondition and conditioned was now embraced; as Cassirer put it, the ‘living process of speech’ is one in which ‘individuality and universality are contained as equally justified and equally necessary aspects of the process. The universal is that through which the individual constructs the world, and the universal is what constructs the world of the individual.’²⁵ The linguistic structure now shifts, ‘imperceptibly’, with every utterance and this shifting structure ‘constructs’ the individual utterance. As Bakhtin put it in 1961, the utterance ‘creates something that before it never was, something absolutely new and unrepeatable.... But something created is always created from something given.... Everything given is transformed into what is created.’ While ‘positivist’ scholarship studies only the ‘given in the created’, the object is nevertheless ‘created in the process of creation, the poet himself is created, and his world view, and the means of expression’.²⁶ Here we have the Bakhtinian recasting of the Marburg never-ending task: thought as thought of origin.

Where Cassirer recast Humboldt’s ‘inner-form’ as the ‘law of signification’, Bakhtin concentrated on the relationality of discourse and called this ‘dialogism’, the ongoing and never-ending process of inter-subjective thought-exchange, the units of which are utterances. *Dialogism* is the logic of thought-exchange on the basis of language and, like all the ‘human sciences’, has an ethical significance. For Cohen, the ‘mathematics’ of ethics is jurisprudence, and it is for this reason that dialogism is both juridical and normative. In the novel, as the most self-consciously dialogic form of complex (meta-)utterance, socio-specific discourses are brought to an inquest, with the novelist him- or herself not ‘speaking’ directly.²⁷ The utterances of the hero are defined by their relations towards (a) the object; (b) the given linguistic system of possibilities for expression; and (c) other utterances within the sphere of intercourse. In this way the discourse can be judged ‘correct (or incorrect), true, right (or false/wrong), beautiful, just etc.’. The author thus plays the role of the assumed but unheard ‘superaddressee’ who, like Kant’s theoretical reason, sits in judgement. Outside the literary work, however, the presence of such a judge is simply assumed as a structural requisite of dialogue, the ‘third’ the ‘absolutely just responsive understanding of whom is presupposed either at a metaphysical distance or in distant historical time’.²⁸

Linguistics: the regional sciences of discourse?

The Marburg School sought to justify the existence of distinct object domains by establishing the ‘factual validity’ of mathematical thinking underlying each individual science. Sciences, they thought, were *essentially* regional, with a priori boundaries and principles, the erasure of which is fatal to science itself. Neo-Kantianism was thus the ultimate self-justifying academic philosophy. According to the Marburgers, jurisprudence, the science of legal concepts, is the ‘mathematics’ of the cultural sciences. Bakhtin and Voloshinov sought to establish a science of *discourse* as a cultural science, which is validated according to the ‘mathematics’ of jurisprudence, producing its objects but not implying that the existing normative linguistic structure (like the existing law) is the embodiment of rationality. Linguistics is a specific object domain, but one whose method is that of the natural sciences; this lies behind Bakhtin’s hostility to Saussurean linguistics. *La langue* is a system of norms that cannot be questioned: a method appropriate for the natural sciences is imposed on the cultural sciences so that linguistics claims to explain cultural phenomena. The existing standard of value must be able to be questioned if the production of the object is a never-ending task, and this is especially the case in the science of culture, the object of which is a ‘teleological formation’.²⁹

Bakhtin’s most systematic comments on this matter are in his late notes on establishing a ‘methodology for the human sciences’ and his major 1953 essay on ‘discursive genres’, the latter of which takes advantage of Stalin’s recent consignment of linguistics to the natural sciences.³⁰ The neo-Kantian underpinnings of Bakhtin’s argument are especially clear in recently published archival notes for the discursive genres essay, where Bakhtin tries to justify this new regional science of discourse by arguing that only this can analyse the ‘relatedness’ of linguistic meaning (*znachenie*) to ‘objective validity’ – that is, the ‘truthfulness, beauty, veracity, necessity, expressiveness, sincerity’ of the utterance.³¹ These categories are what Kagan, following Cohen, called ‘undoubted facts of actuality’, the ‘spheres of objects and problems of separate scientific and cultural disciplines’ into which ‘actuality is broken up’.³² The same feature found its way into the neo-Kantianism that shaped French philosophy. As Durkheim’s teacher, Hamelin, put it, quoting Renouvier, such ‘categories are necessary phenomena in relation to our minds ... they are necessary truths ... which are the condition of [the understanding] being used’.³³

