

## HUSSERL, BAKHTIN, AND THE OTHER I. OR: MIKHAIL M. BAKHTIN – A HUSSERLIAN?

CARINA PAPE

Ph.D. in Philosophy at Humboldt-University, Berlin.

Coordinator of the International Research Group RdpK (Russian-German Philosophical Research Group), Lectureship at the Humboldt-University, Berlin, 10117 Berlin, Germany.

E-mail: carina.pape@posteo.de

Mikhail Bakhtin aimed to invent a phenomenology of the self-experience and of the experience of the other in his early work. In order to realize such a phenomenology he combined different approaches he called idealism and materialism / naturalism. The first one he linked to Edmund Husserl, but did hardly name him directly concerning his phenomenology. Does this intersubjective phenomenology give a hint that Bakhtin used Husserlian ideas more than considered yet? Or did they both invent similar ideas independently from each other? Both thinkers dealt with the issue of intersubjectivity. Husserl judged statements on other psycho-physical realities as metaphysics in the *Logical Investigations II*, but in his *Ideas I* he described the others as enhancing one's experience through their "experiential surpluses". In the same way Bakhtin described the unique perspective of the other as a mandatory and valuable part of the world of the act in his *Philosophy of the Act* and his investigations on *Author and Hero*. In order to understand the influence of Husserl's phenomenology for Bakhtin's early philosophy we need to take a look closer at those contentual parallels as well as some paraphrases yet unnoticed. This gives hint for the question if for Bakhtin Husserl was more than just a name dropped. In this article I reconstructed the relations between both thinkers and answered the question if the dating of Bakhtin's early work until 1928 has to be re-considered.

*Key words:* Intersubjectivity, materialism, idealism, pluralism, life world, the other.

© CARINA PAPE, 2016

# ГУССЕРЛЬ, БАХТИН И ДРУГОЕ Я. ИЛИ: МИХАИЛ БАХТИН – ГУССЕРЛИАНЕЦ?

КАРИНА ПАПЕ

PhD в области философии, Берлинский университет им. Гумбольдта.  
Координатор международной исследовательской группы RdpK (Русско-Немецкая  
Философская Исследовательская Группа), преподаватель в Берлинском университете им.  
Гумбольдта, 10117 Берлин, Германия.  
E-mail: carina.pape@posteo.de

В своих ранних работах Михаил Бахтин стремился разработать феноменологию опыта себя и опыта другого. Для того, чтобы реализовать проект такой феноменологии, он совмещал разные подходы, которые он характеризовал как идеализм и материализм / натурализм. Первый он связывал с Эдмундом Гуссерлем, хотя почти не упоминал его в связи с его феноменологией. Указывает ли эта интерессубъективная феноменология на то, что Бахтин вдохновлялся идеями Гуссерля в большей мере, чем это принято считать? Или они оба пришли к близким идеям независимо друг от друга? Оба мыслителя заняты темой интерессубъективности. Во втором томе *Логических исследований* Гуссерль оценивал суждения о психо-физической реальности Другого как метафизические, однако уже с своих *Идеях I* он описывал Другого как того, кто расширяет наш опыт посредством привносимого им “избытка опыта”. Сходным образом Бахтин в трактате *К философии поступка* и в исследовании *Автор и герой* в эстетической деятельности описывал уникальную перспективу Другого как необходимую и ценную часть мира поступка. Для того чтобы понять влияние феноменологии Гуссерля на раннюю философию Бахтина нужно более подробно рассмотреть содержательное сходство их философии, равно как и некоторые ранее не замеченные текстуальные параллели. Это позволит наметить ответ на вопрос, был ли для Бахтина Гуссерль чем-то большим, чем вскользь упоминаемым именем. В этой статье я реконструирую отношения между двумя мыслителями и отвечаю на вопрос о том, должна ли быть пересмотрена датировка ранних работ Бахтина (до 1928).

*Ключевые слова:* Интерессубъективность, материализм, идеализм, плюрализм, жизненный мир, Другой.

## 1. BAKHTIN – A HUSSERLIAN?

Lately there has been a growing interest in the early philosophy of Mikhail M. Bakhtin (again)<sup>1</sup>. This philosophy mainly consists of the fragmentary manuscripts “Toward a Philosophy of the Act” (*K filosofii postupka*) and “Author and Hero in the Aesthetical Activity” (*Avtor i geroi v esteticheskoi deyatelnosti*). In these fragments

---

<sup>1</sup> For a broader description of this interest and the relation between the (“western”) philosophical tradition and Bakhtin’s early works, including Husserl, see: (Pape, 2015, 43-55; 73-121; Sasse, 2010).

Bakhtin emphatically claimed a *prima philosophia* (*pervaya filosofiya*), which only could be a “description, a phenomenology” of the world of acting (Bakhtin, 2011, 80-81; Bakhtin, 1996, 22, 42)<sup>2</sup>. But how “phenomenological” or more precisely how Husserlian is his phenomenology?

In a letter to his colleague Vadim V. Kozhinov from the 1960s Bakhtin explicated that Husserl’s phenomenological method was a “crucial influence” on his own work (Makhlin, 1997, 145). Research has not paid enough attention to this influence. Most studies are restricted to the Neo-Kantians (H. Cohen, M. Kagan) or to the philosophy of life, or they focus on H. Bergson, M. Merleau-Ponty, E. Levinas or M. Scheler (Erdinast-Vulcan, 2013; Poole, 2001). Only few studies have considered the phenomenological tradition to be important for Bakhtin’s theory anyway (Bernard-Donals, 2003), even less dealt with Husserl’s phenomenology as a direct inspiration for the *Philosophy of the Act* (Haardt, 2000, 219-221).

