

## ARTICLES

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*ON “SECONDARY AESTHETICS, WITHOUT ISOLATION”*: PHILOSOPHICAL ORIGINS OF MIKHAIL BAKHTIN’S THEORY OF FORM

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Ever since it resurfaced in the field of literary studies in the early 1960s, the work of Mikhail Bakhtin has inundated the broad array of global humanities with a long list of innovative, albeit sometimes opaque, critical terms, of which *heteroglossia*, *chronotope*, and *outsidedness* (*vnenakhodimost'*) are but a few. Concomitant to the assumption of the complete originality of these cross-disciplinary concepts is that of Bakhtin as a solitary genius who lived and worked in a socio-historical vacuum, that is, against, rather than *within*, a real historical time and a real social environment.<sup>1</sup> Hand in hand with this perception of the absolute uniqueness of Bakhtin as a historical figure, there developed the myth of the radical originality of his intellectual output. It continued to dominate Bakhtin Studies even when, in the 1990s, the discipline came of age as a field of study residing in the interstices between modern philology and the history of ideas. Bakhtin Studies thus continued to be preoccupied with what was considered to be the master’s completely original concepts. This scholarly context informs the choice of topic explored in this paper. Leaving behind the Romantic—and obsolete— notion of Bakhtin’s uniqueness and instead introducing the idea of intellectual non-synchronicity, this paper investigates Bakhtin’s engagement with one of the central concepts of Western aesthetics: the concept of artistic form.

Appearing for the first and only time on Bakhtin’s agenda in 1924, in an unpublished manuscript provisionally entitled “The Methodological Questions of Literary Aesthetics” (“K voprosam metodologii estetiki slovesnogo

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1. For an extensive survey of the Russian reception of Bakhtin’s oeuvre since its resurfacing in the late 1960s to the mid-1990s, see Emerson 31–72. A subtle and exceptionally well-argued call for a scrutiny of socio-cultural constructions surrounding Bakhtin and his Circle is given in Shepherd 1–21.

2 *Slavic and East European Journal*

tvorchestva”),<sup>2</sup> the problem of form remained a *hapax legomenon*, a single occurrence, in the Russian critic’s versatile oeuvre. Discursively, the article surprises the reader of today with an incongruous merger of a contemporary polemical edge and a rather obsolete theoretical idiom. Its impassioned diatribe against “material aesthetics” (*material'naia estetika*), profoundly asynchronous in its genealogy, was likely prompted, and shaped, by some inner dynamics of the scientific field of early Soviet literary scholarship.<sup>3</sup> One may assume that Bakhtin’s decision to embark on discussing aesthetic form was driven by his intention to penetrate from the periphery into the very center of the field of early Soviet literary studies. It was a field that had been set and dominated by two mutually competing “formalist” agendas: the one advanced by the Russian Formalists, and the other, championed by Gustav Shpet (1879–1937) and his circle at the State Academy for the Research in the Arts (GAKhN). Unaffiliated with either of these institutions and, very likely, without any academic qualifications whatsoever at the time (Poole 124–5), Bakhtin was attempting to carve out a niche for himself by writing on a subject that would not reappear in his later works. However that may be, the actual intellectual edifice on which Bakhtin developed his theory of form is still opaque. The present paper aims to redress this state of affairs; it endeavors to elucidate the intellectual origins of Bakhtin’s discourse on form by reconstructing the intellectual and socio-cultural contexts of its emergence. Indisputably, a very important intellectual source was Neo-Kantianism and the next section treats that very issue.

*On Mind, Nature and Objects of Art:**Neo-Kantian Aesthetics from Hermann Cohen to Broder Christiansen*

Numerous Bakhtin studies have shown that the scholar’s earliest writings on aesthetics and moral philosophy were decisively shaped by turn-of-the-century German philosophy.<sup>4</sup> This heterogeneous intellectual corpus included

2. The article was commissioned by the journal *Russian Contemporary* (*Russkii sovremennik*) and was written no later than June 1924. However, due to the fact that the journal ceased to exist in autumn 1924, the paper remained unpublished until 1974, when, in a slightly abbreviated form, it appeared under the editorial title of “Toward the Aesthetics of Literature” (“K estetike slova”).

3. We learn from the recently published correspondence between Bakhtin and his friend and associate Matvei Isaevich Kagan (at the time fellow at the Philosophy Department in GAKhN) that Bakhtin pleaded with Kagan to help him find an affiliation with any of the Moscow-based academic institutions (Kagan 636).

4. Bakhtin’s affiliations with the German and continental philosophical legacies have been discussed at length. The earliest attempt to systematize this abundance of references and personal testimonies came with the publication of Bakhtin’s intellectual biography by Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist (1984, especially Chapters 2 and 3). Outside the English-speaking world, the earliest attempts to assess Bakhtin’s intellectual debt to turn-of-the-century German thought appear in the writings of Reiner Grübel (1989) and Natal’ia Bonetskaia (1985). In the decade to come, investigations of Bakhtin’s philosophical origins became more frequent and

various schools of psychology-informed *Einfühlungs* aesthetics (aesthetics of sympathy/empathy), as promoted by, for example, Theodor Lipps, Johannes Volkelt, Wilhelm Wundt, and Hermann Lotze; by early phenomenology in its Austrian and German variations represented by Franz Brentano, Anton Marty, Edmund Husserl, and Max Scheler; and, most important of all, by German neo-Kantianism in both of its incarnations: the South-Western School with its chief proponents Wilhelm Windelband (1848–1915) and Heinrich Rickert (1863–1936) and the Marburg School, dominated by the polyhistoric figure of the German-Jewish thinker Hermann Cohen (1842–1918). Neo-Kantianism on the whole, and Cohen's work in particular, feature importantly in Bakhtin's formative years: textual references to neo-Kantian ideas in Bakhtin's key writings, as well as autobiographical accounts, all testify to the decisive influence of neo-Kantianism on the young thinker (Kagan 636–7; Bakhtin, *Besedy* 40, 241, *passim*).<sup>5</sup> Bakhtin's early ethical treatise, dated between 1918 and 1924 (Gogotishvili, "Teoreticheskaiia" 352) and now known as *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (*K filosofii postupka*), mentions Cohen merely in parentheses (Bakhtin, *SS* 23). Nevertheless, Bakhtin's most ambitious contribution to aesthetics, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" ("Avtor i geroi v esteticheskoi deiatel'nosti") relies heavily on this philosopher's work (*SS* 94 *passim*).<sup>6</sup> Nor was Bakhtin's 1924 article "The Methodological Questions of Literary Aesthetics" an exception: it was precisely Cohen's philosophical system that helped Bakhtin to establish the conceptual framework he needed for the redefinition of the aesthetic process in this text, and to launch what he thought of as a fundamental critique of material aesthetics from the standpoint of philosophical aesthetics.