Like Bakhtin, Derrida seeks to found a new regional science of language in use, though on rather different premisses. His characterization of science and of writing, the science of which is *grammatology*, is typically neo-Kantian: science is a ‘task’ in which ideal objects are produced, while writing is ‘the condition of the possibility of ideal objects ... the condition of the *epistémè*.’³⁴ Derrida draws heavily on Husserl’s essay ‘the Origin of Geometry’, which, as Rose shows, is itself a ‘classic piece of neo-Kantianism in the Marburg style’:

It seeks to justify an exemplary or regional science not knowledge as such; it drops the distinction between appearances and things in themselves; it turns the question of transcendental possibility into the delineation of a productive origin; and it defines the a priori metacritically as ‘culture’ or ‘history.’ ‘Culture’ or ‘history’ becomes the name for the source of signification which repeatedly creates or posits its idealities or validities: this historical beginning is defined as ‘origin in an accomplishment, first as a project and then as a successful execution’.³⁵

Derrida sets writing as a metacritical a priori one stage back from that of Husserl: ‘before being the object of a history – the object of an historical science – writing opens the field of history – of historical becoming. And the former (*Historie* in German) presupposes the latter (*Geschichte*).’³⁶ Writing, the world of and in signs, now becomes the mathematics of history as science (method) and the object of history is ‘produced’ by *différance*. Derrida criticizes the notion that experience ‘always corresponds to a certain type of factual or regional experience (historical, psychological, physiological, sociological, etc.), giving rise to a science that is itself regional and, as such, rigorously outside linguistics’³⁷ for its phonologism. Reversing the hierarchy between speech and writing means that regional sciences themselves become conditions of ‘experience’: regional sciences give rise to (objectify) regional experience.

Bakhtin makes a similar point when he argues that ‘communication requires objective validity (in all its various forms depending on the sphere of intercourse); without it communication would degenerate and decay. All utterances have dealings with objective actuality regardless of the consciousness or will of people (speakers, those engaged in communication), and regardless of communication itself.’³⁸ Derrida’s notion of ‘arche-writing’ as the ‘pure movement which produces difference’³⁹ is thus akin to Cassirer’s ‘law of symbolization’ but without the organicism which the latter inherited from von Humboldt and bequeathed to Bakhtin. History is transferred wholesale to the realm

of culture and made a productive origin. As Habermas recognizes with reference to Derrida, the printed form of language severs the text from the context in which it arose, from concrete connections with individual subjects and gives it an autonomy in relation to all living contexts, so that the text becomes readable in all changing contexts. The semantic content (Natorp’s ‘objective validity’) is thereby saved from psychologism.⁴⁰ Derrida’s embrace of writing is thus similar to Cohen’s notion of genuine actuality being science in published books.

Life, culture and the inbetween

Foucault presents the most systematic poststructuralist attempt to develop a neo-Kantian scheme of regional validities and to relate this to discourse in life. The following passage from *The Archaeology of Knowledge* shows the connection with the principles of Cohen and Derrida but it also provides a useful bridge to Bakhtin’s work:

Different *oeuvres*, dispersed books, that whole mass of texts that belong[s] to a single discursive formation – and so many authors who know or do not know one another, criticize one another, ... pillage one another, meet without knowing it and obstinately intersect their unique discourses in a web of which they are not the masters, of which they cannot see the whole, and of whose breadth they have a very inadequate idea ... they communicate by the form of positivity of their discourse.... Thus positivity plays the role of what might be called a *historical a priori*.⁴¹