Phenomenology in general is understood as a method established or first expressed by Husserl, not as a “Husserlian school” (Staiti, 2010, 229). Gustav G. Shpet described the individual adaption in Russia in a letter to his mentor Husserl as follows: The “Ideas” had not been studied much so far, but almost everybody talked about phenomenology, even societies for phenomenological issues were founded (Cf. Haardt, 1992, 60). How important was the “crucial influence” for Bakhtin? In the “Philosophy of the Act” and “Author and Hero” Bakhtin used the terms *mir postupka* (world of the act) and *mir zhizni* (life world / Lebenswelt) synonymously. This might indicate that they were not written between 1919 and latest 1928, as suggested, but much later. Only then would a direct Husserlian influence on Bakhtin be possible. Or is the only reason for the use of the terms a similar development of concepts by both thinkers and a parallel reference to the philosophy of life of H. Bergson or W. Dilthey?

Even more illuminating than the term *life world* is the problem of intersubjectivity discussed by Bakhtin and Husserl. It illustrates parallels as well as differences between them. In his “Logical Investigations II” (*Logische Untersuchungen II*, 1901) Husserl still defined the “question on the right to assume other ‘psychological’ and ‘physical’ entities distinct from our own I” as a “metaphysical question” (Husserl, 1901, 20). Bakhtin wanted to solve this problem of the other I by a phenomenology combining the “self-experience” with the “experience

---

<sup>2</sup> All translations of German or Russian publications are mine, if not otherwise stated.

of the other” in “Author and Hero” (Bachtin, 2008, 150). He attributed the “phenomenology of the self-experience” to Husserl (Bachtin, 2008, 173). According to Bakhtin the other in his or her “unique uniqueness” (*edinstvennaya edinstvennost'*) is a vital part of our world, just as the I (Bachtin, 2011, 51; Bakhtin, 1996, 17). In the “Ideas I” (“Ideen I”) Husserl also attributed the others positively. Their “experiential surpluses” (“Erfahrungsüberschüsse”) enhance the shared “intersubjective natural environment” (“intersubjektiven natürliche Umwelt”) (Husserl, 1992a, 84).

I will show the meaning of Husserl’s thoughts for Bakhtin’s work by looking closer at such overlaps in their thoughts, which enhances our understanding of both thinkers, just as the individual “experiential surpluses” enhances our experienced intersubjective world.

## 2. PHENOMENOLOGY IS WHAT YOU MAKE OF IT

The Russians did not adapt phenomenology and especially Husserl’s methods word-for-word, but extended them creatively, according to the general approach to phenomenology (Staiti, 2010, 229). In Russia Shpet initiated a ‘phenomenological movement’ from 1906 on and translated the “Logical Investigations I” in 1909 (Haardt, 1992, 23-24; Dennes, 2010). After a prompt translation of the “Philosophy as Rigorous Science” no more translations followed, but the phenomenological movement persisted until the end of the 1920s (Haardt, 1992, 24). This is the period when Bakhtin wrote his philosophical works, before he turned to aesthetics and cultural science, dialogism and polyphony. And Husserl’s works might have been received independently from translations, because the philosophical education included “the lecture of German philosophical works” before 1917, as Alexander Haardt had pointed out (Haardt, 1992, 54).

There is some evidence that Bakhtin knew Husserl’s German writings or lectures. A reconstructed manuscript dealing with the “Bildungsroman” (German in the original) included an extensive reading list with sources in German (Emerson, 1997, 277). And in the famous interview with the philologist Viktor D. Duvakin from 1973 Bakhtin stated that he had learned the German language even before the Russian language because of his German nanny (Bakhtin, 2010, 26). Several terms in his early work are neologisms loaned from the German philosophical tradition (Brandist, 2002, 2). Anyway, in his published work Bakhtin did not express the crucial influence brought up in the letter. Husserl’s name is hardly mentioned in Bakhtin’s professional writing (Bachtin, 2008, 109; Bakhtin, 1996, 9). Bakhtin usually

did not express his sources and inspirations. He reasoned this waiver of “unnecessary baggage of references” in a later work: “the competent reader does not need them, for the incompetent reader they are useless” (Bakhtin, 1979, 95). We should pay some attention to this attitude and to the controversy on Bakhtin’s authenticity. The remark on competent and incompetent readers seems pretentious and excluding: Either you understand me or it is your problem. How can a person who normally propagated dialogue and the uniqueness of every individual hold such an opinion? I argue that though the remark *is* excluding it is not caused by academic arrogance, but by politics.

### 2.1 *To name or not to name – A side note on the “Cassirer scandal”*

It is well-known that the romantic German poet Jean Paul Richter owned a huge collection of handwritten quotations, called his slip boxes (Zettelkästen). He integrated these quotations (literally or paraphrased) into his own novels and let his characters do the same (Richter, 1974, 425). It was not well-known that Bakhtin had his own “Zettelkästen” and used them just like Richter until Brian Poole wrote about this, especially about the “Scheler-Notebooks” (Poole, 2001, 111-113). Bakhtin owned a collection of black notebooks in which he wrote down his own thoughts as well as parts of foreign works. The peak of the debate about the missing references was the so-called “Cassirer scandal”.

Bakhtin had translated full pages of Ernst Cassirer’s writings *literally into Russian* and integrated them into his book on François Rabelais and the culture of carnival without marking them as quotations (Poole, 1997). The authentic character of Bakhtin’s work was questioned. The research community was irritated. Poole marked almost with sarcasm: “No matter what we say, we’re still predicating Bakhtin’s name. He wrote it all – earlier and better than anyone else” (Poole, 2001, 109). However, I think the question is not about what Bakhtin wrote before “anyone else” and what not. The question is: *Why* did he translate *full pages*, including a complicated terminology and foreign grammar, *literally* from German into Russian and fit them in his own writing? Everybody who has tried it knows that it is much more work to translate something literally *and* readable instead of paraphrasing the main ideas. And it is much easier for readers to detect literal translations as plagiarism. Bakhtin’s behaviour does not seem reasonable. I assume that the remark mentioned above concerning competent and incompetent readers gives a hint and that Bakhtin *wanted* the unmarked quotation to be detected – but only by the

right people. In this sense the noticeable non-naming is akin to a secret language, only detectable by insiders – those who *knew* Cassirer's writings and *appreciated* them. This is more reasonable considering Bakhtin's situation. The "philosopher of dialogism remained without an answer himself for most time of his writing" (Sasse, 2010, 8). He entered a dialogue only in his circle of friends, known as the Bakhtin circle, interrupted by banishment. His writing brings to mind a time of oral tradition with no hope for a broader readership. Why should one mark quotations in this case anyway? And even if he might have thought about such a readership, there were good reasons not to explicate everything.

