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Bakhtinian Bildung and the Educational Process: Some Historical Considerations

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Bakhtinian *Bildung* and the Educational Process: Some Historical Considerations.

The work of the Bakhtin Circle has recently received considerable attention and has found many applications among educational theorists. Reception of this kind has been particularly productive in Brazil, where scholars working in applied linguistics have found much in the work of Voloshinov and Bakhtin to help them discuss ways in which educational practice may be adapted to the needs of less privileged parts of society. Ideas about dialogue and speech genres have proved particularly productive in this area, and it is undeniable that some significant work is taking place. The appearance of White and Peters (2011) has shown the productivity of Bakhtinian categories in educational studies more broadly, and has tried to employ the critical force of the ideas by framing educational practice with a 'dialogical imperative'. Now an entire journal of *Dialogic Pedagogy* has been launched, testifying to the steady flow of contributions to the field. This article takes a step back from the application of ideas to consider the place of the educational process within Bakhtin's own work, and to set some of his perspectives within a historical framework. This, I believe, allows us better to perceive the potentialities and limitations of the ideas, illuminating the areas that they allow us to explore and some of the aspects that need to be overcome to facilitate progress.

Bakhtin's most significant reflections on the question of education deal not with institutionally positioned pedagogy as such, but with the more general process of personal and cultural maturation. The Russian terms for education, *vospitanie* and *obrazovanie*, literally upbringing and formation, are employed by Bakhtin within a more general discussion of individual and cultural development that is generally goes under the German term *Bildung*. This describes a set of synchronous unifications and harmonisations: the mind and heart of the individual and the personal identity of the individual with the broader society. There is an important Hegelian background to these works. In Hegel's work *Bildung* is not so much a theory, but an operative concept, at different times meaning 'the process through which the uncultivated individual can reach the standpoint of contemporary science', the history of the world as the 'formative cultivation of consciousness' (*Bildungsgeschichte*), and as the characteristic of emerging modernity (Markus, 1986, p.115). The process of personal growth is, therefore, synchronous with the unfolding of society from its primitive, natural state to a fully developed and articulated whole in which individuals are integrated as critical and active subjects without any detriment to their specificity. This involves a movement from mute to full articulate identity, from a mere 'natural consciousness', through the vale of alienation to the reunified and developed self. Bakhtin describes this experience in

a distinctly Hegelian fashion, writing about how the organic world becomes replaced by and 'abstract world', in which 'people are out of contact with each other, egotistically enclosed and greedily practical' (2012 [1939], p. 480), which needs to be overcome at a higher level. For Hegel, the movement beyond the vale of alienation involves a general process of acculturation in which the individual becomes able to comprehend the thought and standpoint of others, broadens his or her horizons, internalises what originally appeared alien, cultivates the imagination, engages in intellectual labour, develops and realizes his or her own abilities. Yes the process of *Bildung* is more than the individual acquiring what is at hand, but simultaneously the universal spirit achieving self-consciousness. This dialectic between the individual and culture is precisely what Bakhtin sees being achieved in and through the rise of the novel.

The educational-institutional understanding of *Bildung* came via Wilhelm von Humboldt, who viewed *Bildung* as a process of cultivation, so that the individual cultivates him or herself 'within the realisation of humanity's development as a whole' (Underhill, 2009, p. 66). Foundational to Humboldt's programme was the study of ancient Greece, which had an unmatched linguistic 'purity' and fostered a harmonious and unified personality (see Ashmore, 2006, p. 21).[1] The Hellenic model also had a more directly political consideration. As Stefan Arvidsson puts it, Humboldt believed that through the cultivation of 'Greek' virtues 'the German bourgeoisie could lead the German states away from feudal power- and life-systems without being involved in bloody and plebeian experiments of the type that followed the French Revolution' (Arvidsson, 2006, p. 50). The Humboldtian education system would thereby inoculate public officials against cowardly conservatism and rash insanity. However, Humboldtian *Bildung* still retains a Hegelian resonance that goes beyond the usual sense of 'education': it remains a process of free and intensive interaction between the individual and the world. Thus, Humboldt regarded 'a successful process of *Bildung*' to be 'a permanent enrichment of the individual through her continuous efforts to acquire as much as possible of the world'. Crucial here, however, is that as for Hegel, *Bildung* for Humboldt meant overcoming the mere accumulation of single things, and for each thing to be assimilated as part of a unity. This relation between part and whole permeates Bakhtin's work. The fragmentation of the cognised world which needed to be transcended was, for Bakhtin, the result of the differentiation and mechanisation of labour, 'where objects are separated from the labour that produced them' (2012 [1939], p. 480). The new 'great world