Objective validity is here an agitated field of discursive interaction strikingly reminiscent of Bakhtin’s mature work. In a well-known passage, Bakhtin describes how every utterance is a dependent but active participant in a constantly (re)forming discursive mesh of intersecting utterances of which individuals have but partial knowledge:

Every ... prose word – everyday, rhetorical, scientific – cannot but be oriented on the ‘already said’, the known’, on ‘common opinion’ etc. The dialogic orientation of the word is of course a phenomenon common to every word. It is the natural condition of every living word. On each of its routes toward the object, in all its directions, the word meets the alien word and cannot but enter into a living tension-filled interaction with it.⁴²

Though Bakhtin’s passage displays a much stronger phenomenological coloration than that of Foucault, there is a close relationship between the notions of ‘directedness’ and ‘positivity’, since in each case the object of discourse is not *given* but, in classic neo-

Kantian style, *posited* in the discursive act. In each case the object is posited not by a subject in complete control of his or her positing discourse, but according to a discursive a priori with historical being.

In the preface to *The Order of Things* Foucault distinguishes three levels at which his analysis will work. The first level is constituted by the primary codes of culture:

The fundamental codes of culture – those governing its language, its schemas of perception, its



exchanges, its techniques, its values, the hierarchy of its practices – establish for every man, from the very first, the empirical orders with which he will be dealing and within which he will be at home.

At the second level, and ‘other extremity of thought’ are ‘the scientific theories or the philosophical interpretations which explain why order exists in general, what universal law it obeys, what principle can account for it, and why this particular order and not some other’. Between these two extremes, however, is a third ‘more obscure’ level that he calls the ‘pure experience of order and its modes of being’, or the ‘episteme.’ This is regarded as the most difficult sphere to analyse and also the most fundamental, since it occupies the space between the first and second levels and provides the basis for the construction of the second level. This realm is described as a sort of ineffable proto-reflexivity firmly linked to time and space, shifting and anarchic but also more ‘true’ than the second level.⁴³

Foucault’s fascinating exposition is remarkably similar to an analysis developed by Voloshinov in

his books on Freud and on the philosophy of language, where he makes a distinction between ‘life-ideology’ (*zhiznennaia* or *zhiteiskaia ideologiia*, misleadingly rendered as ‘behavioral ideology’ in the English translation) and ideology proper as the realm of objective validity. As Galin Tihanov has shown, this derives from an inventive development of the work of Simmel and Nikolai Bukharin so that ‘life ideology’ becomes a ‘supply chamber’ for ideological systems (‘ethics, science, art and religion’), displaying

a greater fluidity and sensitivity due to a closer contact with social situation; infiltrating, influencing and transforming ideological systems. Voloshinov also distinguishes between different ‘strata’ of life ideology, with the lower regions having a greater proximity to ‘life’ than the upper levels, which are more systematized.⁴⁴ The category of life and its relations with the realms of ‘objective validity’ was similarly the central question throughout Foucault’s career, though his approach to this question changed considerably. Foucault’s ‘third realm’ roughly corresponds to Voloshinov’s ‘upper level’ of life-ideology,

while the first level corresponds to the latter’s lower level. In Bakhtin’s mature work the relatively stable forms that the different levels of ‘life-ideology’ take are defined in terms of discursive *genres*, a category which Foucault rejects, with ‘primary’ genres being embedded in direct social interaction:

Secondary (complex) discursive genres – novels, dramas, all types of scientific research, large publicistic genres etc. – arise in more complex conditions and relatively well-developed and organized cultural communication (primarily written): artistic, scientific, socio-political etc. In the process of their formation they absorb and rework various primary (simple) genres, which have been composed in direct discursive intercourse. On becoming ingredients of the complex ones, the primary genres are transformed and acquire a specific character: losing their direct relation to real actuality and towards real alien utterances.⁴⁵