In his 1912 *The Aesthetics of Pure Feeling* (*Ästhetik des reinen Gefühls*)

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thorough. The works of Ken Hirschkop (1990), Brian Poole (1995) and Galin Tihanov (1998), among others, transformed the landscape of Bakhtin studies for good, introducing an era of more systematic investigations of Bakhtin's philosophical origins, most notably realized in the works of Craig Brandist (2002), Brian Poole (2002), and Tihanov (2000).

5. As richly documented in Dmitrieva, neo-Kantianism found fertile soil in turn-of-the-century Russia, where it was quickly assimilated by various intellectual circles and introduced in university curricula. Bakhtin's own exposure to neo-Kantian ideas was mediated through his friend and associate Matvei Kagan. Kagan first studied in Leipzig under Wundt and Volkelt, then moved to Berlin to take private tutorials with Cohen, after which he returned to Marburg where he received his doctorate under Paul Natorp (1854–1924) in 1914 (Dmitrieva 191; M. Kagan 23). Kagan's influence on Bakhtin was initially addressed in Clark and Holquist (see especially 57–62), and it received a more substantial elucidation in Poole ("Nazad"; "Rol"), Iudif' Kagan, Coates, and more recently Makhlin.

6. A number of unreferenced formulations and the critical intention of the treatise overall suggest that the lost parts of *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* may have contained even more substantial discussions of Cohen's philosophy (Gogotishvili, "Teoreticheskaiia" and "Postranichnye"). Bakhtin's utilization of Cohen's ideas in *Author and Hero* has been discussed in Makhlin, "2nd Introduction" 597–600. On the assimilation of Cohen's aesthetics in *Author and Hero* see also Steinby 232–242.

Hermann Cohen embarked on a rather ambitious philosophical enterprise: to “improve” Kant’s account of the faculties of reason, morality and taste by eradicating/conciliating any gulf that might exist between them, as well as to assert that non-aesthetic acts (e.g., cognition, evaluation) are in fact inherent to aesthetic activity. The work of art, the philosopher states, “must be an object of nature” (*ein Gegenstand der Natur*); moreover, he further asserts, the work of art is “an object of the knowledge of nature” (*ein Gegenstand der Naturerkenntnis*) (Cohen, *System* 80). Therefore, the work of art is not independent of the laws of morality and cognition but must be able to “sire a pure object of moral cognition” (“Und das Kunstwerk muß ferner [...] ein Gegenstand der Sittlichkeit sein, und als ein reiner Gegenstand der sittlichen Erkenntnis erzeugbar werden”) (Cohen, *System* 80).<sup>7</sup> As a result of Cohen’s transformation of Kant’s theory of three separate faculties into an inclusive theory of “three conditions,” there emerge the core postulates of his philosophy of art: that aesthetics may have an impact on cognitive philosophy and ethics, not just *vice versa* (Akindinova, “Estetika G. Kogena” 507); that art does not exist in itself, without other human potentials; and, finally, that art scholarship, no matter how comprehensive, cannot account for the phenomenon of art, nor can it figure as a “unitary foundation of art” (Poma, *Critical* 132).<sup>8</sup>

Cohen’s renegotiation of the Kantian boundary between aesthetic and non-aesthetic realms canvases with clarity an aspect of Bakhtin’s late philosophy that vitally informed his articulation of the content–form dichotomy: the moral and cognitive spheres are seen here as experiential and methodological prerequisites for aesthetic experience. This reconstellation of the artistic realm *vis-à-vis* ethics and cognition enabled Bakhtin to conclude, in “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity,” that aesthetic activity is a “secondary creation,” which “does not create an entirely new reality,” but nonetheless “stands on an equal footing with the realms of ethics and knowledge” (SS 287).<sup>9</sup> This skillful appropriation of Cohen’s general insights also draws our attention to another aspect of the philosopher’s aesthetics that

7. All translations from German and Russian in this article are mine, unless otherwise indicated.

8. It is essential for our further discussion of Bakhtin’s theory of form to restate our position that Cohen here (and, by the same token, Bakhtin) departs from Kant’s theory of faculties. The imputation of Kant’s theory of faculties to Bakhtin occurs as a common error in a number of recent accounts of Bakhtin’s early work. See for example Michael Holquist’s attempt to reduce Bakhtin’s view of human faculties to Kant’s original teaching (Holquist 6), which has already been competently discussed and refuted (Steinby 236) and, especially, Nikolai Nikolaev’s commentaries to Volume 1 of Bakhtin’s *Collected Works*, where Cohen’s influence on “The Methodological Questions of Literary Aesthetics” was also misread (Bakhtin, SS 722–3).

9. In the margins of the manuscript of “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” Bakhtin made a note which reads as follows: “[S]econdary aesthetics, without isolation” (“vtorichnaia estetika, bez izoliatsii”) (SS 110). The note clearly suggests that the aesthetic realm is secondary to cognition and the moral act, but is neither detached from, nor subordinate to them.

more specifically influenced Bakhtin's thought on form: the notion that the understanding of the arts requires a new "disposition of consciousness," one which could encompass this more comprehensive vision of the artistic realm. In a characteristic neo-Idealist move, Cohen finds this new "disposition" in the concept/experience of feeling (*Gefühl*), a faculty that, he believed, was capable of being directed both "toward the outside" (that is, exterior content), and inward (Akindinova, "Die systematische" 71–2 and "Analitika" 6–7). Like the Romantic poet Friedrich Schiller before him, Cohen asserts that it is through the faculty of pure feeling that aesthetic activity establishes a new unity of man and nature, of law and freedom. The aesthetic feeling, he writes, is "love [...] for human nature" (*Liebe ... zur Natur des Menschen*) (199). Cohen terms this interplay of human faculties and the natural world *Gestaltung*, or form-bestowing. It follows from the foregoing that the act of form-bestowing cannot be reduced merely to the external existence of the object: the two-sided nature of aesthetic *Gestalt* comprises both the external form and interior meaning in a unity, which Cohen compares to that of body and soul (Cohen 191; Akindinova, "Analitika" 12 and "Die systematische" 76).