According to Caryl Emerson, in early 20th century Russia "every officially public or published text (by definition censored) has a 'more honest', multilayered, hidden subtext that only insiders can decode" (Emerson, 1997, 8). Bakhtin also used the so-called *aesopianisms* to avoid censorship and political repressions (Emerson, 1997, 8-10). This method of indirect reference is related to religious practices and was also used by authors in times of censorship, from the ancient world to renaissance and neo-humanism to the *fin de siècle*, neo-romanticism (M. Gorki, V. Nabokov), and the Russian "third renaissance" (Sapienzia, 2004; Makhlin, 1995). Keeping this in mind, it is striking that Bakhtin's (non-)referring changed according to the changing political circumstances. While we find foreign names and titles in the early conceptual works they appear less and less often in the later and systematically more elaborated works. And in the "Philosophy of the Act" and "Author and Hero" German thinkers like Kant, Husserl, Cohen and the Marburg School are almost predominant, though they are only mentioned critically when named explicitly. In the later writings we do not find their names anymore, but their positions integrated in Bakhtin's statements unmarked.

Bakhtin got in trouble with the Soviet regime several times. In November 1918 he had provoked the regime by participating in public discussions with the topic "God and Socialism". A reviewer of the journal "Molot" ("The Hammer") labeled him "distinctively pejorative as a conservative, partly opaque lecturer, who does not reject religion, but criticized Socialism, because it does not honor the dead" (Sasse, 2010, 23–24). In 1929 he was arrested and was exiled to Kostanay (Kazakhstan). Emerson pointed out that Bakhtin had to acquire several strategies and "protective skills" and nobody will ever know in which capacity these skills had an impact on his main ideas and texts (Emerson, 1997, 8).

Bakhtin submitted a dissertation with the title "Rabelais and the Folk Culture of the Middle Ages and Renaissance" ("Tvorchestvo Fransua Rable i narodnaya

kul'tura srednevekov'ya i Renessansa") to the Maxim Gorky Literature Institute, Moscow, in 1940, but because of the controversial ideas discussed within the work Bakhtin was denied his doctorate. After revising the book he got the title "kandidat nauk" (Ph.D.) in 1951. The dissertation was not published before 1965, fundamentally revised, and is available today as "Rabelais and his World". It is obvious that similar to the case of the book on Fyodor Dostoyevsky (first edition 1929, revised second edition 1963) the political situation had a greater influence than the scientific standards. Today no one knows if Cassirer's ideas were already used in the first text on Rabelais and if they were marked as quotations. But the quotations from western thinkers *might* have been a reason for the rejection and that might have been a reason for Bakhtin not to name Cassirer in the later text, but mark his thoughts through the word-for-word translation.

Of course, these are just hypotheses. However, although paraphrasing would have been the better opportunity for plagiarism, the literal adoption created a much more decodable subtext. I am convinced that Bakhtin used the one-to-one translation to create a subtext which refers to Cassirer for insiders – his philosophical colleagues – without explicit references, detectable for the censors. Such aesopianism makes it difficult to detect sources of his writings.

### 3. HUSSERL & BAKHTIN

The term "phenomenology" appears only two times in the "Philosophy of the Act". In "Author and Hero" Bakhtin used it to describe aesthetic phenomena and especially the relationship between the heroes and the author / reader. Though this approach is focused on literature, the literary phenomena are used as phenomenological models of the life world resp. the world of the act. Thereby Bakhtin invented the phenomenology of the experience of the self and the other mentioned above (Bakhtin, 2008, 150). During the 1910s the problem of the other I became a "cardinal question of the Russian philosophy". The debate's sources in Germany were the works of Wilhelm Dilthey and Alexander Pfänder (Bakhtin, 2008, 306). Husserl also started questioning intersubjectivity around this time (Husserl, 1973). However, his analysis became systematic and was published first in "The Paris Lectures" (1929) and the "Cartesian Meditations", published in France in 1931. Anyway, he already dealt with the other I to some extent in the "Ideas I" (1913), which may have been known to Bakhtin. With this in mind I will first concentrate on implicit parallels in the thoughts of both thinkers and then take a closer look at some paraphrases I found.

#### 4. FIGHTING GENERALTHESIS AND THEORETIZM

Bakhtin and Husserl both criticized the approaches of their contemporaries, psychologism and physicalism / materialism (Bachtin, 2011, 76-77). Husserl described the “transcendental psychological experience as incidental and relative” (Husserl, 1992a, 105), just as Bakhtin described the “life fallen apart from answerability” as “fundamentally incidental and unrooted” (Bachtin, 2011, 117). According to Bakhtin one cannot “catch” the act (postupok) itself through the approaches of theoretical thinking, historical description, or aesthetic intuition. All these approaches are guilty of what he called “theoretizm”.

Bakhtin’s concept of the “postupok” is manifold: “everything, even a thought and a feeling, is my act” (Bachtin, 2011, 39). Bakhtin described the world of the act as “sobytie bytiya”. In *written* form this means “event of being”, emphasizing the process-like nature of the world of experience. But the spoken term “so-bytie” has another connotation: “with-being”. Though this is incorrect in terms of grammar, it reminds us of the neologisms, which were quite common as an emphasis in philosophy at the beginning of the 20th century (e.g. Martin Heidegger). This strange “with-being of being” was taken as a hint to interpret Bakhtin’s concept as a philosophy of participation and dialogue which only “can take place between the I and the other” (Bachtin, 2011, 24). One needs the complete and rich dimension of the (spoken) word to express the act (postupok) as part of this event of being or being-as-event, as Bakhtin remarked (Bachtin, 2011, 80). This spoken word’s “emotional-volitional” directionality (Bachtin, 2011, 51) may refer to Husserl’s *intentionality* already.

