Book Section:

II.8 Bakhtin, Bakhtin Circles and the (Re)Discovery of Bakhtin in the West

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Bakhtin Circles

The term 'Bakhtin Circle' is a designation retrospectively applied to an informal group of young scholars who met in the Soviet cities of Nevel (a town now in the Pskov region of Russia, 1918–1920), Vitebsk (a city now in the Republic of Belarus, 1920–1924) and Leningrad (now St. Petersburg, 1924–1929). The name derives from the Russian philosopher and literary theorist Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895–1975), who attended the meetings, while the idea of the 'Circle' (*krug*, or small circle, *kruzhok*) derives from the tradition of progressively-minded, literary discussion groups that appeared in the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century. Perhaps the most famous such group was the so-called 'Petrushevskii Circle', a group established to discuss philosophy and literature prohibited by the Imperial government of Nicholas I, by the utopian socialist Mikhail Petrushevskii. This group at certain times involved the writers Fedor Dostoevskii and Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, and the poets Aleksei Pleshcheev, Apollon Maikov, and Taras Shevchenko, some of whom suffered arrest and exile to Siberia. The term is therefore associated with the idea of dissidence, and has some historical purchase since a number of members of the 'Bakhtin Circle' were arrested at the time of the consolidation of the Stalin regime in 1928, though for involvement in another group, the quasi-Masonic sect *Voskresen'e* (the Resurrection). The 'Bakhtin Circle' designation is problematic, however, because Bakhtin did not establish or lead the group, the membership of which remained informal and fluid, and the ideas they discussed were not prohibited at the time. Members of the group were involved in a number of other formal and informal groups that did not involve Bakhtin, and it is unclear whether the so-called 'Bakhtin Circle' was regarded by most of them as the main arena in which they developed their ideas. In the case of Bakhtin, whose poor health prevented him from holding down a permanent job throughout much of the decade, however, it is more likely that the group played a more central role in his intellectual development. The designation is neither neutral nor uncontroversial, therefore, and needs to be treated with caution, though there does not appear to be a more appropriate alternative available (see Brandist et al. 2004, 251–75).

1 The Nevel Circle

There is some evidence that at least some of the group perceived their work to have sociocultural, if not necessarily political significance, and that some were engaged in early post-Revolutionary activities to democratise the spheres of edu-

cation and culture. Bakhtin himself worked as a school teacher in Nevel, during which time he began attending a 'Kant seminar' that had been established by the Jewish philosopher Matvei Isaevich Kagan (1889–1937) on his return, under the terms of the Brest-Litovsk peace agreement between Russia and Germany, from studies in Leipzig, Berlin and Marburg. This 'seminar', which was attended by Kagan, Bakhtin, the pianist Mariia Veniaminovna Iudina (1899–1970), and some young intellectuals working on literature, philosophy and music, Lev Vasilievich Pumpianskii (1891–1940), Valentin Nikolaevich Voloshinov (1895–1936) and Boris Aleksandrovich Zubakin (1894–1938), met to discuss philosophical matters with a focus on neo-Kantianism. This was the first group that was retrospectively designated the 'Bakhtin Circle'. Previous to this (1916–1918) Bakhtin, his brother Nikolai, who completed a classical education in St. Petersburg, and Pumpianskii attended meetings of the Religious-Philosophical Society and the so-called 'Omphalos Circle' in St. Petersburg. There is, however, no evidence that Bakhtin completed any formal higher educational courses at this time. It seems it was Kagan, the oldest member of the group and the person who had completed a formal education in German universities under some of the leading academic philosophers of the time, who was the dominant figure in the Nevel Circle, which discussed a range of issues and participated in some public debates and lectures. Kagan and Pumpianskii lectured on topics that would soon appear in their early publications, including "Filosofskaia sistema Germana Kogena" (1919, "Herman Cohen's Philosophical System"), "Kak vozmozhna istoriia?" (1919, publ. 1921, "How is History Possible?", 2004) and "O lichnosti v sotsiologii" (1918–1919, "The Personality in Sociology") (Kagan), "Dostoevskii kak tragicheskii poet" (1919, "Dostoevsky as a Tragic Poet"), Gogol's *Revizor* (1836, *Government Inspector*) and the poetry of Pushkin (Pumpianskii). Bakhtin participated in public discussions about Russian culture (with Kagan) and 'God and Socialism' (with Pumpianskii). The sole publication of this time is Bakhtin's very brief piece "Iskusstvo i otvetstvennost'" ("Art and Answerability") in the Nevel newspaper *Den' Iskusstva* (*The Day of Art*) in September 1918 (Kagan 1992).