This articulation of form as a *Gestalt* that resides at the boundary between the realms of the aesthetic and the non-aesthetic will leave a strong imprint on Bakhtin's contemplation of artistic form. Although less ambitiously than Cohen with regard to the reconciliatory function of aesthetics, in "The Methodological Questions of Literary Aesthetics" Bakhtin similarly conceives of artistic creation as an inherently receptive activity. Reality, that is, the object of aesthetic activity, Bakhtin writes, "predates the aesthetic act," insofar as it is "cognized and evaluated by the [moral and cognitive] act" (SS 286).<sup>10</sup> Artistic activity is defined here as an *a posteriori* practice in its relation to the realms of cognition and ethics, which is, nonetheless, intrinsically and inescapably linked to them. It is at this point that Bakhtin's discussion of the aesthetic realm is subject to yet another neo-Kantian mediation: the thought of the German aesthetician Broder Christiansen (1869–1958). Almost forgotten today, Christiansen's work, initially his 1902 *Theory of Knowledge* (*Erkenntnisstheorie und Philosophie des Erkennens*),<sup>11</sup> and especially his *magnum opus*, the 1909 *Philosophy of Art* (*Philosophie der Kunst*) exerted an

10. In Russian: "prednakhodimaia esteticheskim aktom [...] deistvitel'nost'." The English translation of the text omits the important part of Bakhtin's articulation of the aesthetic as a practice *a posteriori* (SS 278).

11. Originally published in Hanau in 1902, Christiansen's *Theory of Knowledge* appeared in Russian as *Psikhologiia i teoriia poznaniia* (*Psychology and the Theory of Knowledge*) in 1907. The volume, which was translated by Evgenii Borichevskii (1883–1934), was edited and prefaced by Boris Aleksandrovich Fokht (1875–1946), one of the leading figures of early Russian neo-Kantianism. Having studied in Heidelberg under Kuno Fischer (1824–1907), and in Freiburg under Rickert (Dmitrieva 151–2), Fokht moved to Marburg, most likely in 1904, where he studied under Cohen and Natorp (Dmitrieva 171–2).

immense influence on virtually every orientation in Russian liberal humanities in the 1910s. Fedor Stepun's (1884–1965)<sup>12</sup> rapid review of *The Philosophy of Art* in the international journal *Logos*, which regarded the volume as a work of “utmost interest” (Stepun 278–280), prompted the Russian translation of Christiansen's work. Carried out by the philosopher Georgii Fedotov (1886–1951), the Russian translation of *The Philosophy of Art* appeared in 1911 and was enthusiastically greeted both by the cultural elite of the late Imperial era and by the new “generation of the 1890s.”<sup>13</sup>

It was the daring eclecticism of *The Philosophy of Art*, a feature noted already in Stepun's review, that triggered the prolific reception of Christiansen's aesthetic theory in Russia. Following the Baden neo-Kantians and, in particular, his philosophical mentor Heinrich Rickert,<sup>14</sup> in the attempt to reestablish the methodology of the humanities on the principle of *value*, yet also relying firmly on the phenomenological principle of intentionality, Christiansen conceived of aesthetic activity as inseparable from the subject's act of evaluation. While Bakhtin never acknowledged his familiarity with Christiansen's work (a subject to which I will return later), it is important to note that this same blend of neo-Kantianism and phenomenology decisively shaped his own early ethics and aesthetics (Brandist, “Two Routes” 526 *passim*; Nikiforov 227 *passim*).

The notion that philosophical thinking is an axiological act gave rise to another key proposition of Christiansen's aesthetics, which is of normative import for Bakhtin's theory of form: according to Christiansen, the aesthetic ob-

12. Having studied in Heidelberg under the key figures of South-Western German neo-Kantianism, Wilhelm Windelband and Emil Lask, Stepun returned to Russia in 1907 where he, among other things, set up the Russian-language version of the international journal *Logos* (1910–1914) (see Dmitrieva 211). In September 1922 Stepun was expelled from the Soviet Union, along with other prominent Russian intellectuals (Fitzpatrick 76).

13. The release of *Filosofia iskusstva* (*The Philosophy of Art*) in 1911 (St. Petersburg: Shipovnik) appealed to a rather heterogeneous array of thinkers, ranging from the champions of the Silver Age to the Russian Formalists. While Christiansen's influence on the Formalists and their intellectual orbit (from Boris Eikhenbaum and Sergei Bernshtein to their colleague and opponent Boris Engelgardt, or the founder of the Prague Linguistic Circle Jan Mukařovský) has received some scholarly attention (Erlich 199–200; Gerigk 86–8; Grübel, “Der Russische” 2237; Khanzen-Lëve [Hansen-Lëve], *Russkii formalizm* 305–306; Steiner 92–93), the dissemination of his ideas among the Silver Age thinkers and artists has remained under-discussed. It might be instructive to mention that Andrei Bely's influential 1910 volume *Symbolism* (*Simvolizm*) already contains references to Christiansen's masterpiece. In his 1916 *The Meaning of the Creative Act* (*Smysl tvorchestva*) Nikolai Berdiaev singled out the German thinker from the cohort of modern aestheticians only to reduce, somewhat naively, Christiansen's aesthetics to a specific tool for self-discovery (“[...] art unmistakably reveals our own being,” 571). On the other hand, Berdiaev was unquestionably right in praising Christiansen's aesthetics for its rejection of both dominant trends in European aesthetics of its time: empiricism and sensualism (Berdiaev 571).

14. Christiansen earned a doctorate in philosophy in 1902 at Freiburg University under Rickert's supervision, with a thesis on Descartes' theory of judgment (Gerigk 89).

ject, the central concept of aesthetic analysis, is a conceptual, rather than real (empirical), entity constructed in mental perception. To mitigate the abstract bias of this conception of the aesthetic object, Christiansen introduces the idea that aesthetic perception presents an intentional act; by this move he imparts concreteness to each aesthetic object and also defines the aesthetic object as a teleological entity.<sup>15</sup> The first thing that strikes one about Christiansen’s conception is the denunciation of any equivalence between aesthetic object and the empirical/material aspects of a work of art, by which Christiansen took a critical stance toward the so-called “aesthetics of pure visibility” and the sensualist-formalist tendency in turn-of-the-century German art scholarship.<sup>16</sup> Crucially, the empirical object of art, which is defined by the very elements it consists of, by the spatiotemporal nexus it assumes, and, finally, by the interplay of thing (*Ding*) and causality (*Kausalität*), is denied any aesthetic relevance whatsoever (Christiansen 53–4; Akindinova, “Estetika” 136). Another consequence of the idea that the aesthetic object is a mental representation of the object, rather than the object itself, is the notion that the form/structure of the aesthetic object will first and foremost be determined in relation to the structure that is established in the subject’s mind. This aesthetic aggregate, or structure reconstituted/synthesized in the mind, legitimizes itself *qua* aesthetic value, each time one of its constitutive parts takes over other elements and reorganizes them into a hierarchical, axiological formation.<sup>17</sup> Christiansen terms this part the artistic *dominant*, by which he understands “any formal or objective element [of a work of art]” that “comes to the fore and takes the leading role,” that is, gives a decisive shape to the aesthetic object (Christiansen 242).<sup>18</sup>

15. Advanced by the Austrian philosopher Franz Brentano (1838–1917) and his school, the conception of intentionality assumed that mental activity was *correlative* to the world and also contained the assumption of the purposefulness of human deeds. For an excellent discussion of the impact of the theory of intentionality on the transformation of turn-of-the-century neo-Kantianism (and, by the same token, on Bakhtin’s own intellectual formation), see Brandist, “Two Routes” 521 *passim*.