[1] On the wider intellectual context see Kaiwar (2003).

needs to be assembled on a new basis, made native (*rodnoi*), humanised' (2012 [1939], p. 480). In the new, capitalist world, Bakhtin argues, 'the person must educate (*vospitat'*) or re-educate himself in this large and alien world, he must make it his own (*osvoit'*), make it kindred (*orodnit'*)' (2012 [1939], p. 481). For Bakhtin, as for Humboldt, 'to flee the dispersed and confusing multiplicity of the world, one is led to seek allness ["*Allheit*"]', and 'this allness of all things is the only subject towards which the process of *Bildung* must be directed' (Humboldt, 1980, p. 237-38). When either thinker speaks of the 'world' that is to be acquired, this refers not simply to nature, but to something more all-encompassing: the noumenal realm of Kant's 'thing in itself'. This is something towards which all particular languages and cultures are directed, but no one of which is ever adequate to grasp in its entirety.

From Herder, Humboldt and his followers Bakhtin took the idea that *Bildung* is specifically linked to language as worldview. As Humboldt had originally put it, 'every language contains the whole conceptual fabric and mode of presentation of a portion of mankind' (Humboldt, 1999 [1836], p. 60). No single language can grasp the world in its entirety, but each approaches the world in its own unique way. Language is at once *energeia* and *ergon*, formative activity and product of such activity, 'subjective activity fashions [*bildet*] the object in thought', forming concepts [*Bildung des Begriffs*] which become embedded in the collective memory as speech, and are handed down from generation to generation as culture (Humboldt, 1999 [1836], p. 56). This process was generally spontaneous and lacked self-conscious reflection. Basing his ideas on the presuppositions of German Romanticism, Humboldt argued that it was only through the nation that the world as a whole could be approached. Each nation allegedly develops its own language and culture and so develops its own collective psychology, but while this *Völkerpsychologie* was indispensable, it was only a precursor to a higher stage in the 'mental development of the human species'. To move from this spontaneous process of concept and language formation to *Bildung* as a self-conscious process of education, formation and cultivation requires one brings together *and translates between* as many perspectives and articulations as possible, enabling the transcendence of particular and context-bound horizons embodied in particular languages, and for universal meanings to be grasped.[2] This lies behind Humboldt's championing of the comparative study of languages as a crucial dimension of *Bildung*. Subsequently comparative philology was heralded as a means to free thought from what the Max Müller called the 'disease of

[2] For a trenchant discussion of this aspect of Humboldt's work see Stojanov (2012).

language', through which the original meanings of metaphors and images had been forgotten and had led humanity into superstition. Philology thus carried out a scientific critique of the mythical forms that had ensnared thought, but in doing so it demonstrated the 'presence of the divine scattered through nature' and could ultimately 'reveal Christianity as the unconscious goal of all humanity' (Harpham, 2009, p. 45). Such reflections were immediately entangled with the ideological dichotomy of Aryans or Indo-Europeans and Semites that permeated philology of the time.