Vitalii Makhlin (1995) and Nikolai Nikolaev (2004) have argued the Nevel Circle should be considered a distinctive school of Russian philosophy, which he calls the Nevel School of Philosophy. It is, however, difficult to sustain such a claim on the basis of just one very brief sketch in a newspaper as the entire published output of a school of philosophy. It may feasibly be argued that for Bakhtin this Circle acted as a school of philosophy in the pedagogical sense, and that here he learned about contemporary philosophical ideas and began to emerge as an independent thinker in philosophical matters. The Nevel Circle did not last long. Bakhtin moved to Vitebsk in 1920, where he met the literary scholar Pavel Nikolaevich Medvedev (1891–1938) and Ivan Ivanovich Sollertinskii (1902–1944),

who was to become a prominent Leningrad musicologist. The same year Kagan left Nevel to take up a teaching post at the newly established university in Orel at the invitation of the Japanologist Nikolai Iosifovich Konrad (1891–1970), who was also acquainted with Bakhtin. While in Orel, Kagan wrote up and published "How is History Possible?", the only sustained piece of philosophy to be published by a member of the group before the late 1920s. The Nevel Circle now dispersed, as Pumpianskii and Iudina departed for Petrograd (soon to become Leningrad), Zubakin moved to Smolensk, and Kagan soon moved on to Moscow.

2 The Vitebsk Circle

Medvedev had become a prominent and influential figure in Vitebsk by 1920. He had been the city's last mayor in 1917 and had been rector of the new Proletarian University there, as well as serving on a committee to establish an Institute of Humanities and Arts. He helped Bakhtin secure teaching posts at the State Pedagogical Institute and at the Vitebsk Conservatoire, where he taught literature, history and the philosophy of music. Voloshinov moved to Vitebsk sometime in 1921 where he worked as deputy head of the local arts subdivision of *Narkompros*, the Commissariat of Enlightenment. At this time Vitebsk was home to a remarkable collection of avant-garde artists including Marc Zakharovich Chagall (1887–1985) and Kazimir Severinovich Malevich (1878–1935) and the public sphere was animated by intense debates about the relationship between art and life. Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov again participated in public lectures and debates on, *inter alia*, modern Russian poetry, Nietzsche's philosophy (Bakhtin), the history of Russian literature (Voloshinov), and Dostoevskii's literary legacy (Medvedev) (see Mikheeva 1988, 28–29). Medvedev reported, at various times, that over this period Bakhtin had finished a book on moral philosophy (which may be based on the incomplete manuscript now known as *K filosofii postupka* [1986, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*]), one on Dostoevskii, and one called *Èstetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* (1986, *The Aesthetics of Verbal Creation*) (see, for instance, Medvedev 1922).

Toward a Philosophy of the Act (the date of composition has not conclusively been established) was Bakhtin's early attempt to negotiate a path between the abstractions of neo-Kantian philosophy, which sought to delineate the object domains of the sciences according to 'mathematical' principles, and other trends in German philosophy such as *Lebensphilosophie* (the philosophy of life) and phenomenology, which foregrounded the concrete act of consciousness. It may be that Bakhtin's reading of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813–1855) played a role in the strategy Bakhtin adopts here (Sandler 2012). Be that as it may,

in this work of moral philosophy we find Bakhtin seeking a way of transcending the rationalism of Kantian ethics and the nullity of utilitarianism by focusing on the active, individual consciousness located between the realms of life and culture, and evaluating morally appropriate ways to act in unique situations, the 'event' (*sobytie*). This dense fragment of text has been subject to a number of different evaluations, but it is important to note that it is an early text not only in a chronological sense, but also in terms of the development of his ideas. The notion of responsibility (*otvetstvennost'*) discussed here does not have any specifically discursive features and so should not be interpreted as an early version of *dialogism*, even though there are certain continuities.