16. Proposed by, among others, the German aesthetician Konrad Fiedler in his 1876 study *On Judging Works of Visual Arts* (*Über die Beurteilung von Werken der bildenden Kunst*), the concept of “pure visibility” (*der reinen Sichtbarkeit*) suggests that the visible appearance of a work of art is by no means a contingent matter, but rather, the final, externalized completion of a purposeful “Gestalt forming activity” (Fiedler 56 *passim*).

17. The concept of aesthetic object was investigated by some of Brentano’s associates and followers, most notably by Stephan Witasek (1870–1915), the philosopher of the Graz school of experimental psychology and a follower of Franz Brentano (1838–1917) and Alexius Meinong (1853–1920), for whom the aesthetic object was anything that incites “*Ersatz* [compensatory] emotions” *in the subject* (Smith 204, emphasis added).

18. Christiansen’s conceptualization of an artistic dominant directly influenced the Russian Formalist concept of *dominant*, which first appeared in print in Boris Eikhenbaum’s 1922 *Melodic Aspects of Russian Lyrical Poetry* (*Melodika russkogo liricheskogo stikha*). Eikhenbaum uses the idea of *dominant* to differentiate between the organizing principles of versification

The way in which Christiansen facilitated the transition from a subjective aesthetic vision toward a more synthetic model is important. In order to ensure that one of the central concepts of his aesthetics does not remain bound to individual aesthetic experience, Christiansen draws again on the apparatus of Gestalt theory to hypothesize that the aesthetic object comes into being through a process in which the initial sensory impressions are first transformed into “feelings-based impressions” (*Stimmungsimpressionen*) and then subjected to an additional, teleological activity of the mind.<sup>19</sup> The sheer materiality of art-work is initially “animated” in the act of sensory perception (*sinnliche Anschauung*), the outcomes of which can be divided into three major classes. The first group of sensory data (e.g., the sculptor’s perception of bronze or marble) that bear only initial relevance for the constitution of the aesthetic object, is termed by Christiansen the *material*. Although it carries what Christiansen calls the “idea-form,” and subsequently enters the perceptive synthesis, which yields the aesthetic object, the material does not have any *autonomous* value in the process of the emergence of the aesthetic object (Christiansen 57–60). The second group of perceptive data comprises what Christiansen names the “objective/representational *content*” (*der gegenständliche/dargestellte Inhalt*), which should be understood as the material that is mediated through, and modified by, the subject’s perceptive act (61–72). The third, and in Christiansen’s view, essential constitutive factor of aesthetic object is the form: “[w]hile there can be a work of art without empirical objects [*Gegenständliches*], there is no art without form,” he argues (71). The supremacy of form does not relegate the other two constituents to a lower level: in the final stage of this process, which is termed the “synthesis of the aesthetic object” (*Objektsynthese*) (41), form is inseparable from content. Although categorically distinct, in Christiansen—and, as we shall see, in Bakhtin, too—content and form contribute to the constitution of the aesthetic object in a dynamic unity and can be separated only in abstraction. A mental, rather than a physically palpable category, artistic form hence emerges as the crowning act of the synthesis of aesthetic object, a conceptual unity of appearance and sense that is attainable (only) in the act of perception.

Wary of the empiricism of late-nineteenth-century aesthetics, and even more concerned with what he calls “the sensualist dogma” in contemporary aesthetics—a belief that sensory perception is not only the pre-condition of

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and explain how one of various “formative elements” of the verse subjugates all others (“pod-chiniaia ikh sebe”) (121). On the transfer of the term *dominant* from Christiansen to Eikhenbaum and Russian Formalism in general see Hansen-Löve, “Dominanta” 15 *passim* and *Russkii formalizm* 305–7; also Gerigk 87–88, 94–95.

19. Christiansen’s idea of a dually structured aesthetic perception indeed resembles the differentiation between the “simple object of sensation” (tones, colors, etc.) and more complex Gestalt structures [...], which was introduced by Witasek (Smith 203–232).

aesthetic perception, but also its vital constituent—Christiansen in *The Philosophy of Art* repeatedly highlights the danger of reducing the process of aesthetic intuition to merely a matter of the senses; he sees this move as equal to confusing the whole of the aesthetic process with the senses of hearing or seeing. Instead, he proffers that the final purpose of aesthetic representation resides not in producing/inciting a “sensual image of the object” (*das sinnliche Objektbild*), but in bringing about a “non-pictorial impression of the object” (*unbildliche Gegenstandsimpression*) (100). Yet, it would be wrong to assume that the German philosopher denied aesthetic significance to all sensory perception. Christiansen puts on a pedestal what he calls “differential sensations” (*Differenzempfindungen*), which he understands as a disposition capable of communicating the “differential/distinctive qualities” (*Differenzqualitäten*) to our perception (118 *passim*).<sup>20</sup> It is in this process of mediation between material world and artistic form, which Christiansen terms the “object synthesis,” that the *aesthetic object* emerges. Christiansen describes at length the way in which the three key components of the aesthetic object, material, content and form, interact as a “successive fusion” (*sukzessive Verschmelzung*) and also as a process of “growing into” (*Ineinander-Wachsen*). These mental acts, which lead to the appropriation of initial sensations, are fundamental for aesthetic perception and they are in operation in every aesthetic experience, Christian asseverates (Khristiansen 127).

Christiansen’s sophisticated, if eclectic, diversification of the process of object synthesis, and his distancing from both nineteenth-century formalist art scholarship and classical idealist aesthetics, served as the key points of departure for the young Bakhtin. At present we have no documentary evidence whether or not Bakhtin read Christiansen’s work; he was a notoriously reluctant user of references in his own early writings, and the name of the German aesthete does not emerge in any of Bakhtin’s personal testimonies that we have available. Yet it is highly unlikely, given the popularity of Christiansen’s thought in Russia in the 1910s, the intrinsic importance of his theories to all the intellectual strands and figures surrounding Bakhtin at the time, and the young Bakhtin’s habit of devouring philosophical literature coming from the German-speaking world, that he would not be cognizant of the German thinker’s work. As the following pages will explore, Christiansen’s delineations lurk beneath Bakhtin’s 1924 investigation into artistic form in more ways than one: the German thinker’s daring reconceptualizations enabled Bakhtin to make a similar heuristic move in his own reassessment of the aesthetics of form, where neo-Kantian transcendentalism and phenomenological realism likewise served as two fundamental vectors.