The sociologisation of philology

In Russia at the beginning of the twentieth century the post-Humboldian *Völkerpsychologie* was very influential, but the assumed link between nation, language and worldview began to come apart. Perhaps the most significant sign of this was Jan Baudouin de Courtenay's 1904 essay 'Language and Languages' in which the social stratification of the national language, and the various social functions languages play in society was foregrounded. '[L]anguage, or speech, reflects various worldviews and moods of both individuals and whole groups of people', Baudouin argued, and these were clearly not limited to nations (Boduen de Kurtene, 1963 [1904], p. 79). Unfortunately, however, Baudouin took the *völkerpsychologische* notion of nation as the prototype for all social groups. After the Revolution, however, the psychologistic basis of such ideas was displaced by institutional stratification and irreducible forms of social interaction were highlighted (Brandist, 2006). By the time Bakhtin began to recast his early phenomenology of relations between author and hero in discursive terms at the end of the 1920s, the sociologisation of the Humboldtian view of language as worldview was commonplace in Soviet linguistic thought (Brandist and Lähteenmäki, 2010). To take just one example, in her 1926 book *Language and Society*, Rozalia Shor argued that 'if language is a social phenomenon, if it is the necessary precondition and tool of social intercourse, if the environment within which and through which language is maintained and passed on is social environment, then it is obvious that any kind of social differentiation must find itself reflected in linguistic differentiation' (Shor, 1926, p. 100). By the mid 1930s the relationship between the national and social linguistic forms were being discussed with considerable historical specificity and theoretical insight. One of the most prominent contributions was Viktor Zhirmunskii's 1936 *National Language and Social Dialects*:

> Alongside the language of the ruling classes, which is the ruling language of a given society, there are other social dialects; various peasant dialects, colloquial speech of the

> middle class, the dialectally coloured language of workers. On the whole, the characteristic feature of the linguistic development of capitalist society is its essential diglossia [*dvuiazychie*]: the unitary language of the ruling class (the 'common', 'national', 'literary' language – the terminology is insufficiently settled) is in contrast with the territorially scattered dialects of subordinate social groups. (Zhirmunskii, 1936, p.6)

Soviet linguists had clearly made considerable advances in expunging the Romantic and psychologistic elements of the Humboldtian conception of language, but most retained the identity of language and worldview, such that social dialects and socially coloured forms of language use manifest traces of the social worldview of the speaker. The recently published version of one of Bakhtin's most important essays, '*Slovo v romane*' (2012 [1936]), which shows considerable differences from that which formed the basis of the English translation ('Discourse in the Novel'), makes the connections between Bakhtin's own conception of *raznorechie* (heteroglossia) and Zhirmunskii's book now quite explicit (Bocharov, 2012, p. 728).

In Bakhtin's analysis, however, the historical specificity of the relationship between social structure and linguistic stratification is significantly weakened, with historical developments becoming mere preconditions for discursive interaction. 'Commercial capitalism and the centralising energy of absolutism' brings about a new 'interaction and interanimation of languages' (2012 [1936], p. 170) that makes possible a shift from the spontaneous formation of socio-specific worldviews to a self-conscious mediation between different languages and so the transcendence of the context-bound horizons embodied in particular languages. This process of *Bildung* takes place in and through the rise of the 'second stylistic line' of the novel in which, Bakhtin argues, the essence of the novel finally appears. The novel now reflects upon the 'interaction and interanimation of languages' and perspectives. The socially stratified national language, heteroglossia [*raznorechie*], now begins a transition from:

> a state of 'being in itself' (when languages do not acknowledge each other or are capable of ignoring each other) to a state of 'being for itself' (when heteroglot languages mutually reveal each other's presence and begin to function as dialogising backgrounds). Languages of heteroglossia, like mirrors that face each other, each reflecting in its own way a little piece, a little corner of the world, force us to guess at or grasp for a world behind their mutually reflecting aspects that is broader, more

> multi-levelled, containing more and varied horizons than would be available to a single language or a single mirror. (2012 [1936], p. 170)

While the old ruling class only encountered 'peripheral elements of other classes', social groups that were reaching a state of self-consciousness and rising to dominance 'came into contact with, clashed with, and mingled with elements of other groups more closely and essentially'. These groups, which comprised the rising bourgeoisie, 'grasped the process of becoming [*stanovlenie*] most powerfully and essentially', and it was among these groups that the novel reached its most essential form (2012 [1936], p. 170).