It is unclear what evidence or claims by Bakhtin that mention the other putative works mentioned by Medvedev were based upon. Most likely it refers to sections of the long, incomplete manuscript now known as *Avtor i geroi v ésteticheskoi deiatel'nosti* (*Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity*). The dating of this manuscript is uncertain, and it seems Bakhtin worked on parts of it until as late as 1927, when it was finally abandoned. The putative text on Dostoevskii may have been the relevant section of *Author and Hero*, but it is possible that it was a lost, or discarded early work that was heavily reworked in the latter part of the decade and published as *Problemy tvorchesva Dostoevskogo* (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*) in 1929. Voloshinov and Medvedev moved to Petrograd in 1922, Bakhtin joined them in May 1924.

3 The Leningrad Circle

While Bakhtin was still in Vitebsk Pumpianskii attended meetings of the Free Philosophical Association (Vol'naia filosofskaia organizatsija, Vol'fila, 1920–1922) along with prominent thinkers of the so-called 'Silver Age' like Andrei Belyi (1880–1934) and Konstantin Érberg (1871–1942) (see, especially, Belous 2005). At this time he published his short monograph *Dostoevskii i antichnost'* (1922, *Dostoevsky and Antiquity*) and worked on a book about Gogol' (Pumpianskii 2000). Iudina graduated from the Conservatoire in 1921, and Sollertinskii and Voloshinov from Petrograd University in 1924. Medvedev published work on the recently deceased poet Aleksandr Blok and worked as editor of the journal *Zapiski peredvizhnogo teatra* (*Notes of the Travelling Theatre*) until 1924. When Bakhtin arrived the fragments of the Nevel and Vitebsk Circles that were located in Leningrad began to meet together, often at the flat of the geneticist and historian of science Ivan Kanaev (1893–1984) where Bakhtin and his wife lived until 1927. The Circle was now supplemented by a number of significant scholars such as Boris

Mikhailovich Ėngel'gardt (1887–1942), then Professor of Verbal Art at the State Institute for the History of the Arts (Gosudarstvennyi institut istorii iskusstv, GIII), who had studied under a number of German neo-Kantians in 1909–1911, and who was the author of a significant study of the work of one of the founders of comparative literature Aleksandr Nikolaevich Veselovskii (Engel'gardt 1924); the poet and novelist Konstantin Konstantinovich Vaginov (1899–1934) and the Indologist Mikhail Izrailevich Tubianskii (1893–1937). In his youth Tubianskii was a follower of neo-Kantian ideas before becoming an important writer on Buddhism, editor, translator and commentator on the works of Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore and the person who established the teaching of the Bengali language at Leningrad University (see Brandist 2015). Among the more occasional attenders of meetings of the Circle was Konrad, who had met Bakhtin several years before and who was now one of the leading Japanologists in the USSR.

It was in Leningrad that the Circle became a significant arena for the development of ideas that are now regarded as 'Bakhtinian'. The members of the Circle had by now begun to mature into significant scholars in their own right, embarking on careers in important Leningrad institutions at a crucial moment. The second half of the 1920s was a time in which economic recovery and the progressive political environment led to the setting up of new research institutions and the provision of funding for projects aimed at overcoming the imperial heritage of the Russian Empire and facilitating a fundamental reconsideration of received ideas in social sciences and the humanities. New, sociologically oriented and critical approaches were taking shape in different areas ranging from the emergence of a new 'sociological poetics', the theory of language (Medvedev and Voloshinov) and the history of Russian literature (Pumpianskii) to new approaches to oriental studies (Tubianskii and Konrad) and the history of science (Kanaev). The Circle became the unofficial point of intersection of a number of institutionally embedded research projects, perhaps best represented in the form of a Venn diagram where circles of intellectuals and projects overlap. Bakhtin was the person who, owing to his infirmity depriving him of full employment, remained focused on the Circle as his main point of intellectual engagement.