20. A fair, although cursory, treatment of the role that Christiansen’s concept of differential sensations played in the emergence of the Russian Formalist conception of estrangement is given in Steiner 92–93 and Khanzen-Lëve [Hansen-Löve], *Russkii formalizm* 305–306.

*Toward Immanent Overcoming: Bakhtin's Axiological Theory of Form*

The neo-Kantian distinction between fact and value,<sup>21</sup> along with the ensuing notion that the object of knowledge in the humanities is never a factual given but a task to be achieved by the subject, coalesces in Bakhtin's early work with a slightly modified theory of intentionality. This framework enabled him to avoid the tag of "speculative idealism" (an intellectual label that would be increasingly inopportune in the climate of the 1920s), which his overreliance on neo-Kantianism could have generated. Bakhtin's earliest articulation of this conceptual blend appears in his ethical treatise *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, a text which aspires to think through and theorize an ethical subject capable of transcending the limitations of two of the reigning conceptions of modern ethics—the universally legitimate formal ethics, and the content-driven material ethics.<sup>22</sup>

To assist with this ambitious project, the young thinker solicited the aid of turn-of-the-century German value theory, in particular that of the renegade neo-Kantian Heinrich Rickert, and Edmund Husserl's (1859–1938) questioning of the absolute validity of truth.<sup>23</sup> The introduction of the instances

21. In Rickert's interpretation, for example, the distinction between facts and values assumes that experienced reality is split into two autonomous, yet related realms, the empirical realm of "real" objects and facts, and the non-empirical realm of values. While the former "can be explained (*erklären*), values and valuable objects must be understood (*verstehen*)" (Zijderveld 146). Nowadays this distinction is mainly considered obsolete (see, for example, Putnam).

22. The critique of formal ethics and attempts to foster an alternative, subject-oriented ethical conception was a preeminent concern of the Munich-based neo-Kantian-turned-phenomenologist Max Scheler (1874–1928). The influence of Scheler's work on sympathy on the emergence of Bakhtin's conception of the author-hero relationship has been documented (Poole "From Phenomenology") and further evaluated (most extensively in Brandist, *Bakhtin passim*). Yet to be fully addressed is the impact of Scheler's earlier work, the 1916 *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values (Der Formalismus in der Ethik und die materiale Wertethik)*, on Bakhtin's contemplations concerning ethics.

23. Although Bakhtin's relation to Husserl has been addressed (see, for example, Gogotishvili, "Teoreticheskaia" 385–402; Averintsev 438–456; Brandist, *Bakhtin* 58 *passim*), the latter's influence on the young Bakhtin still remains an open chapter in the Russian thinker's intellectual biography. While Husserl receives a mention in Bakhtin's early works mainly as a contrasting background (SS 10, 131), it is plausible that his early idea, namely that the logically based truth of a judgment does not implicate the obligatory character of that judgment (*Logical Investigations*, Vol. 2, Investigation 5, especially paragraphs 37–42), did influence Bakhtin's notion that the obligatory character of the human act cannot be guaranteed by the moral/ethical appropriateness of that act (Bakhtin, *Toward* 5 and SS 10, 462 n. 6\*). Certainly, the answer that Bakhtin gives to the problem of the universality of a truth-statement radically differs from that of Husserl insofar as the Russian thinker drew on the individual act of the ethical subject, whereas Husserl rejected contingencies on the path to knowledge (the so-called eidetic reduction). Somewhat ironically, in the light of Husserl's later theory of *Lebenswelt* (literally, *life-world*), published in 1936 in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology (Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie: Eine Einleitung in die phänomenologische Philosophie)*, and generally understood as a historically

of validity (*znachimost'*), value (*tsennost'*) and judgment (*suzhdenie*) in Bakhtin's conception of the ethical act/deed brought about an overhaul in the neo-Kantian framework of Bakhtin's early thought. With these new philosophical additions Bakhtin imbued the neo-Kantian categories with a subjective, real-historical charge, thereby turning them into potentially attainable categories. This conceptual reconstellation had a pragmatic and immediate aim: by espousing a radically different concept of human experience, Bakhtin secured for himself conceptual leverage with which he was able to challenge the fundamentals of the Russian Formalist understanding of form, whilst simultaneously matching their emphasis on the real and the concrete.

Understandably, Bakhtin focalizes his early use of this hybrid philosophical framework around those aesthetic categories that establish the interface between a work of art and the outside world: material, content and form. The contours of Bakhtin's reassessment of these concepts were drawn in his early-to-mid-1920s treatise "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity." In a detailed scrutiny of the axiological dynamic between authorial perception (*videnie avtora, Anschauung*)<sup>24</sup> and the object of perception (*geroi*), Bakhtin rejected the idea that the material, or, the transcription of the objective world, may have any aesthetic relevance. Aesthetic activity begins with the transformation, and eventuates in the completion, of the material of perception (SS 107). During aesthetic activity, the material, or rather, the author's supposedly unmediated record of objective reality is being infused "with moments that are *transgredient* to the objective world [...]" (Bakhtin, SS 107, my emphasis).<sup>25</sup> Bakhtin's use of eminently neo-Kantian terminology emphasizes here that, in order for an aesthetic act to take place, the transformation of primary aesthetic perception must be performed by another, axiologically external instance. Aesthetic activity itself then presents a "secondary creation."

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defined and culturally constructed framework within which the subject's experience of the world takes place (Łukasiewicz 27), Bakhtin's theory of truth-judgment in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* could be understood as a surprisingly synchronous anticipation of Husserl's revisionism.

24. The semantic potential of *Anschauung*, the term that enters the modern history of ideas with Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, is prolific and diverse (Naumann-Beyer 212). Defined by Kant in the *First Critique* as the "immediate representation of the object" ("unmittelbare Vorstellung des Gegenstandes") *Anschauung* referred to the cognitive disposition of the human subject. Some twenty years later, in Kant's *Third Critique*, *Anschauung* is used to denote the individual perception of the aesthetic object. In turn-of-the-century *Kunstwissenschaft* the term primarily refers to a disposition in the human subject that is beyond either cognitive knowledge or sensual perception, becoming therewith a mental activity that draws on perceptive and reflective human abilities, but is irreducible to either sensation or reflection alone.

25. The concept of *transgredience* originated in the neo-Kantian intellectual milieu. In the work of Wilhelm Windelband and, more importantly perhaps, that of his student, the influential aesthetician Jonas Cohn, this term relates to Kant's transcendentalist doctrine and denotes the specifically aesthetic quality of being transcendental to the boundaries of one's own consciousness (Cohn 27 n. 1, *passim*).