Here we have a simple bifurcation into what we might call ‘life-genres’ (Foucault’s first level) and the genres of ‘objective culture’ (second level), but in Bakhtin’s essays on the novel he introduces a third

realm consisting of the small parodic genres which are themselves incorporated into the larger, secondary, meta-genre of the novel; this is further expanded in his discussion of the Menippean satire in the 1963 Dostoevsky book. Indeed, Bakhtin develops a scheme in which the genres associated with popular culture ('low' humorous genres, and especially carnival) are preconditions of science in the same way as Foucault's third level of 'pure experience of order'.⁴⁶ These genres stand midway between life and the 'official' culture that, like Foucault's second level, is an object of suspicion for its association with authority. In each case the 'third' realm represents an 'order which divides systems of positivities "before presenting them to the understanding"', delineating 'a classic *Geltungslogik*'.⁴⁷

Foucault's 'archaeological' project is to analyse the relationship between third and second levels:

to rediscover on what basis knowledge and theory became possible; within what space of order knowledge was constituted; on the basis of what historical a priori, and in the element of what positivity, ideas could appear, sciences be established, experience be reflected in philosophies, rationalities be formed, only, perhaps, to dissolve and vanish soon afterwards.⁴⁸

Though very different from those of Foucault, Bakhtin's historical works follow precisely this pattern, focusing entirely on the forms of pre-literary culture which made the novels of, say, Rabelais and Dostoevsky possible. Where Foucault attempts to outline 'rules of formation which were never formulated in their own right' but were nevertheless intuitable, Bakhtin develops the notion of the 'chronotope', or time-space intuitions characteristic of a particular life-form which make certain types of literature possible, and which correspond to specific discursive formations.⁴⁹ The age of the epic corresponded with Athenian monoglossia, and it was only the collapse of this that made the development of science and 'realistic' literature possible. The first pre-novelistic works were made possible by the first inter-animation of cultures and languages – polyglossia – which resulted from the collapse of Athenian democracy and Hellenic expansion. The modern novel was born with the breakdown of the feudal order, which allowed the inter-animation of different social groups and their discourses (heteroglossia).

Rabelais and Dostoevsky were both writing at 'threshold' times when the old order was in decline and the new order had yet to form, times when the inter-animation of social discourses was particularly

acute, leading to a flood of 'unofficial' culture into their novels. The carnivalesque plays a particularly important role here, constituting a sort of genre of the third realm, a transition point between culture's 'primary codes' and reflexive forms. In each case there is no attempt to assess the adequacy of any historically generated form of social consciousness against a world existing independent of knowledge, but only an attempt to uncover the preconditions for historically specific oeuvres. This is a neo-Kantian project which both Bakhtin and Foucault share.

Shifting positions on a neo-Kantian base

With these methodological parallels it is no surprise that there are so many areas in which Foucault's and Bakhtin's historical works can be compared, but it is almost solely on this basis that comparative work has so far progressed. Foucault's pervasive anti-humanism and subsequent turn from archaeology to genealogy has overshadowed attempts to discern philosophical common ground at a more fundamental level. As Rose shows, Foucault's reversion to genealogy was a defection from one school of neo-Kantian thinking to another, with the Marburgian primacy of validity being replaced by a Nietzschean version of Baden School neo-Kantianism in which the primacy of value in the production of knowledge takes the form of power.⁵⁰ It is significant that it is this move that draws the fire of the more Marburgian Habermas, who argues that 'the internal aspects of meaning, of truth-validity, and of evaluating do not go without remainder into the externally grasped aspects of practices of power'.⁵¹