4 Discussion, debate, and authorship

It appears various members would read some of their work in progress at Circle meetings, and this was then discussed by the group, in some cases leading to some reworking or amendment of the texts under preparation. It may be that by this time members of the Circle respected Bakhtin as, perhaps (though not necessar-

ily), the most philosophically accomplished member of the group and so took his comments seriously. This does not suggest members of the group were in any way under Bakhtin's leadership or regarded his pronouncements as authoritative since various members of the Circle had developed significant expertise independently of Bakhtin. Tubianskii, for instance, was already translating and preparing a collection of works by the Marburg neo-Kantian Hermann Cohen, and working on the importance of dialogue in Plato before meeting Bakhtin. This, and his subsequent training under some of the most significant specialists in oriental studies at the time, gave him a level of intellectual autonomy that is difficult not to acknowledge. Examining the fragmentary evidence of discussions within the Circle, some of Bakhtin's biographers have been led to divide the Circle into Bakhtin's 'disciples' and 'interlocutors' (Clark and Holquist 1984, 103) with Iudina, Kanaev, Voloshinov, and Medvedev in the former category and Tubianskii, Sollertinskii, Pumpianskii, and Kagan in the latter category. Traces of different perspectives in some surviving notes and jottings are the basis for these claims, but the absence of such notes does not prove others slavishly followed Bakhtin's every word.

In their biography Clark and Holquist produced the most systematic argument that Bakhtin was the real author of works published in the names of his 'disciples' Voloshinov and Medvedev. This is an argument that achieved some traction in the 1980s and 1990s. It originated in some gossip of the 1920s, for instance, in her diary the classicist Ol'ga Freidenberg (1880–1955) painted an unflattering portrait of Voloshinov, suggesting work published in his name had really been written by a certain 'Blokhin' (Braginskaia 2005). Such arguments were repeated by a number of people who had been acquainted with the elderly Bakhtin in the 1960s and 1970s. Published reminiscences about their private conversations emerged after Bakhtin's death, and although there was no opportunity to verify the accounts, biographers often took such testimony at face value. Such evidence is clearly of a low-quality, however, and the motivations of those involved are not above question. Moreover, Bakhtin declined to claim the authorship when offered the opportunity to do so, the accounts of Bakhtin's various interlocutors are often inconsistent with each other and, in any case, evidence has emerged to show that on a number of occasions Bakhtin gave false information about his biography (for an overview and evaluation see Hirschkop 1999, 111–195). Archival documents about the work of Voloshinov and Medvedev at The Institute for the Comparative History of the Literatures and Languages of the West and East (Nauchno-issledovatel'skii institut sravnitel'noi istorii literatur i iazykov Zapada i Vostoka, ILIaZV) on the other hand provide compelling evidence that the work in question emerged chiefly as part of an institutional project to lay the foundation for a new 'sociological poetics', and even some early drafts of their publications exist (Voloshinov 2004; Brandist 2008, 190–195). Arguments suggesting,

for instance, that Medvedev's works written during the period of the Leningrad Circle are of a greater significance than his previous work and that this indicates Bakhtin's covert authorship of his work remain speculative at best in the absence of substantial documentary evidence suggesting the opposite. As Iurii Medvedev (1998) has shown, Pavel Medvedev's knowledge of German art scholarship and formal theory exceeded that of Bakhtin in the 1920s and was fundamental to his one of the key 'disputed texts', the 1928 book *Formal'nyi metod v literaturovede- nii: kriticheskoe vvedeniie v sotsiologicheskuiu poėtiku* (*The Formal Method in Lit- erary Studies: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*), written as part of the ILIaZV project. It is significant that the editors of Bakhtin's *Collected Works* (Bakhtin 1997–2012) finally decided not to publish a seventh volume of works 'cov- ertly' authored by Bakhtin even though the commentaries of the early volumes made strong claims about Bakhtin's authorship and noted that such a volume was forthcoming.