This marriage between aesthetics and value theory in “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” presents the intellectual context for Bakhtin’s intervention in the ongoing Soviet debates on literary and artistic form, as articulated in his 1924 article “The Methodological Questions of Literary Aesthetics.” The main premise of this article is that the artist does not have immediate access to the objective world, but operates within a world that is pre-ordered by ethical judgment and cognition. The artist’s utilization of “nature,” or material, can therefore be understood as an “immanent overcoming” (*immanentnoe preodolenie*) of what has already been created, articulated, or used. In practice, the aesthetic activity of which Bakhtin writes in “The Methodological Questions of Literary Aesthetics” assumes that the poet is not the Biblical Adam, who experiences the world intact and for the first time, but rather, the subject who is deeply immersed in the world of articulate objects in which he leaves his own form-bestowing imprint. The poet’s entry into language is not a passive *sub*-scription to the language understood as an elemental force, but an active *in*-scription into the language as an ever-changing medium. This active overcoming of language stands in contrast with what Bakhtin termed the “negative overcoming” of language, the example of which he finds in the Russian Formalist conception of *estrangement*, where the dynamic, multifaceted repository of human experience was relegated to its mere surface, to phonetic or stylistic manifestations. The active overcoming of language which, Bakhtin advocates, implies that the author engages not with words in their grammatical or encyclopedic sense, but with the values of the experienced world, which those words represent for him/her. On this theoretical platform, Bakhtin contends that the artist is governed by his/her wish to leave his evaluative imprint on the pre-existing world of ideas, values, social discourses (which do include, but cannot be reduced to, artistic genres, styles, devices, etc.) and that this engagement is his/her “primordial struggle [*pervichnaia bor’ba*] against the cognitive-*cum*-ethical orientation of life” (SS 229).<sup>26</sup>

By arguing that artistic creation and the form-bestowing act as its crowning achievement are manifestations of the author’s axiological stance, Bakhtin expands on Rickert’s idea that, just like the theoretical truth of philosophy, aesthetic beauty belongs to a non-empirical reality, which can be articulated by value-judgments (Zijderveld 146 *passim*). In another borrowing from Rickert,<sup>27</sup> Bakhtin firmly holds his stance against the particularization and diffusion of the humanities into individual disciplines, a process that was

26. It was likely with this in mind that the late Russian linguist Mikhail Gasparov declared that Bakhtin’s entire early aesthetics could be understood as an attempt to “overcome the word” (*preodolenie slova*) (495).

27. On Rickert’s demarcation between cultural science (*Kulturwissenschaft*) and natural science (*Naturwissenschaft*), and on his insistence that the former should have a unitary methodology, see Zijderveld 226–235.

well underway within turn-of-the-century art scholarship in Europe, and which was, he was convinced, taken to extremes in the practice of Russian Formalism. Their positivistic stimulus, which suited natural sciences rather than literary studies, as well as their focus on bare material, suggested to him a gross misconception about what the subject matter of literary studies should be. In Bakhtin’s view, all other critical frailties of Russian Formalism—foremost among them the inability to establish an aesthetically valid conception of form—originate from that fundamental error (SS 270–275). In Bakhtin’s neo-Kantian vision, aesthetic form is the product of the author’s evaluative encounter with the world and cannot be articulated immanently, through object-relation. What this also means is that, although form is effecuated by a human act, it does not have a material/objective existence; form is a *condition* for a work of art to be brought into existence, insofar as the form asserts the axiological, rather than ontological, status of a work of art. The fact that in a concrete aesthetic practice this execution of the author’s axiological position takes a concrete, spatiotemporal and material shape is of little import: unlike the Formalists, the young Bakhtin was more interested in the philosophical premises of the aesthetic process than in the pragmatic effects that this process has on the recipient (SS 273). In all fairness, Bakhtin’s reaccentuation of cause and effect in the aesthetic relationship is accompanied by an indisputable simplification of the Russian Formalist positions. For instance, his core accusation that the Formalists failed to distinguish between raw material and form either disregards, or renders rather inadequately, one of the most important formalist documents of the same period, Iurii Tynianov’s article “The Literary Fact” (“Literaturnyi fakt”), published in July 1924. In this text, which signals the beginning of the second, methodologically more sophisticated phase of Russian Formalism, Tynianov makes a clear distinction between the two concepts, thereby distancing his own theoretical pursuit from the position of the group of critics associated with the Left Front of Art (Osip Brik, Sergei Tretyakov, Nikolai Chuzhak). For Tynianov, Brik’s calling for an entirely new reckoning of the relationship between literature and everyday life (*byt*) was unacceptable as it compromised the key Formalist concept of estrangement (*ostranenie*), which rested upon the premise that art and (everyday) life are mutually exclusive, and that the former is preconditioned by the transformation of the latter (“Literaturnyi” 261).

As a result of his theoretical reassessment, Bakhtin rejects the object-related idea of aesthetic process as inadequate to render the complexity of the aesthetic relation and to produce a valid conception of artistic form. By embracing the more appropriate (from the point of view of his revised neo-Kantianism) concept of *aesthetic object*, Bakhtin attempts to break through the dead-end of the content-material-form relation. Following Christiansen,

although, astonishingly, still failing to acknowledge this crucial debt,<sup>28</sup> in “The Methodological Questions of Literary Aesthetics” Bakhtin puts forward the category of aesthetic object, which is constituted in the author’s act of re-evaluation and is, therefore, fundamentally different from an empirical work of art. The study of the aesthetic object understood as a *relation* of the human mind is declared by Bakhtin to be “the main task of aesthetics” (SS 325 *passim*). Instead of following this precept, Bakhtin laments, the dominant schools of poetics at the time preferred to concentrate on other aspects of a work of art, namely its extra-aesthetic reality (*dannost’*) and the teleological composition (*tselevaia kompozitsiia*) of material (SS 276). As a result, the technically understood composition assumes the place of the aesthetic object. In order to rectify this deviation from the “right” hermeneutic path, Bakhtin introduces another differentiation within the aesthetic of composition—that between architectonic and compositional forms. Architectonic forms, which include qualitative categories such as the tragic, the comic, and the elegiac, express the author’s interaction with the values of the social and historical world, for which reason, they are *axiological* forms and enter the aesthetic object (Bakhtin, SS 278). In contrast, compositional forms, for example, sonnet or novella, organize material in a rather technical sense and do not enter the aesthetic object. To further elucidate this distinction we should revisit the core idea of Bakhtin’s “The Methodological Questions of Literary Aesthetics,” that the criterion of aesthetic validity can never be merely technical and that only those forms that embody the author’s reassessment of the world of experience are aesthetically valid. An example that illustrates well the difference between the two modes of formal organization in the arts is rhythm, which, according to Bakhtin, may be understood in both senses: when it embodies feelings, attitudes or emotional evaluations, rhythm is an architectonic form; insofar as it helps organize the material, it is a compositional one. Bakhtin’s example hides another unacknowledged contemporaneous reference to Iurii Tynianov’s text, “Rhythm as the Constructive Factor of Verse,” where rhythm is viewed as the constructive principle of poetry only when it is “displaced,” i.e., when it deviates from a historically and culturally established set of norms (Tynyanov, “Rhythm” 132, 135 n13).<sup>29</sup>