Unlike the poststructuralists, Bakhtin remained a humanist throughout his career, his philosophy of language being based on an organicist model rather than the intellectualism of Saussure. His idea of dialogue was a linguistic rendering of an ethic of intersubjective relations developed from the Marburg School and the phenomenology of Max Scheler, whose own work was to some extent an attempt to overcome the fragmentation of subjectivity described by Nietzsche. In the Bakhtinian mix there are the developments of neo-Kantianism in the work of Simmel and Cassirer, with the attempt to overcome the dichotomy of life and objective culture through the notion of unfolding symbolic forms. Derrida's and Foucault's attachment to Nietzsche's fragmentation of the subject and a neo-Saussurean philosophy of language is in sharp contrast to Bakhtin, while the French theorists both effectively took the opposite side to Bakhtin in the famous 1929 Davos disputation between Heidegger and Cassirer. Foucault and Derrida diverge on their attitude to phe-

nomenology and to Heidegger's *Ursprungsphilosophie*, but their points of agreement are more pervasive. There are nevertheless distinct points of convergence between the French and Russian theorists. Derrida's encounter with Levinas on the basis of intersubjective ethics, pioneered by Scheler, led Derrida to move toward a delineation of an ethics of deconstruction which in some respects echoes the ethical charge of Bakhtin's dialogism. Similarly the later Foucault's gravitation toward an ethics which reactivates the *sollen* (ought) at the basis of Baden neo-Kantianism brings him back into a common problematic. Common to all three theorists is a tendency to efface politics and ultimately to replace it with ethics, itself a classic neo-Kantian move. Foucault ultimately transforms the will to power into a vitalistic will to life, revealing his own connection to *Lebensphilosophie*, taking us back to his formulations in *The Order of Things* and to the parallels with Bakhtin's attempts to mediate the 'worlds' of life and culture through a 'third realm'. These developments are all explicable with reference to roots in a shared philosophical tradition which in the case of Bakhtin was direct but in that of the French theorists was gained through a tradition of academic philosophy and sociology founded on German neo-Kantianism.

The neo-Kantian logic of presenting the world as not 'given' but 'set as a task' asserted itself in all three cases with the wholesale replacement of politics by ethics. While Marburg neo-Kantian philosophers were predominantly reformist socialists, their prime aim was to establish a philosophy of regional sciences based on the 'production' of objects of knowledge according to mathematical logic. In the realm of the human sciences this meant treating society exclusively as a 'moral reality' and human beings as 'juridical persons', while consigning consideration of the physical structures and biological requirements that impose given parameters on, and act as forces within, social life to the natural sciences. Thus, the socio-economic structures existentially presupposed by a specific and emergent mode of political rule or cultural formation were neglected in favour of a *sui generis* logic of culture. Bakhtin, Derrida and Foucault were all, in their own way, compelled by the logic of their own premisses to misrepresent one element of a relationship that is integrated at a 'molecular' level by hypostasizing that element. The consequences for analysis are seriously debilitating and the political consequences are nothing short of disastrous.

Not only does this return us to a fundamentally idealist philosophy; in the case of poststructuralism

it reverts back to the Marburg-type metaphysics of the production of the object through mathematical categories that the thinkers which mediated the Marburg influence had tried to undermine. Where the intervening generation of sociologists, existentialist philosophers and Western Marxists had sought to outline the relationship between the history of science, philosophy and productive relations, the poststructuralists re-establish originary productive categories. After all, if validity is established independently of an unknowable existence, then a disembodied ethics of object-constitution can leave the world unknown and unchanged. It is easy to see how this fits in with the perceived need of disillusioned post-1968 intellectuals to justify their withdrawal from collective politics. The resulting 'new ethics' that now dominates social theory is, predictably, reminiscent of that with which incipient Western Marxism struggled. It also reminds us of the roots of cultural studies in *Kulturkritik*.⁵² This 'new ethics' and *Kulturkritik* was Bakhtin's point of departure, with the presence of Simmel, Cohen and Scheler dominating his early ethical work. However, in Stalin's Russia Bakhtin was not able to settle into what Rose calls the 'slumber of the mathesis',⁵³ even through a movement from philosophy to literary studies. The apparent separation of economic life from politics and citizenship that characterizes bourgeois democracy and on which neo-Kantian ethicism rests, could not be maintained in Stalin's Russia, even within the realm of literary criticism. Bakhtin and the poststructuralists thus meet on the road going in opposite directions: the former struggles to accommodate the increasingly apparent effects of political economy on culture within a compromised neo-Kantian framework, while the latter respond to the dissipation of socio-economic struggle and consolidation of bourgeois democracy by absorbing culture into a neo-Kantianized realm of validity.