5   Bakhtin's work 1924–1927

Until around 1927 Bakhtin continued to labour away on his philosophy of verbal art, drawing chiefly on neo-Kantian and phenomenological sources. His early work on moral philosophy seems to have been abandoned around the time of his move to Leningrad. Bakhtin prepared one article on "Problema formy, soderzha- niia i materiala v slovesnom khudozhestvennom tvorchestve" ("The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art") for publication in 1924, but the journal was closed and the article did not appear until after Bakhtin's death. Here Bakhtin drew heavily on the German neo-Kantian philosopher Broder Christiansen's *Phi- losophie der Kunst* (1909, *Philosophy of Art*) to develop a critique of positions then being developed by Russian formalists (see Matejka 1996). In his most sustained, but incomplete work of the 1924–1927 period, *Author and Hero*, Bakhtin argues that the key to a successful piece of narrative literature is an author's relationship to his or her hero that gives the latter's consciousness full validity while com- pleting the image of the hero from without. Author-hero relations in narrative literature become analogous to those between God and man in Marburg School neo-Kantianism. Here it is the idea of a monotheistic God, who views all and passes judgement, which is the fundamental factor in guiding ethical behaviour. Rather than remaining within the abstract realm of Marburgers' 'consciousness in general', however, Bakhtin's account is rendered more concrete through his incorporation of the phenomenological notion of intentional consciousness. The aesthetically valid subject in verbal art now becomes the intentional object of

the act of authorship. The specific modality of this act is modeled on Max Scheler's work on forms of sympathy from 1913 (*Wesen und Form der Sympathie, The Nature of Sympathy*) according to which ethical interaction requires the conditional merging of the self and other before a return to one's own unique position in the world (see Poole 2001). In Bakhtin's inventive reworking, concrete acts of authorship can be analyzed according to the modes of interaction they embody, especially whether the author (a) gives sufficient autonomy to the hero who exists in the 'open event of being' and (b) fulfills the authorial responsibility to bestow completeness and pass judgment on the hero. Dostoevskii is found wanting in the second phase of 'aesthetic activity', unable finally to relinquish the hero's perspective and to bestow closure.

6 Medvedev and Voloshinov 1924–1930

Medvedev's work in the period critically explored the state of Soviet literary scholarship in both its formalist and sociological forms and culminated with the monograph *Formal'nyi metod v literaturovedenii* (1928, *The Formal Method in Literary Studies*). While often considered as a critique of Russian formalism, the book is actually best summarized by its subtitle, which places it firmly within the project on sociological poetics at ILIaZV. Here Medvedev aimed to delineate a new form of sociological poetics that considered the social conditioning of literature not as an extrinsic influence, but as part of the very fabric of artistic literature itself. Drawing on neo-Kantianism, phenomenology, Marxism, nascent comparative literature (especially Veselovskii) and contemporary German art scholarship, Medvedev argues that the formal characteristics of a work should be considered as evidence of the artist's orientation within the social world rather than as phenomena that can be defined apart from the thematic content of the work. While posing a range of important questions, Russian formalists are shown to be unable to propose an adequate framework to understand the specificity of artistic form, especially in comparison to recent discussions of form in German art scholarship and literary studies where movements in artistic form are viewed as embodiments of a 'form-shaping ideology'. Literary scholarship therefore takes its place as one of the 'sciences of ideology', examining the various ways ideological material is incorporated into and reprocessed in literature. Such material acquires an aesthetic validity, and in the process important and hitherto hidden aspects of social reality come into focus. Moreover, literature takes its material not only from other clearly defined spheres of ideology, but from ideologies that are in the process of formation as they emerge from lived experience.

This marked an important step forward in the work of the 'Bakhtin Circle', for while consideration of relations between art and life, and the intentionality of authorship, had been aspects of Bakhtin's early work, here a fully formed sociological perspective begins to emerge that has the capacity to subsume those philosophical concerns within literary and social analysis. Crucial in this regard was Medvedev's orientation within the ILIaZV project on sociological poetics and his expertise in German art scholarship. The methodological individualism of Bakhtin's early work is quite different to the sociological and generic considerations emerging in Medvedev's study, and these were to have a considerable influence on Bakhtin's own development.