Bakhtin agreed with Husserl’s assumption that the world should be accessed free of pre-judices (Vormeinungen) and “idealizing fictions” (idealisierende Fiktionen) (see: Husserl, 1913, 72; Husserl, 1992a, 52; see as well: 35). Those prejudices might be “scientific prejudices” or unquestioned everyday attitudes, based on the “Generalthesis” (general thesis) (Husserl, 1992a, 52): the unswerving belief that the world exists and I am a part of it. All the other scientific judgments I make and all my private-pragmatic decisions build upon this general thesis. If I would no longer believe that the world exists, I would not do anything. In the *phenomenological reduction* (Époche) Husserl wanted to put this thesis and all other prejudices in “parentheses”. We cannot *delete* them, but we can concentrate on how they *influence* our experience of things as phenomena. Scientific prejudices are “idealizing fictions”, because they assume an “intrinsic givenness, which exists independent from



us” (Möckel, 1998, 93). This is not congruent with reality. Bakhtin quite similarly argued that the “sense of being, for which my unique place in being is judged as meaningless”, would never understand *me* (Bachtin, 2011, 56). Like the “early Husserl”, Bakhtin’s ontology did not question being *per se*, which exists without us, but being *as event*, for which we (as its participants) are absolutely necessary. The first mode of this participating experience is “I-for-myself”.

In “Author and Hero” Bakhtin criticized a lack of epistemological reflection and “pure idealism”: “The ‘I-for-myself’ was solved in the ‘I-for-the-other’” (Bachtin, 2008, 109). How is this compatible with the critique of “theoretizm”? Bakhtin put Husserl’s name in parentheses behind “pure idealism”. The contrary position is named “naturalism”, the predomination of the body and the other in classical arts, but this is an implicit critique as well of materialism and contemporary Soviet philosophy. Bakhtin tried to bridge the gap between both with his pluralist position, already anticipating his later dialogism. His so-called idealism (equated with Husserl) is judged as incomplete without the materialist position just as the other way around. Both positions are theoretical reductions of the “two parts of the association of I and other” (Makhlin, 1997, 142)<sup>3</sup>.

It is striking that, though the other is important, only the “I” is part of all three “architectonical moments” of the being as event: “I-for-myself”, “I-for-the-other”, and “the-other-for-me”. In the “Philosophy of the Act” Bakhtin explicated: “I-for-myself am the center of the source of the act, [...] because it is the only place where I responsibly take part in the unique being” (Bachtin, 2008, 123). Everything else would be “idealizing fiction”, in Husserl’s words. The question on the act is always the question on *my* act. When I think of the other, the world, or the being without me I necessarily cross the border between the realm of being and acting and the sphere of theory, of pure possibility – where I could imagine almost everything, including unicorns. I lose my unique place as a participant in the being as event. Bakhtin called this my “alibi-in-being”, a “document without signature, obliging nobody to anything” (Bachtin, 2008, 100). In the theoretical world every value of a two-part constellation becomes disposable and therefore the negation of my uniqueness for the being as event implies the “loss of the uniqueness of the being as event” – but “such a being cannot grow, cannot live” (Bachtin, 2008, 56).

---

<sup>3</sup> “‘Идеализм’ и ‘материализм’, на феноменологическом уровне, суть два типа конкретного переживания мира и, соответственно, две ‘теоретизированных’ редукции к одному из членов корреляции я – Д.”

Thus, similar to Husserl Bakhtin propagated the importance of the I, a concrete I – i.e. me. Therefore Husserl was more than a name dropped in Bakhtin’s “phenomenology”. Though Bakhtin did not explicate Husserl’s influence or did not name the method of the Epoché the influence of this approach is obvious. Bakhtin admitted that a full equivalence between the described experience and the description is impossible (Bachtin, 2011, 80), but he judged the self-critical phenomenological approach to the *things themselves, as they appear to me* as the best compromise (Bachtin, 2011, 39). However, these connections also illustrate the difficulties concerning Bakhtin’s sources. Husserl is named only once in the “Philosophy of the Act”: “The ought does not result from the epistemological definition of truth [pravda] at all, this part is absolutely not included in this definition and cannot be deduced from it; it can only be brought from outside (Husserl)” (Bachtin, 2011, 38).

This reference proves Bakhtin’s direct or indirect knowledge of the “Logical Investigations I” and its influence on his own writing, because there Husserl wrote quite similarly: “It is a consequence of formal logic that ought and not-ought are mutually exclusive; and the same goes for the statement that judgments about the ought do not include postulates about a corresponding being”. (Husserl, 1913, 42)<sup>4</sup> Besides the named parallels, mainly paraphrases like this prove Bakhtin’s adaption of Husserlian ideas, but only this single paraphrase is remarked on in the “Philosophy of the Act”.

##### 5. PURE CONSCIOUSNESS VERSUS PARTICIPATING CONSCIOUSNESS

For Bakhtin not the (idealistic) “epistemological part” of the “I-for-myself” is of peculiar interest, but the “concrete experience of my own being as subject and the total unexploitedness of the object” (Bachtin, 2008, 93). Bakhtin did not accompany Husserl in moving from “individual intuition” to “substantial intuition” (Wesensschauung) and “substantial possibility” (Wesensmöglichkeit) (Husserl, 1992a, 10), as Alexander Haardt has pointed out (Haardt, 2002, 132). Like “most Russian phenomenologists” (Haardt, 1992, 220) Bakhtin was skeptical towards Husserl’s approach to the “substantial universalities” (Wesensallgemeinheiten) in the “Ideas”

---

<sup>4</sup> “Daß sich Sollen und Nichtsollen ausschließen, ist eine formal-logische Konsequenz der interpretierenden Aussagen, und dasselbe gilt von dem Satze, daß Urteile über ein Sollen keine Behauptung über ein entsprechendes Sein einschließen” (Husserl, 1913, 42).