For Bakhtin, then, in order for the material, understood as intact nature, to become the object of the artist’s attention, a primary articulation, or a conversion of material into content, must be performed by the joint forces of ethical

28. In his opening remarks to “The Methodological Questions of Literary Aesthetics,” Bakhtin laconically liberates his study from the “ballast of quotations and references,” deeming them “unnecessary to the competent reader, and of no use to the incompetent one” (SS 265).

29. Bakhtin’s familiarity with Tynianov’s article on rhythm is more than likely given that the volume in which the essay appeared, *The Problem of Verse Language (Problema stikhotvornogo iazyka)*, was published in the spring of 1924, precisely at the time when Bakhtin began his work on “The Methodological Questions of Literary Aesthetics.”

evaluation and cognition. The artist, Bakhtin assumes in faithfully neo-Kantian fashion, cannot see a world which has not been previously ordered for him by mind and ethics. On the other hand, the worlds of art and experience do not remain impermeable to one another: the former is predicated upon the latter, insofar as primary experience (the cognized and ethically mapped world) is subsumed under the receptive realm of the arts. In this arrangement, the function of artistic form is precisely that of enabling a transposition from the realm of primary assessment to the realm of secondary creation. Translated into aesthetic categories, the idea that the aesthetic process is a secondary creation means that, for the eye of the aesthetic subject, pure, intact material is an invisible, non-existent realm. The aesthetic subject—in Bakhtin’s early terminology, the author—“receives” the form as already accentuated by cognitive and ethical experience, and only then sets into motion the mechanism of secondary creation, which entails the act of reassessment, or, the axiological mapping of the material world, into what finally takes the shape of a material object. It is the subject’s validation that bridges the gap between the realm of primary, ethical and cognitive experience, and the secondary realm of the aesthetic. The dynamic set of relations, which at once facilitate and crown the aesthetic process, is the aesthetic object.

*In Lieu of Conclusion: Bakhtin’s Concept of Form and the Rise of Secular Modernity in Late-Imperial and Early-Soviet Russia*

There is a certain irony in the fact that Bakhtin’s redefinition of the concept of artistic form is performed by utilizing the aesthetics of Broder Christiansen, insofar as practically the same theoretical repertoire fed the Russian Formalist ideas on the autonomy of the aesthetic field, so fervently denied by Bakhtin in “The Methodological Questions of Literary Aesthetics.”<sup>30</sup> Although radically opposed to the Formalist arguments for the autonomy of literary series, Bakhtin formulates his critique by contemplating the mechanisms of artistic isolation, which is, in a different critical register, used by the Formalists to define the working of the crucial mechanism of *estrangement*. The elliptic note found on the margins of the manuscript of Bakhtin’s “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity,” which simply reads “[s]econdary aesthetics, without isolation” (“*Vtorichnaia estetika, bez izoliatsii*”) (SS 110), clarifies the small, but vital difference between Bakhtin’s use of the category of aesthetic isolation and the Formalists’ appropriation of the same theoretical scaffold, and, consequently, between their respective approaches to the question of form. Bakhtin believes that the artist’s input into the process of bestowing artistic form is vital (a premise which is not denied by the Formalists), and that the difference between an art-work endowed with form and content itself is essential for our

30. Indeed, the first chapter of Christiansen’s book is dedicated precisely to the question of the autonomy of aesthetic value (“Die Autonomie der ästhetischen Werte”).

understanding of the aesthetic process (which is precisely the cornerstone of the Formalist doctrine as well); but in Bakhtin's interpretation, the form-endowed art-work incorporates the cognitive and moral "layers" of the content without discarding them. Consequently, whereas for Bakhtin the aesthetic process is the crowning achievement on the edifice of human experience, for the Formalists the aesthetic act means putting an end to the pre-aesthetic realm, and the opening of an entirely autonomous domain.

This difference brings into sharper focus the specific usability of turn-of-the-century neo-Kantian theories and phenomenological theories of value in the thought of the young Bakhtin. Hermann Cohen's, Broder Christiansen's and Heinrich Rickert's respective insights were used by Bakhtin as key lever-ages to reposition the aesthetic realm *vis-à-vis* experiential reality, a move that enabled him to critique the Formalist doctrine from a conceptual vantage point. Inspired by Rickert, Bakhtin thus contends that the task of aesthetic activity is to super-evaluate the world in an act that would assimilate, rather than exclude, the rational and ethical identity of the world. To assert this all-encompassing capacity of aesthetic activity Bakhtin, in turn, needed Hermann Cohen's intervention, which made the boundaries between the three Kantian faculties more porous. With this framework, Bakhtin was then able to further elevate the aesthetic function by ascribing to it an integrative and overarching position among human faculties. All of this allows Bakhtin to juxtapose aesthetics, thus conceived, to the cognitive act, which "relates negatively to the preceding realities of [the ethical] act and aesthetic seeing" (SS 285), and asserts its specificity through negation.

The function of form in this arrangement is nothing short of essential; it is: to elevate the segments of the cognitively or ethically pre-ordered world onto a plane of personal assessment, or, to subject the old order of experience to a new, axiological unity asserted by the human (aesthetic) subject. Yet again, as Bakhtin's marginal remark in "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" suggests, the purpose of an individual formative act is not to "isolate" and invalidate the subsumed cognitive and ethical realities, but rather to incorporate them in a new, axiological form of unity. The function that is performed by the form-giving act far exceeds the scope of aesthetic debates: the form-giving act means the re-appropriation of the world, which had been articulated by acts of knowledge (science and philosophy) and morality (ethics). In other words, art fulfills its task of bringing together the worlds of mind and experience, nature and culture, individual and society, in a form-giving mental act. This task, interestingly, is very similar to the one Bakhtin set before art at the very outset of his philosophical path, in his programmatic 1919 article "Art and Responsibility," where he made an ardent plea for the unity of three "realms of human culture—science, life and art" by/within the redeemed, individually responsible human subject (SS 5–6).