Voloshinov's work of the period was another crucial development, for it is here that questions of language are first posed systematically. A short, critical monograph about Freudianism published in 1927 already showed Voloshinov's insistence that the psyche needs to be understood as socially integrated from the emergence of the human being as such. It was in the 1926 essay "Slovo v zhizni i slovo v poėzii" ("The Word in Life and the Word in Poetry") that Voloshinov's importance as a thinker first appears, however. Drawing heavily on Anton Marty's (1847–1914) psychology of language (1908) and Karl Bühler's (1879–1963) theory of the speech act (1922), Voloshinov shows how lexical units must be understood as part of a complex whole (a *Gestalt*), that is embedded in an utterance in which speaker, hearer and object or state of affairs are all present (see Brandist 2004). The meaning of a word uttered in 'life', a unique moment of social interaction, must actively be discerned by the hearer according to its embeddedness in a given linguistic context and a shared social space. The meaning of a word within poetry, on the other hand, must be defined only from the linguistic context.

Voloshinov's work culminated in the monograph *Marksizm i filosofiia iazyka: Osnovnye problemy sotsiologicheskogo metoda v nauke o iazyke* (*Marxism and the Philosophy of Language: Fundamental Problems of the Sociological Method in the Science of Language*, hereafter *MPL*, 1929). In this remarkable book, Voloshinov set Marty's and Bühler's accounts of language in use and meaning-making as verbal interaction within a sociological framework, so that configurations of speaker, hearer and objects or states of affairs are set within a class divided society. Each concrete utterance thus registers socio-specific orientations on the extra-discursive world, which is 'refracted' in verbal material. Moreover, the utterance registers social relationships, so that structures of social hierarchy and conflict leave traces in the style. Voloshinov also notes how the use of the same sign system by different social classes results in a struggle over the meaning of crucial terms such as 'freedom' or 'democracy', with the ruling class trying to present its own perspective as both authoritative and neutral. At times of revolutionary unrest, however, this struggle over different social accents, the 'inner dialectic'

of the sign, comes out into the open. Such features of language require a fully sociological analysis, and this places the dominant linguistic paradigms of the time, represented by Benedetto Croce (1866–1952) and Karl Vossler's (1872–1949) romantic individualism and Ferdinand de Saussure's (1857–1913) structuralism inadequately. There are questions about the accuracy of Voloshinov's characterization of the ideas of Vossler and Saussure, but his emerging theory of language nevertheless has important features at odds with both approaches.

The final part of Voloshinov's book discusses modes of social relations between narrative and characters' voices in prose texts, with particular focus on what philologists now call 'free indirect discourse'. This is closely related to the collective project on sociological poetics at ILIaZV in which Voloshinov was engaged, and of which *MPL* was a product. These and other important parts of *MPL* actually began as 'An Essay in Sociological Poetics' at ILIaZV in 1925–1926 (see Brandist 2008, 190–195).

7 Bakhtin's 1929 book on Dostoevskii

It seems clear that Bakhtin's work at the end of the decade was profoundly affected by his friends' work on sociological poetics. The book on the philosophy of authorship, which Bakhtin had labored over for a number of years finally joined the list of his aborted projects, and he recast his approach according to sociological, discursive and literary-historical concerns. As a result, with the help of his friends Bakhtin was finally able to publish a monograph, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*, in the ILIaZV series resulting from the collective project on sociological poetics. While much of the earlier philosophical perspective on author-hero relations here remains implicit, it has radically been overwritten by the sociological and linguistic concerns pioneered by Voloshinov and Medvedev. As a result, by 1929:

– Bakhtin overlays his early theory of intersubjectivity with an account of discursive interaction so that the 'event' (*sobytie*) becomes the utterance and dialogue becomes the discursive embodiment of intersubjective interaction;
– Bakhtin views literature as a specific form of social discourse, which incorporates and reflects upon other social discourses in their process of becoming.