(Husserl, 1992a, 9). Lev Shestov, for example, criticized Husserl for “generalizing the truth” and thereby “relativizing human life” (Shchedrina, 2011, 120; see as well: Pape / Kolkutina, 2013, 47). And Gustav Shpet pointed out that the pure consciousness resulting from the phenomenological reduction is a consciousness “so to speak of nobody” (Shchedrina, 2011, 118). To whom might it be relevant then? Bakhtin as well was not interested in a possible generalization of individual experience, but he partly adapted Husserl’s transcendental approach. Husserl emphasized that

experiencability never means an empty logical possibility, but is motivated from the experiential context. [...] Every actual experience points beyond itself to other possible experiences, which themselves point to new possible ones, and so on *in finitum*. And all this happens according to substantial rules, bound to a priori cases. (Husserl, 1992a, 89-90)

Bakhtin adopted this direction to the future in his hermeneutics later, especially the “stages of the dialogical movement of understanding”, concerning the word and the human being equally, for both are located in a network between past and future meanings resp. actions (Bachtin, 1979, 354-355). He emphasized the unique position of the concrete I, detected as missing in idealism (Bachtin, 2011, 104-105), as well as the unique relation to the concrete other. The mentioned “unexploitedness of the object” differs essentially from a “pure objectness of the other human being”, therefore it corrects the Idealistic position: “even I for myself – a unique human being – am no absolute I” (Bachtin, 2008, 93). In the “Philosophy of the Act” Bakhtin already emphasized that the “centrality of my unique participation in being [... is] not at all the centrality of a positive value, for which everything else in the world is nothing more than a functional approach” (Bachtin, 2011, 123). The “positive value” is meant as a quasi-mathematical value (1), for which everything else is simply: not me (0).

Even if we do not join in the accusation of solipsism against Husserl (see: Theunissen, 1965, 153) – Bakhtin’s approach essentially transcends Husserl’s possible implicit “social relatedness of every individual I to a plurality of possible other Is” (Möckel, 1998, 204; Adler, 1936, 90-92). Bakhtin *theoretically* assumed a pure consciousness, an “absolute I”, but it differs from being – being me – as the theoretical knowledge of a physician about the hormone chaos called “love” differs from the experience of my first lovesickness. The knowledge is only one possible part, absolutely not identical with the actual experience. And to experience us in completeness and as a unity we need the other, because some values (concerning us) would not be part of our world without them. Some aspects are only given to me

through the eyes of the other. These aspects make my life complete as a human one. Bakhtin described these “transgredient moments, i.e. the potential value awareness of the other” in “Author and Hero” under the heading “outside-situatedness” (Bachtin, 2008, 203):

The ever-present plus of my perception, knowledge, and ability concerning every other human being is based on the uniqueness and irreplaceability of my place in the world; because in this place, at this time, and under these circumstances I am the only one; all other humans are outside of me. (Bachtin, 2008, 77)

The other owns the same plus of perception concerning me. This idea is influenced by some lectures of the Russian avant-gardist painter and art historian Kazimir Malevich (Bachtin, 2011, 13), but it is also anticipated by Husserl and his “other Is, seeing better and farer” (Husserl, 1992a, 98) resp. his “I-plurality” (Ichmehrheit), which may enhance my world of experience through their “experiential surpluses (Erfahrungsüberschüsse) (Husserl, 1992a, 84). Bakhtin adopted this plurality and adapted it in a paraphrase (b) of the “Ideas” § 29 about the “other I-subjects and the intersubjective natural environment” (a):

a) Everything that is valid concerning me is also valid, as I know, concerning all the other humans I find existing in my environment. Experiencing them as humans I understand and tolerate them as I-subjects, like myself, and as directed to their natural environment; but as follows: I perceive my environment and their environment as one and the same world, which only is aware for us in a different manner. *Everyone has his own place*, from where he experiences the given things, and therefore everyone has *different phenomena / appearance of things* [Dingerscheinungen]. Also, the actual fields of perception, memory, and so on are different for everyone, aside from the fact that even the intersubjectively shared parts of conscious are aware in a different manner, different kinds of perception, different degrees of clarity, and so on. (Husserl, 1992a, 51-52, emphasis mine)<sup>5</sup>

b) The mandatory actual face of the event is defined *from my unique place*. As a consequence, there are as many *different worlds of the event* as there are individual centers of answerability and unique participating subjects [...]. *Therefore, the acknowledged value, the emotional-volitional picture of the world, is one for me and*

---

<sup>5</sup> “All das, was von mir selbst gilt, gilt auch, wie ich weiß, für alle anderen Menschen, die ich in meiner Umwelt vorhanden finde. Sie als Menschen erfahrend, verstehe und nehme ich sie hin als Ichsubjekte, wie ich selbst eins bin, und als bezogen auf ihre natürliche Umwelt. Das aber so, daß ich ihre und meine Umwelt objektiv als eine und dieselbe Welt auffasse, die nur für uns alle in verschiedener Weise zum Bewußtsein kommt. *Jeder hat seinen Ort*, von wo aus er die vorhandenen Dinge sieht, und demgemäß hat jeder *verschiedene Dingerscheinungen*. Auch sind *für jeden die aktuellen Wahrnehmungs-, Erinnerungsfelder usw. verschiedene*, abgesehen davon, daß selbst das intersubjektiv darin gemeinsam Bewußte in verschiedenen Weisen, in verschiedenen Auffassungsweisen, Klarheitsgraden usw. bewußt ist.” This part of the paper is an enhanced version of a chapter in my dissertation (Pape, 2015, 86-101).