It should be noted at this point, though, that philosophical discussion of the

conditions of aesthetic activity and the form-giving act *vis-à-vis* the neo-Kantian conceptions of two realities and three faculties dominates Bakhtin's account of form so convincingly that, paradoxically, it renders less relevant his polemics with the theoretical conceptions of the Russian Formalists. Moreover, the organicist pathos of Bakhtin's inquiry raises the question of whether, appearances notwithstanding, the real intention of his theory of form was to launch a philosophical critique of the Formalist aesthetics at all, or whether his discussion was aimed at something greater than that. Bakhtin's use of a neo-Kantian conceptual framework, his emphatic rejection of the ideas that language can be detached from the entirety of human experience and, ultimately, that literature may be methodologically independent (of systematic philosophy), in a way overshoot the purported target in order to cast a categorically negative verdict on the processes of singularization and individualization of the human sciences overall.

Indeed, Bakhtin's critique of the methodological insufficiencies of Russian Formalism, all of them caused by the alleged isolationism of their methodology, has limited effect. This is so not just because Bakhtin's critique was oftentimes unfair,<sup>31</sup> nor because the scholarly apparatus on which his arguments stand fails to comply even with the academic standards of his own time (let alone those of our time). His critique remains partial because it challenges the philosophical validity of one literary pragmatics, rather than the only pertinent aspect of this literary pragmatics—its own aesthetic viability. The crux of Bakhtin's discussion is not to demonstrate that the mechanism of estrangement is aesthetically ineffective, but to reveal this mechanism as inappropriate from the point of view of what he terms systematic, or philosophical aesthetics. In other words, for Bakhtin the question is not whether an aesthetic principle was aesthetically productive or not, but whether the question of aesthetic effectiveness was a relevant question at all. If Bakhtin's 1924 essay on artistic form is viewed in the context of his other early writings, most of which are permeated with the integralist view of human experience, the idea that the real target of Bakhtin's criticism was somehow more general gains in plausibility.

Profoundly inspired by the organicist vision of the human sciences and human experience as an integral whole, Bakhtin radically opposed the idea of the regionalization of the human sciences, the embodiment of which in the late imperial and early Soviet intellectual scene he traced in the intellectual practice of Russian Formalism. In the words of Max Weber, this diversifying

31. Bakhtin's theory of "overcoming of the material" has rightly been compared to that of Eikhenbaum (Grübel, "Der Russische" 2242–2243). More strikingly perhaps, in his 1921 essay "Rožanov," Viktor Shklovsky makes it clear that "[a] literary work is *pure form*. It is neither thing, nor *material* [...]" (189, emphasis added)—an argument that renders Bakhtin's critique all but ungrounded.

and localizing was a corollary of the process of the socio-economic stratification of Western societies. The continuous “intellectualization” of human society, Weber writes, brings about the “disenchantment” (*Entzauberung*) of the world, and human knowledge in the age of disenchantment no longer seeks to give answers to ultimate questions of “[w]hat shall we do and how shall we live” (*Readings* 326),<sup>32</sup> but turns “vocational” and dissociated into specific disciplines. The birthplace of the idea of the autonomy of the cultural domain lies precisely there, in the process of specialization of human knowledge, but, Weber believed, both these processes which facilitated the sea change in the epistemology of human sciences were crucially enabled by the advent of capitalism. Correspondingly, the earliest visible calls for the “disenchantment” of the human sciences arrive on Russian soil in the late imperial years, in the era of Russia’s only nascent, yet burgeoning, capitalism. The pledge for the autonomy of the cultural field, or, in the context relevant for our discussion, the idea that literature and the arts are autotelic domains with inherent principles of evaluation, should thus be seen as expressions *par excellence* of the general process of societal modernization. Weber’s words from *Sociology of Religion* are a pertinent commentary on the sociocultural climate of the Russian 1910s: the artistic emphasis on external content characterizes “unreflectively receptive” approaches to art, in contrast to which stands the pursuit of *uniquely aesthetic values*, which is characteristic of “intellectualist civilizations” (243). While aesthetic autonomy and the disciplinary dissociation of the humanities are reflected upon by Weber as unquestionable signs of societal modernization, Bakhtin in his early years uncompromisingly denounces the compartmentalization of human sciences and rejects the idea of uniquely aesthetic values as a contradiction in terms. The present article has charted the tools Bakhtin used to profess his critique of modernity, a critique which we may conclusively characterize as asynchronous. The socio-historical context of his engagement with the rising tide of modernity, as well as the distinct coincidences of thought outlined here, invite, indeed mandate, a more systematic future exploration of the relation of Bakhtin’s early epistemology to the intimations of Russian intellectual modernity of the 1910s and 1920s.

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32. On Weber’s views on aesthetic autonomy and on aesthetic formalism in particular see Scaff 14–17.

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#### Тезисы

Душан Радунович

О «вторичной эстетике, без изоляции»: Философские корни бахтинской теории формы

Тема данной статьи — социальные и философские предпосылки ранней концепции художественной формы Михаила Бахтина. Главным стремлением молодого Бахтина было отвергнуть в методологическом смысле концепцию «формы как материала», развиваемую его современниками — русскими формалистами. Бахтинская критика формалистской эстетики формы, которая получает наиболее развитое выражение в статье «К вопросам методологии эстетики словесного творчества» (1924), основана на предпосылках неокантианской философии, прежде всего, на эстетических концепциях Германна Когена и Бродера Христиансена. Из репертуара немецкого неокантианства Бахтин также заимствует свой ключевой аргумент — что эстетическая деятельность является «вторичным творчеством». В отличие от «первичных» актов познания и морального суждения, искусство «преднаходит» упорядоченную действительность, которая уже оценена познанием и этическим суждением. Таким образом, Бахтин утверждает, что художественное творчество является скорее переоценкой эмпирической действительности, чем прямым вторжением в эмпирическую действительность. При таком подходе художественная форма является существенным признаком/выражением вторичной, оценочной эстетической деятельности, фундаментально несводимой к познавательному и этически неопределяемому понятию материала. Наиболее значимым моментом бахтинской теории является понятие эстетического объекта. Скорее психическое, чем материальное понятие, эстетический объект является результатом формальной деятельности по преимуществу; таким образом, Бахтин считает именно эстетический объект сверхзадачей эстетического анализа. Статью завершает оценка резкой критики Бахтиным концепции эстетической автономии, развитой представителями русского формализма. Автор статьи заключает что, в соответствии с традиционными взглядами неокантианства на будущее гуманитарных наук, цель бахтинской критики идеи эстетической автономии, так же как и его критики формалистской эстетики формы — отрицание процесса модернизации и специализации научных дисциплин.