Along with this shift, Bakhtin's perspective on Dostoevskii has been revised, so that the novelist's inability to complete and 'finalise' the image of the hero is now regarded not as a failing, but as a positive intervention in a particular social and historical situation. Living in a bluntly hierarchical society and surrounded by people who seek to categorise him or her once and for all, the Dostoevskian

hero seeks to assert his or her own right to be a self-defining subject. All this is now considered as verbal relations in the text embodying social relationships. Dostoevskii's unwillingness to participate in the 'monologic' objectification of his heroes results in the emergence of a new, 'polyphonic novel' in which neither the narrative nor authorial voice can claim precedence over that of the hero. This is the beginning of Bakhtin's theoretical reflection on dialogue and on the novel as a genre, though at this stage any historical considerations remain subordinated to an essentially synchronic analysis of Dostoevskii's authorial practice.

8 History and geography

Bakhtin's most important work is probably his essays on the history of the European novel in the 1930s. This takes us beyond the period of the 'Bakhtin Circle', but the foundations of this conception were nevertheless laid in this period. As are detailed in the chapter on ILIaZV within this volume, there were important projects being pursued at that institute in the 1920s, about which Bakhtin most probably learned from his friends working there. The work of people such as Izrail' Frank-Kamenetskii (1880–1937), Ol'ga Freidenberg (1890–1955) and Viktor Zhirmunskii (1891–1971) were to prove important influences on Bakhtin's work of the 1930s, even though these figures may not have been acquainted with Bakhtin personally (Tihanov 2000; Brandist 2016). The importance of semantic palaeontology in Bakhtin's work on realism, carnival and related matters appears substantial. In addition, the work of Lev Iakubinskii (1892–1945), head of the linguistic section at ILIaZV on the rise of the Russian national language appears to be a significant influence on Bakhtin's account of the rise of the socially stratified national language, *raznorechie* (heteroglossia) (see Brandist and Lähteenmäki 2010). Yet there were other important influences from within the 'Bakhtin Circle' itself, the importance of which was not apparent in Bakhtin's work of the late 1920s. Here I will mention only two: Tubianskii and Konrad.

As is discussed in the chapter on "Sociological and Marxist Literary Theory in Colonial Context, Hegemony", these figures were strongly opposed to the privileging of European literature and culture and encouraged the development of categories that would apply to world culture as a whole. Tubianskii (1990 [1927]) championed the philosophical sophistication of classical Buddhism and traced the emergence of ideas akin both to neo-Kantian and Marxism in the work of Tagore. Konrad (1927) proposed a sociological history of Japanese literature in which he drew strong parallels between forms of Japanese prose genres and the nomenclature of western literary studies, highlighting, *inter alia*, the importance

of the comic and the grotesque in the rise of modern culture and a realistic portrayal of the world. In his work of the 1930s we see Bakhtin developing an account of literary history that has much in common with these perspectives. There is little doubt that there are shared sources here, but discussion within the Circle undoubtedly affected patterns of interpretation and application.

These concerns inevitably came to the fore when, in the 1930s and 1940s, Bakhtin was giving lectures and working on a dissertation at the Institute of World Literature in Moscow. Subsequently, in the 1950s, Bakhtin was to work as a Professor of World Literature at the Mordvinia Pedagogical Institute in Saransk. Though focused on the European novel, Bakhtin never makes any claims about the superiority of European literature and culture, and never seeks to follow lines of transmission of literary forms from one society to another. Instead, we have a correlation of certain forms of society and literary genres that may be applied regardless of kinship between language groups or direct contact between cultures. Such approaches avoid narrowly Eurocentric perspectives, but unless careful attention is paid to institutional specificities one may be tempted to making some rather superficial and formalistic correlations.

The arrest of some members of the Circle in 1928, and Bakhtin's consequent move into internal exile in Kazakhstan the following year effectively ended the Circle as an informal discussion circle. Operating in the much more restrictive environment of Stalin's USSR, it was difficult for many members to publish work of a similar scope or quality for some time, and some of them suffered premature deaths either through direct repression (Medvedev and Tubianskii) or illness (Voloshinov and Kagan). For this reason, some of Bakhtin's most important work remained unpublished until his death in 1975, and when it was finally published the intellectual environment from which it emerged had been obscured. Reconstructing the dialogues to which these works were contributions has been a task that remains unfinished.

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