For Bakhtin in the mid-1930s, therefore, the novel combines some essential functions of Hegel's vision of philosophy and von Humboldt's vision of comparative philology as a crucial organ of *Bildung*. The rise of the novel as organ of *Bildung* involves the breaking down of linguistic and ideological parochialism, of the enclosure of the subject in his or her own 'little corner' of the world. The novels of the 'first line', the chivalric novel in verse, the pastoral novel, the baroque novel, were all forms unable to achieve this status because they were limited to the parochial worldview of the 'stagnant nucleus of the ruling class' (Bakhtin 2012 [1936], p. 168). Novels of the 'second line' criticised this relationship to the world, expressed in the author's dogmatic insistence that his or her 'little corner of the world' is the most valuable and true. Bakhtin sounds profoundly Hegelian here, for the social groups among whom the second type of novel emerges have a greater capacity for the assimilation of the '*common general* stock of attitudes and aptitudes, ideas and values which are formed in the individuals because they live in one historical world' (Márkus, 1986, p. 120). This is a 'world' not of neutral and independent objects but of '*objectivisations*' that exist 'only through individuals' participatory activities', these make meaningful communication and mutual understanding between members of society possible (Márkus, 1986, p. 120). However, while for Hegel assimilation occurs by virtue of the individual's 'inescapable *participation* in the pervasive social institutions of their time' (Márkus, 1986, p. 119-20), for Bakhtin such 'participatory activities' are much less clearly positioned in institutions. Rather, it is the novelist, the relatively detached intellectual reflecting on the interaction of perspectives who plays an educative role in raising the self-consciousness of society. Overcoming the fragmentation of the social world, the vale of alienation, does not require the transcendence of the division of labour or the direct participation of the masses in the institutions of government, but only for the interaction of perspectives to be mediated by the intellectual who can achieve intuitions of the whole. One of the main reasons for this

difference from the Hegelian model is the continuing influence of Marburg School neo-Kantianism on Bakhtin's thought.

Paul Natorp's *Sozialpädagogik*

The neo-Kantian who wrote most about the process of *Bildung* was Paul Natorp, whose work on 'social pedagogy' was widely received in Russia at the beginning of the 20th century. Several of Natorp's works on the question were translated into Russian and Matvei Kagan, who studied under Hermann Cohen and Natorp in Marburg, was translating Natorp's 1920 work *Sozial-Idealismus* (Social Idealism) into Russian when he was attending meetings of what later became known as the Bakhtin Circle (Natorp, 2004). Natorp divided the social whole into three functions: 'life-renewing organisation and economy, … life-securing organisation (legislature, administration, regulation, government and so on) and … cognition striving for truth and broadening knowledge' (Ruhloff, 1984, p. 384). The third function is *Bildung*, and should not only be independent from economic and political functions, but should subordinate the other two, so that 'any economic work and any social regulation [that is politics] would be but means to the final end of *Menschenbildung* (human education)' (Natorp quoted in Ruhloff, 1984, p. 385). What Natorp, a liberal socialist, had in mind was the freeing of Humboldtian education from class privilege and the extrinsic economic or political goals of capitalism. Instead pedagogy must become social pedagogy [*Sozialpädagogik*] that studies 'the educational conditions of social life' [*Bildungsbedingungen des sozialen Lebens*], for the 'social form' [*Gesellschaftsform*] is subject to development, while the educational ideal is not (Natorp, 1920, pp.62-3; Saltzman 1981, p. 144). This followed from the neo-Kantian principle that the world is something created by human cognition, that the world is, in essence, culture. The question is how this 'world' is to be cognised and thus created. Philosophy provides the answer, and becomes effective in society through *Sozialpädagogik*, which should be based on the laws that derive from the quasi-Platonic realm of validity (*Geltung*) independent of any process of cognition (Rose, 1981, p. 10-11), as found in ethics, logic and aesthetics (Meyerhardt, 1916, p. 58). The realm of validity now occupies the same space as the religious *idea* of God as an ideal for which man can strive, generating laws to govern conduct, and in doing so form a community (*Gemeinschaft*) in the present. Like Friedrich Schlegel, Max Müller and Hermann Cohen, the protestant Natorp regarded monotheism as crucial in this regard, for in making God immanent and thus reachable, pantheism removed the idea of the transcendental for which people could strive, leading to hedonism, egotism and chaos. It also lacks any stable defences