Whatever the virtues of their respective works, which are often considerable, Bakhtin, Derrida and Foucault are seriously compromised by the neo-Kantian philosophy that underlies them. Just as economic life and politics are intimately intertwined and cannot be adequately explained and criticized in isolation, so the 'realms' of existence and validity, fact and value, must be related in any adequate social and cultural theory. This requires a theory of reference principally excluded from neo-Kantianism and a politics that strives to overcome the division of social life in practice. Theories based on neo-Kantianism can reflect such a division but they can neither explain nor be a guide to changing it.

Notes

- This article is based on research carried out under the project ‘The Russian and European Contexts of the works of Mikhail Bakhtin and the Bakhtin Circle’, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Board of the British Academy.
1. Quoted in Frédéric Vandenberghe, *Comparing Neo-Kantians: Ernst Cassirer and Georg Simmel*, University of Manchester Department of Sociology, Occasional Paper No. 49, 1996, p. 2.
 2. I have in mind the work of, among others, Natalia Bonet-skaia, Askol'd Muratov, Brian Poole and Galin Tihanov, I am indebted to Poole and Tihanov for comments on an earlier version of this article.
 3. Notable exceptions include Steven Collins, ‘Categories, Concepts or Predicaments? Remarks on Mauss’s Use of Philosophical Terminology’, in Michael Curriethers et al., *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1985; and Terry F. Godlove, ‘Is Space a Concept? Kant, Durkheim and French Neo-Kantianism’, *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 32, no. 4, 1996, pp. 441–55.
 4. *Hegel Contra Sociology*, Athlone, London, 1981; *Dialectic of Nihilism: Post-Structuralism and Law*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1984.
 5. Christopher Norris anticipated ‘widespread discussion among critics, philosophers and ... theorists of a post-structuralist persuasion’ arising from Rose’s 1984 book on poststructuralism and law, but this does not appear to have materialized. Christopher Norris, *Deconstruction and the Interests of Theory*, Pinter Publishers, London, 1988, p. 245.
 6. The neo-Hegelian structure of Cassirer’s central work was first advanced by Donald Verene in ‘Kant, Hegel and Symbol: the Origins of the Philosophy of Symbolic Forms’ (*Journal of the History of Ideas* 30, 1969, pp. 33–46), and was elaborated in J.M. Krois, *Cassirer: Symbolic Forms and History*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1987.
 7. V.D. Duvakin, *Besedy s M.M. Bakhtinym*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1996, pp. 39–41.
 8. Roy Bhaskar, *Plato etc.*, Verso, London, 1994, pp. 199–200.
 9. Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith, Tavistock, London, 1973, pp. 170–73. Compare Bakhtin’s account of medicine, largely borrowed from Cassirer without reference, in *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1984, pp. 359 ff. On Bakhtin’s unattributed borrowing from Cassirer here, see Brian Poole, ‘Bakhtin and Cassirer: The Philosophical Origins of Bakhtin’s Carnival Messianism’, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 97, no. 3/4, 1998, pp. 537–78.
 10. ‘Roman vospitaniia i ego znachenie v istorii realizma’, *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*, *Iskusstvo*, Moscow, 1979, pp. 118–236, 224; ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism’, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1986, pp. 10–59, 43.