*for somebody else it is another one. [...] The truth of the event is not an identical content truth, but the one and only right position of every participant, the truth of his / her concrete ought. (Bachtin, 2011, 101-102, emphasis mine; Bachtin, 1996, 42)<sup>6</sup>*

Alexander Haardt pointed out that the “plurality of perspectives” postulated by Husserl corresponds to a similar concept of “actuality”: Actuality “is always depicted as a correlate of a specific access to it” (Haardt, 2002, 132). Bakhtin shared this assumption, but his fixing points of the pluralist actuality differed from Husserl’s. Bakhtin’s concept of the I is similar to Husserl’s, but he did not agree with the idea of an alien-I (Fremd-Ich): “Nothing in being is I for me, except myself. In the whole being I only experience myself as an I – in the total emotional-volitional sense of the word –; all other (theoretical) Is are not I for me”. (Bachtin, 2011, 95)

Such theoretical Is are not completely unimportant for some aspects of my being-human, especially for my cognitive activity. However, the assumption of another I does negate the difference between me and the other, just like the cognitive activity in general (Bachtin, 2008, 77). But Bakhtin aims for the unique, concrete, and not disposable I – for *me*. The participating consciousness is exactly no “consciousness in itself, no scientific consciousness, no epistemological subject” (Bachtin, 2011, 40). The difference itself manifests in the role of corporality, which also illustrates the difference between the I and the other, who can impossibly take my physical and temporal place in being:

When we look at each other, two different worlds reflect in the pupils of our eyes. Taking an appropriate constellation, we could minimize this horizons’ difference to a minimum. But one would have to merge with each other, become one single human, to eliminate this difference. (Bachtin, 2008, 77)

And this would even not be useful, because the event would lose its plurality of perspectives. We would be nothing more than “one”, which in this case would be equal with “zero”. Bernhard Waldenfels has remarked that we never “come to rest in our body as if we were the owners of ourselves, but [...] exactly this restlessness keeps us lively” (Waldenfels, 2006, 91). In this sense, Vitalii Makhlin remarked that Bakhtin’s “creative otherness of the others – the mother, the family, the school, the generation, the nation, the tradition, the social environment – defines the valued and

---

<sup>6</sup> “[...] сколько индивидуальных центров ответственности, единственных участных СУБЪЕКТОВ, а их бесконечное множество, столько разных миров события [...]” (Bachtin, 1996, 42).

meaningful aspects of the consciousness and the self-consciousness of the human” (Makhlin, 1997, 143)<sup>7</sup>.

Anyway, it is impossible to delete the difference of horizons, except as pure *thinkable possibility* – in the same way unicorns *are* thinkable. The double perspective of the human world of perception is already fundamental in Bakhtin’s “Philosophy of the Act”, while yet absent in Husserl’s early (published) works (Bachtin, 2011, 144). Though Bakhtin pointed out the achievements of the self-critical questioning of one’s own cognitive possibilities, already implemented in the idealistic tradition, he judged them as only half the story (Bachtin, 2011, 49). To mistake this half the story as the full story is what he called *theoretizm*. Husserl’s “pure consciousness” would be judged by Bakhtin in the end as another “document without signature, obliging nobody to anything” (Bachtin, 2008, 100). But what about the other?

## 6. TOLERATED PLURALITY VERSUS NECESSARY PLURALITY

Husserl wrote: “Everything that is valid concerning me is also valid, as I *know*, concerning all the other humans” (Husserl, 1992a, 51, emphasis mine). But – *do* I know? Bakhtin instead built on a philosophical tradition according to which “nothing but *belief* proves the existence of another soul” (Bachtin, 2008, 105; 306 footnote 170, emphasis mine).

While Bakhtin had insisted on the others’ importance and their “unique uniqueness” already in his early philosophy (Bachtin, 2011, 142), Husserl explicated the position of the other (“Is”) in his “Ideas” only in the one paragraph above and otherwise only mentioned it in passing (Cf. Husserl, 1992a, 68, 84, 98, 103). The Epoché is “substantially tied to one perceiving subject” (Husserl, 1992a, 317). The other is secondary. Though I need the experiential surpluses of the “other Is, seeing better and farer” (Husserl, 1992a, 98), to get to the intersubjective world as “the correlate of the intersubjective experience, i.e. experience facilitated through ‘empathy’” (Husserl, 1992a, 317) – Husserl was mainly interested in what the other may be *to me*. In his “Cartesian Meditations” he came back to that and pointed out how complicated and multifaceted the “phenomenological task” is. He referred to the intersubjective experience as a nested experience, reminding me of a story-within-

---

<sup>7</sup> “[...] продуктивная дружба Д. – матери, семьи, школы, поколения, нации, традиций, социального окружения – существенно определяет ценностные и смысловые моменты сознания и самосознания человека [...]” (Makhlin, 1997, 143).

a-story (for example “One Thousand and One Nights” or G. Chaucer’s “Canterbury Tales”):

E.g. the others I experience [...] namely as world objects on the one hand; [...] On the other hand I experience them as subjects to this world, as experiencing the world themselves, one and the same world I experience myself, and experiencing me as well – me as I experience them and the others. (Husserl, 1992b, 93)

This indeed seems quite complicated. Bernhard Waldenfels pointed out that the own and the alien (*das Fremde*) are nested and intertwined, insofar as I perceive myself from my own inside and “from somewhere else” at the same time (Waldenfels, 2006, 87). I can concretely experience this kind of double-perspective Bakhtin called the I-for-myself and the I-for-the-other when I look in the mirror and see myself through the eyes of an abstract or possible other. And somehow I always do that. Even when I am *on my own* and look at my reflection in a mirror – “I am *not alone*” (Bakhtin, 2008, 168, emphasis mine): A possible other is looking back, for example my beloved when I get ready before a date. And I am quite sure that one would lose the need to look in a mirror pretty much if there were no other humans and thereby no possible others looking at me anymore.