against materialism and atheism. Like Max Müller, therefore, Natorp dreamed of an ideology that could include both science and piety, Aryan and Semitic. God would be reconciled with reason, nature with culture, modernization with morality (Arvidsson, 2006, p. 90). It is not any one religion that can serve this function, but 'religion within the limits of reason alone', common moral and emotional bonds that transcend confessional schisms and teach a universal fraternity. This is probably what Bakhtin had in mind when he distinguishes between a particular faith and a 'feeling for faith' [*chuvstvo very*] (Bakhtin, 1997 [1961], p. 352).

What follows from this is that *Bildung* is no longer embedded in the mutual adaptation of social institutions and the individual, but in the adaptation of forms of cognition to 'something that philosophy, rational thought, can only vaguely anticipate but what can be articulated or grasped only by religious insight' (Luft, 2007, p. 20) and in the engineering of social reality accordingly. As Sebastian Luft argues, the philosopher for Natorp now becomes a rational prophet, providing intimations of the ultimate meaning of history (Luft, 2007, p. 18). Here Natorp's faith in the symphonic unity of mankind that can be intimated by the philosopher sounds very similar to Müller's vocation for the philologist and, as we shall see, it was equally open to ideological employment. In literature this perspective *sub specie aeternitatis* (under the aspect of eternity) is provided by the author who views the meaning of the whole from without – the phenomenology of this is the main point of Bakhtin's essay of the mid 1920s, 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity'. Here there is no concern with intersecting and interanimating perspectives, but only discussion of the modalities between author and hero with the aim that the former should view the world through the limited perspective of the latter before returning to the position outside the 'open event of being' and bestow closure, completion and judgement. Here there is no consideration of the difference between epic and novelistic modalities of authorship, but only of the author to transcend the limited perspective of the heroes, to provide and external perspective that gives meaning to the whole. The specificity of the novelistic relation to multiple languages and perspectives that we see in SR recedes from view once more in the 1937-39 essay on the chronotope, and is completely absent from the surviving portions of the work on the *Bildungsroman* of the late 1930s, where the novel becomes a variety of epic narrative. Here Goethe, Balzac and Walter Scott are able to transcend the phenomenal world, to intuit the noumenal world in phenomena, to 'see time in space' (Bakhtin 2012 [1937], pp. 287, 299, 234; 2012 [1939] p. 493), to detect the 'traces' of becoming that permeate the landscape. As Galin Tihanov notes,

for Bakhtin the true features of *Bildung* are here the coincidence of essence and phenomenon, of subject and object in the act of seeing. The overcoming of alienation consists in the perception of 'time and space in the variegated forms of landscape, and of past and present in the artefacts of human labour' (Tihanov, 1998, p. 137).