 11. Quoted in Jürgen Habermas, ‘The German Idealism of the Jewish Philosophers’, *Philosophical–Political Profiles*, trans. F.G. Lawrence, Heinemann, London, 1983, pp. 21–43, 26. See also Andrea Poma, *The Critical Philosophy of Hermann Cohen*, trans. J. Denton, State University of New York Press, New York, 1997, p. 89.
 12. Paul Natorp, ‘On the Objective and Subjective Grounding of Knowledge’, trans. D. Kolb, *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol. 12, no. 3, 1981, pp. 252–3. The most sustained examination of Husserl’s debt to Natorp is Iso Kern, *Husserl und Kant: Eine Untersuchung über Husserls Verhältnis zu Kant und zum Neukantianismus*, Martinus Nijhoff: The Hague, 1964, pp. 321 ff. Derrida elides the continuities between Husserl, Heidegger and neo-Kantianism in his essay on Cohen’s ‘Deutschtum und Judentum’, ‘Kant, the Jew, the German’, *New Literary History*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1991, p. 41. Derrida here shows little familiarity with Cohen’s earlier, more influential works.
 13. K.S. Bakradze, *Ocherk po istorii noveishei sovremennoi burzhoiznoi filosofii*, Sabchota sakartvelo, Tblisi, 1960, p. 251.
 14. Heidegger succeeded Cohen in his chair in philosophy at Marburg. Commenting on the famous 1929 Davos disputation between Heidegger and Cassirer, Franz Rosenzweig argued that the former furthered the spirit of Cohen’s philosophy more than did Cassirer. On this, see Gillian Rose, *Judaism and Modernity*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1993, p. 112; and Peter Eli Gordon, ‘Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Translation, Ontology and the Anxiety of Affiliation’, *New German Critique* 77, 1999, pp. 114–16. Rose also notes how, ‘like Cohen, Heidegger begins by expounding time as the productive unity and difference internal to Kant’s transcendental exposition of experience’ (*Dialectic of Nihilism*, p. 70).
 15. Vincent Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, trans. L. Scott-Fox and J.M. Harding, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1980, p. 19.
 16. On this, see Michael Dummett, ‘Objectivity and Reality: Lotze and Frege’, in *Frege and Other Philosophers*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1991, pp. 97–125.
 17. Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism*, Methuen, London, 1983, p. 171. On this aspect of Brunschvicg’s work see S.I.M. Du Plessis, *The Compatibility of Science and Philosophy in France 1840–1940*, Balkema, Cape Town, 1972, pp. 45–6 and 192–208.
 18. Compare Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, vol. 1: Language*, trans. R. Mannheim, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1955, pp. 105 ff.
 19. Rose, *Dialectic of Nihilism*, pp. 113–14.
 20. *Ibid.*, 151.
 21. Descombes, *Modern French Philosophy*, pp. 144, 148.
 22. Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. F. Lawrence, Polity Press: Cambridge, 1987, pp. 167, 182.
 23. ‘Lichnoe delo V.N. Voloshinova’, *Dialog Karnaval Khronotop* 2, 1995, pp. 87–8.
 24. M.M. Bakhtin, *Raboty 1920-kh godov*, Next, Kiev, 1994, p. 12; *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, trans. V. Liapunov, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1993, p. 2.
 25. ‘“Geist” and “Life”’, in Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, vol. 4: The Metaphysics of Symbolic Forms*, trans. J.M. Krois, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1996, pp. 3–33, 16–17.
 26. M.M. Bakhtin, ‘1961 god. zametki’, *Sobranie sochinenii V, Russkie slovari*, Moscow, 1996, pp. 329–60, 330–31.
 27. See M.M. Bakhtin, ‘Slovo v romane’, in *Voprosy lit-*