I also experience the other in two ways, as a (material) object (a body) and as another subject or agent, who is experiencing me. This means that, in fact, Husserl’s *knowledge* about the other I actually is an *experience* of the other through me and thereby the approach, Bakhtin named “phenomenology of the self-experience” (Bakhtin, 2008). This is similar to what I mentioned above as the idealistic position distinguished from the materialist one and the “phenomenology of the experience of the other”. For Husserl there was only one main center, the “I”; for Bakhtin there was a (*theoretically*) endless number of equal centers of the event of being, experienced by me *concretely* as a concrete “I” (me) and a concrete “other” (you). He explained the difference between the “I” and the “other” as follows: “The inner life of the other I experience as his soul, inside of me I live in my mind” (Bakhtin, 2008, 173). The soul is “fundamentally formed” or completed (Bakhtin, 2008, 166), while my self-experience in my mind is an ongoing vivid process.

The main difference between Bakhtin’s and Husserl’s position is Husserl’s assumption of a theoretical “I-plurality”, while Bakhtin did not negate it, but focused on the non-theoretical, more than just possible, but concrete, experienced, and unique I and other. From this follows equally that I for myself can never be not me and that the other can never be a concrete “I” (me) for me – not in the “total emotional-volitional sense of the word” (Bakhtin, 2011, 95). Bakhtin’s basic

assumption is a “double perspective of the valuable determination of the world” (Bakhtin, 2011, 144): for and from me and for and from the other.

## 7. CONCLUSION: BAKHTIN’S PHENOMENOLOGY

Bakhtin’s early work is – with Alexander Haardt’s words concerning the Russian philosophy between 1914 and 1930 in general – a “constructive adaptation of Husserl’s phenomenology” (Haardt, 1992, 60). But for Bakhtin Husserl and his phenomenology is more than just a name dropped or a temporary fashion, as illustrated by the paraphrases detected above. They give proof of Bakhtin’s knowledge of the “Ideas” and the “Logical Investigations”, but what about the parallels (and differences) concerning intersubjective questions?

The “Philosophy of the Act” and “Author and Hero” are only present as fragmentary manuscripts; both begin in mid-sentence. The “Philosophy of the Act” announces four parts to follow, describing “the architectonics of the actual” experienced world, the aesthetic activity as an act [postupok], “not based on its product, but starting from the standpoint of the author, who participates answerably in the life world”, the ethics of politics, and the ethics of religion (Bakhtin, 2011, 114-115). These chapters did not survive or were never written. Nevertheless, the manuscript can be read as a (long) introductory chapter to a book unwritten and “Author and Hero” can be read as the announced second part of this book (Cf. Makhlin, 1997, 144-145). Bakhtin was quoted as saying “this is my philosophical anthropology” when the two fragments were recovered from an old suitcase in 1971 (Bakhtin, 1996, 351). Both include an analysis of a poem by Alexander Pushkin (Bakhtin, 2011, 132-142; Bakhtin, 2008, 38-49). Both descriptions and interpretations of the poem are very *similar*, but not literally *identical*. Compared to each other directly, “Author and Hero” seems to be a reworked version of the “Philosophy of the Act’s” possible second chapter to me.

Amongst others, Michael Holquist has argued for an early dating of the “Philosophy of the Act”, between 1919 and 1921 (Bakhtin, 1993, viii). Brian Poole has remarked on the relations between Bakhtin’s publications, notes, and letters which might indicate that Bakhtin instead worked on the manuscript into the late 1920s (Poole, 2001). However, we know that Bakhtin gave a lecture on “Hero and Author in the Artistic Activity” and wrote “Author and Hero” related to this after 1924 (1924-1926) (Cf. Sasse, 2010, 217). Another hint is the micro-article “Art and Answerability”, published in 1919. Considering the development of style and ideas



I suppose the “Philosophy of the Act” to have been written after this, but before “Author and Hero”, i.e. between 1919 and 1924 (latest 1926). As mentioned, Husserl started working on intersubjective questions around the same time (Husserl, 1973), but his investigations were not published before 1929 (“The Paris Lectures”) resp. 1931 (“Cartesian Meditations”).

Assuming the two Bakhtinian manuscripts as one project worked out between 1919 and 1926, the late Husserlian ideas cannot be adopted in Bakhtin’s “phenomenology of the self-experience and the experience of the other human” (Bachtin, 2011, 80-81; Bachtin, 2008, 150). Nevertheless, Husserl’s early works, especially the “Ideas I” (1913) and the “Logical Investigations I” (1900), indeed *were* the inspiration for one half of this method: the “phenomenology of the self-experience” attributed to Husserl explicitly (Bachtin, 2008, 173). Bakhtin combined these approaches with the opposite position, called “naturalist” or “materialist” by him (Bachtin, 2008, 173). Thereby he came to quite similar remarks like Husserl some years later. For example Husserl’s simple, but fundamental observation in “Crisis” (1936) that “nobody can experience death” (Husserl, 1992b, 332)<sup>8</sup> and Bakhtin’s remark that only the other “is able to be and not to be for me. I am always with myself, for me there is no life possible without me” (Bachtin, 2008, 168).

Both thinkers had a very similar starting point – fighting against the “Generalthesis”, scientific pre-judices, and “theoretizm”. However, with his “radical overcoming of the modern transcendental paradigm” (Shchittsova, 2003, 7), a paradigm which can be found in Kant’s and Husserl’s work, Bakhtin overcame Husserl’s early work by picking up the Russian debate about the “other I” mentioned above. The parallels and differences between both thinkers show them to be children of their time *and* individuals. They participated in the *same event* of being, but with *differing perspectives*.

## REFERENCES

- Adler, M. (1936). *Das Rätsel der Gesellschaft. Zur erkenntnis-kritischen Grundlegung der Sozialwissenschaft*. Wien: Saturn.
- Bachtin, M. (1979). *Die Ästhetik des Wortes*. Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp.
- Bakhtin, M. (1993). *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Austin: Texas University Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1996). K filosofii postupka [Toward a Philosophy of the Act]. In Bakhtin, M. *Sobranie sochinenii v semi tomakh. Tom 1*. [Collected Works. Seven Volumes. Vol. 1]. Moscow: IMLI. (in Russian).