Returning to Natorp we can see a combination of Plato's ideal of the state governed by philosopher-teachers with the pedagogical ideas of the romantic educational theorists, particularly those of the Swiss pedagogue Johann Pestalozzi, whose work he championed. Individual and social ethics, individual and social pedagogy are now one and the same. Instead of philosophers as governors, philosophy as the 'inner concept of spiritual creation' becomes a governing principle (Saltzman, 1981, p. 147) and the basis of law as something within humanity, 'a natural drive to move from the Is (*Sein*) to the Ought (*Sollen*)' (Saltzman, 1981, p. 141). Of course such a philosophy needs bearers, and Pestalozzi saw this as the intellectual minority who rise above the norm (Saltzman, 1981, p. 143) and who have a responsibility to improve the lot of the poor through education. From here one can appreciate Hegel's critique of Pestalozzi and of Rousseau for their expectation that the inequities of the system could be addressed through 'pedagogical philanthropism' (Márkus, 1986, p. 116). This is, to use Bakhtin's term, an outsideness motivated by love for those less fortunate, the conscious recognition of a principle that has come down to us from religion. Importantly, however, there is no reciprocity in this model – to paraphrase Marx's Third *Thesis on Feuerbach*, society is divided into two parts, one of which is superior to society. If there is any education for the educators it is thorough the development of mathematics and the grasping of the quasi-Platonic realm of objective validity.

Natorp inherited this 'pedagogical philanthropism' in the context of what he and many German philosophers of the time regarded as a crisis of humanity that had arisen because the process of the production of the world had gone awry. For Natorp, European societies had become dominated by French and British civilization (*Zivilization*), externally framed norms of conduct, rather than the internal spiritual cause of culture in shaping the eternal future. It was the German people who had attempted to become a nation by moving beyond mere civilization to a special *Kultur*. This was no longer bound by mere 'Germanness', but encapsulated an ambition to become a '*Weltvolk*' (Luft, 2007, p. 17). This, he argued ultimately led to the 1914-18 war, which was a just war because despite the horrors, it was driven by a larger goal for universal peace and harmony through culture, so Germans felt 'like God's warriors against "a world of devils"; like those who have now been given the task

to fulfil all the great prophesies concerning mankind' (cited in Sluga, 1993, p. 77). While to its participants the war was experienced as an atrocity, from the point of view of eternity the place in the larger scheme of things becomes clear. While it was first recognised by philosophers, this mission became clear to everyone in the course of the conflict, and in the wake of defeat the German people have the chance to emerge from the depths of crisis and reconstitute the state as a 'state of human *culture* through a new trinity of *economy, justice* and *pedagogy* that constitute the true state according to the guidelines of social idealism' (Luft, 2007, p. 19). Here one can clearly see the extent to which Natorp, like many other philosophers of the time, including the main source of Bakhtin's phenomenology of alterity, Max Scheler, imbibed the main features of German nationalist ideology. Not only did this prevent them from perceiving the struggle over raw materials and markets that lay behind the war, but it also disastrously misunderstood the relationship between the state, the economy and ideology as the inter-war years were to make very clear. Moreover, as the main academic philosophers of the time, neo-Kantians maintained an extremely naïve understanding of the relationship between academic life and the production of scientific knowledge, propagating the myth of the disinterested professor who pursues truth without fear or favour.

Soviet education

In the wake of the Russian Revolution it is understandable that ideas about social pedagogy appeared to make some sense, however. While it was clearly fanciful to expect the capitalist class to subordinate its economy and state to the interests of universal education, the *Bildung* of the masses, the same was not true of what could be expected of the new post-Revolutionary state. Some of the earliest activities of what is now known as the Bakhtin Circle were associated with the democratization of education that followed in the wake of the 1917 Revolutions (Brandist, Shepherd & Tihanov (Eds.) 2004; Medvedev & Medvedeva, 2008). Pavel Medvedev was made the Rektor of the first *Narodnyi,* later *proletarskii universitet* in Vitebsk at the time when he, Voloshinov, Pumpianskii and Bakhtin were meeting informally to discuss philosophical questions. Not only was there a massive opening of the education system to the masses, and a huge expansion of the number of schools, but the entire curriculum was transformed in order to achieve the very goals of *Bildung* that Hegel and Humboldt had envisaged. Thus Lenin's wife Nadezhda Krupskaia, who played a leading role in the Commissariat of Enlightenment, argued that the 'sole objective' of the socialist school was to facilitate the 'formation of individuality'. While in the bourgeois world individual schools aimed at the 'all-round development of the pupil' could exist, 'such

schools could only be isolated phenomena' for once someone educated in such a school left its confines, what would be encountered was 'an atmosphere that quickly reduced all the fruits of education to nothing'. Where society divides people into 'those who engage in intellectual labour and those who engage in physical labour' the erstwhile pupil is compelled 'to choose one or the other type of labour' with the result that the 'ability to perform "comprehensive" labour would atrophy'. The new school would be aimed at 'the transition from forced to voluntary labour, from monotonous, narrowly specialised to comprehensive labour' (Krupskaia, 1918)