- eratury i estetiki, Khudozhestvennaia literatura, Moscow, 1975, pp. 72–233, 200; ‘Discourse in the Novel’, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1981, pp. 259–422, 388. The jurisprudential heritage is especially clear in the work of the Circle’s other literary theorist Lev Pumpianskii: ‘In the heroic novel there is an uninterrupted passing of judgement (*sud*) on the character. ... The method [of the heroic novel] is the trial of the powers of contending sides in a well-considered social court through the construction of the walk of life, scenes of a life, accompanied by the uninterrupted interpretation of the author’ (L.V. Pumpianskii ‘Romany Turgeneva i roman “Nakanune”’: istoriko-literaturnyi ocherk’, in I.S. Turgenev, *Sochineniia* VI, Moskva–Leningrad, 1929, pp. 9–26, 9, 11).
28. Bakhtin, ‘1961 god. zametki’, pp. 333, 337. Note also Voloshinov’s affirmative comments on the “‘juridical’ theory of tragedy’ developed in Cohen’s *Ästhetik des Reinen Gefühls* in ‘Slovo v zhizni i slovo v poezii’, in V.N. Voloshinov, *Filosofia i sotsiologiia gumanitarnykh nauk*, Asta, St. Petersburg, 1995, pp. 59–86, 82; English translation, ‘Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry’, in Ann Shukman, ed., *Bakhtin School Papers, Russian Poetics in Translation* 10, 1983, pp. 5–29, 25.
 29. Hermann Cohen, *Ethik des reinen Willens*, Georg Olms Verlag, Hildesheim and New York, 1981, p. 309.
 30. On Stalin’s *Marxism and Questions of Linguistics*, see V.M. Alpatov, ‘What is Marxism in Linguistics’, in Craig Brandist and Galin Tihanov, eds, *Materializing Bakhtin: The Bakhtin Circle and Social Theory*, Macmillan: London, 1999, pp. 173–93.
 31. *Sobranie*, p. 251.
 32. Matvei Kagan, ‘German Kogen (4 iulia 1842–4 aprilia 1918)’, *Nauchnie izvestiia sbornik vtoroi*, R.S.F.S.R. Akademicheskii tsentr narkomprosa, Moscow, 1922, pp. 110–124, 114.
 33. Quoted in Collins, ‘Categories, Concepts or Predicaments?’, p. 61.
 34. *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Spivak, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1976, p. 27.
 35. Rose, *Dialectic of Nihilism*, p. 150. Husserl’s 1936 essay is reproduced in Thomas Luckmann, ed., *Phenomenology and Sociology*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1978, pp. 42–70. Derrida’s first major published work was his *L’Origine de la géométrie de Husserl, Traduction et Introduction*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1962; English translation *Edmund Husserl’s Origin of Geometry: An Introduction*, trans. J.P. Leavey, Hays, Stonybrook, 1978.
 36. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 27.
 37. *Ibid.*, pp. 60–61.
 38. *Sobranie*, p. 251.
 39. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 62.
 40. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, pp. 165–6.
 41. Quoted in Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism*, p. 188.
 42. ‘Slovo v romane’, p. 92; ‘Discourse in the Novel’, p. 278.
 43. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, Tavistock, London, 1970, pp. xx–xxi.
 44. Voloshinov, *Filosofia i sotsiologiia gumanitarnykh nauk*, pp. 308–10; *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. L. Matejka and I.R. Titunik, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA, pp. 91–3. On this, see Galin Tihanov, ‘Voloshinov, Ideology and Language: The Birth of Marxist Sociology from the Spirit of *Lebensphilosophie*’, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, vol. 97, no. 3/4, 1998, pp. 599–621.
 45. M.M. Bakhtin, ‘Problema rechevykh zhanrov’, in *Sobranie*, pp. 159–206, 161; ‘The Problem of Speech Genres’, in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, pp. 60–102, 62.
 46. On this, see especially Bakhtin’s ‘Epos i roman’, *Vo-prosy*, pp. 447–83, 466; ‘Epic and Novel’, *The Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 3–40, 23.
 47. Rose, *Dialectic of Nihilism*, p. 185.
 48. Foucault, *The Order of Things*, pp. xxi–xxii.
 49. Though the term was allegedly taken from biology, one of the main sources of this idea was Cassirer’s neo-Kantian writing on ‘intuitive expression’ in language in volume 1 of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, pp. 198 ff., and ‘myth as a form of intuition’ and ‘life form’ in volume 2 on *Mythical Thought* (trans. R. Manheim, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1955).
 50. Rose, *Dialectic of Nihilism*, pp. 187 ff.
 51. Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, p. 276.
 52. See Francis Mulhern, ‘The Politics of Cultural Studies’, *Monthly Review*, vol. 47, no. 5, 1995, pp. 31–40.



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