---

<sup>8</sup> “Den Tod kann niemand an sich erfahren – aber wie erfährt man ihn an anderen?” (Husserl, 1992b, 332)

- Bachtin, M. (2008). *Autor und Held in der ästhetischen Tätigkeit*. Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp.
- Bakhtin, M. (2010). Besedy s V. D. Duvakinym [Talks with V. D. Duvakin]. In V. L. Makhlin (Ed.), *Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (23–33)*. Moscow: ROSSPEN. (in Russian).
- Bachtin, M. (2011). *Zur Philosophie der Handlung*. Berlin: Matthes & Seitz.
- Bernard-Donals, M. (2003). Mikhail Bakhtin. Between Phenomenology and Marxism. In M. Gardiner (Ed.), *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Vol. 1). London: SAGE.
- Brandist, C. (2002). *The Bakhtin Circle. Philosophy, Culture and Politics*. London: Pluto.
- Dennes, M. (2010). Vliyanie fenomenologii E. Gusserlya na rossiiskuyu nauku 1910–1920-kh godov [Husserl's Phenomenology and its Impact on Russian Science in 1910–1920]. *Psikhologicheskije Issledovaniya* [Psychological Studies], 14 (6). Retrieved from <http://psystudy.ru/index.php/num/2010n6-14/408-dennes14.html>. (in Russian).
- Emerson, C. (1997). *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Erdinast-Vulcan, D. (2013). *Between Philosophy and Literature. Bakhtin and the Question of the Subject*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Haardt, A. (1992). *Husserl in Rußland. Phänomenologie der Sprache und Kunst bei Gustav Špet und Aleksej Losev*. München: Fink.
- Haardt, A. (2000). Michail Bachtin – ein Phänomenologe der Intersubjektivität? *Phänomenologische Forschungen. Neue Folge*, 5, 217-229.
- Haardt, A. (2002). Drugoi i ego vizavi: Interpersonal'nye otnosheniya v literature i v mire zhizni u Bakhtina i Sartra [The Other and His vis-à-vis: Interpersonale Relations in Literature and Life World in Bakhtin's and Sartre's Works]. *Proceedings of the Conference on Russian Philosophy in the Post Soviet Era* (129-146). Bremen. (in Russian).
- Husserl, E. (1901). *Logische Untersuchungen. Zweiter Teil. Untersuchungen zur Phänomenologie und Theorie der Erkenntnis*. Halle: Max Niemeyer.
- Husserl, E. (1913). *Logische Untersuchungen 1. Prolegomena zur reinen Logik*. Halle: Max Niemeyer.
- Husserl, E. (1973). *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität. Texte aus dem Nachlass Erster Teil: 1905–1920* (Hua XIII). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Husserl, E. (1992a). *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie*. Hamburg: Meiner.
- Husserl, E. (1992b). *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie. Ergänzungsband. Texte aus dem Nachlass 1934–1937* (Hua XXIX). Den Haag: Kluwer.
- Makhlin, V. (1995). Tretii Rennans [The Third Renaissance]. In K. G. Isupov (Ed.), *Bakhtinologiya. Issledovaniya, perevody, publikatsii* [Bakhtinology. Research, Translations, Publications] (132-154). St. Petersburg: Aleteiya. (in Russian).
- Makhlin, V. (1997). Drugoi [The Other]. In N. D. Tamarchenko (Ed.), *Bakhtinskii tezaurus. Materialy i issledovaniya* [Bakhtin's Glossary. Proceedings and Research] (141-148). Moscow: RGGU. (in Russian).
- Möckel, C. (1998). *Einführung in die transzendente Phänomenologie*. München: UTB.
- Pape, C., & Kolkutina, V. (2013). Philosophie in Russland und in Deutschland. *Philosophischer Literaturanzeiger*, 66 (1), 41-77.
- Pape, C. (2015). *Autonome Teilhaftigkeit und teilhaftige Autonomie. Der Andere in Michail M. Bachtins Frühwerk*. München: Fink.
- Poole, B. (1997). Bakhtin and Cassirer: The Philosophical Origins of Bakhtin's Carnival Messianism. *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 97 (¾), 537-578.
- Poole, B. (2001). From Phenomenology to Dialogue. Max Scheler's Phenomenological Tradition and Mikhail Bakhtin's Development from "Toward a Philosophy of the Act" to His Study

- of Dostoevsky. In K. Hirschkop (Ed.), *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory* (109-135). Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Richter, J. P. F. (1974). *Siebenkäs. Sämtliche Werke* (Bd.1-2). München: Carl Hanser.
- Sapienza, F. (2004). Mikhail Bakhtin, Vyacheslav Ivanov and the Rhetorical Culture of the Russian Third Renaissance. *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 37 (2), 123-142.
- Sasse, S. (2010). *Michail Bachtin zur Einführung*. Hamburg: Junius.
- Shchedrina, T. (2011). Die ethische Dimension der Erkenntnis in der russischen Philosophie: Nikolaj Berdjaev – Gustav Špet – Lev Šestov. In A. Haardt & N. Plotnikov (Eds.), *Das normative Menschenbild in der russischen Philosophie* (113-125). Münster: LIT.
- Shchittsova, T. (2003). Das menschliche Ereignis in der Philosophie von M. Bachtin. In H. R. Sepp (Ed.), *Essays in Celebration of the Founding of the Organization of Phenomenological Organizations*. Retrieved from <http://www.o-p-o.net/essays/ShchittsovaArticle.pdf>
- Staiti, A. (2010). Phänomenologie. In H.-H. Gander (Ed.), *Husserl-Lexikon* (229-235). Darmstadt: WBG.
- Theunissen, M. (1965). *Der Andere*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Waldenfels, B. (2006). *Grundmotive einer Phänomenologie des Fremden*. Frankfurt a. Main: Suhrkamp.