It was for this reason that early Soviet educationalists turned to the ideas of John Dewey, who had developed experimental curricula to achieve the goals of *Bildung*. The entire spirit of the school would be renewed through the affiliation of school and life, so that 'activity schools' would teach a range of practical skills not as mere 'modes of routine employment' but as 'active centres of scientific insight into natural materials and processes, points of departure whence children shall be led into a realization of the historic development of man' (Cited in Fitzpatrick, 1979, p. 7). Dewey's theories of education permeate the work of most Soviet educationalists of the 1920s and were fundamental points of reference for policy makers, who were keen to learn from some of the radical practices introduced in some US schools (Mchitarjan, 2000). Although these have some correspondences to Natorp's social pedagogy, Dewey was particularly critical of neo-Kantianism from a Hegelian standpoint, and the complex and project methods which were adopted by Soviet educationalists directly challenged the disciplinary boundaries that neo-Kantianism assumed, and sought not only to preserve, but to make more rigorous and methodologically strict. Correspondingly Dewey viewed agency as 'an ontological characteristic of all beings, and it is exercised in a variety of processes that are both linguistic and physical, that is, in the course of human and nonhuman entities' resistance or conformity to others, they transform and are transformed by them, sometimes in minute and other times in grosser, more perceptible ways' (Dressman, 2004, p. 46). Bakhtin's vision of *Bildung* does not straddle the physical and cultural domains in this way. He remains an idealist who, in Marx's famous phrase, 'does not know real, sensuous activity as such'. Forms of agency that yield knowledge are either dialogical 'speech acts' of one form or another or, for the intellectual, supremely monological acts of seeing through which meaning is bestowed upon the world.

Progressive education reforms are now under fire from the right in many countries, where a common argument is that they have failed to achieve levels of literacy and numeracy needed

for the contemporary workplace. They had run ground in the USSR by the beginning of the 1930s where Stalinist bureaucrats marshalled the same arguments. The reason for the failure of such practices to achieve the laudable ends of going beyond training for the workplace is not the result of a misguided attempt to abandon traditional academic disciplines – we all know that the most interesting research takes place on the boundaries of disciplines – but the institutional subordination of education, and of other social institutions, to the needs of capital accumulation. Neoliberalism and Stalinism alike seek to subordinate all social institutions to this imperative. Natorp and Dewey both underestimated the autonomy of education from such controls, and Natorp's suggestion that economics can be subordinated to universal *Bildung* without a thoroughgoing transformation of the means of production is a pipedream that Bakhtin inherited. One might consider Max Horkheimer's contention that disciplinary boundaries rationalized by neo-Kantianism recapitulate the capitalist division of labour with the harmonious balance between supply and demand as its goal (1975 [1937]). In this context one might view Bakhtin's attempt to separate the natural and human sciences according to a methodological distinction between mono-logic and dia-logic as an attempt to mark out a socially effective role for traditional intellectuals in Soviet society in providing a basis for a rounded *Bildung* for the masses, for it is these philosopher-pedagogues that have intimations of the noumenal world through their powers of 'seeing'.

Here, then, we can see the limitations of Bakhtin's conception of *Bildung*. Without going into the realm of institutional critique and practical socio-political organisation the potential of any dialogic pedagogy will always retreat before the economic and political agenda of a system that is not only indifferent to the universal aims of *Bildung*, but fundamentally hostile to the production of critical thinkers who are able to perceive that their shared interests lie in the fundamental transformation beyond the imperatives of capital accumulation.

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