Barthes, Bakhtin, Structuralism: A Reassessment
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Barthes, Bakhtin, Structuralism:
A Reassessment

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Abstract:

The thesis is a comparative analysis of the shared ideas and concerns in the works of Mikhail Bakhtin and Roland Barthes from the point of view of differences between French and Slavic literary structuralisms. Its background argument is that the structuralism developed in the later works of the Russian Formalists and by Prague Structuralists and Soviet Semioticians is more historically and socially oriented than its French version, defining the structure of a literary work as a system of all of its elements and effects (even those that take us outside of the text, like literary tradition and historical and political circumstances). In this sense, Bakhtin can be seen as a part of the Slavic structuralist tradition (and not opposed to it as is often claimed), and Barthes (seen throughout his career) is on the whole perhaps closer to the Slavic structuralism than he is to the French.

The particular problems discussed are those of the relationship between literature and ideology, the notions of intertextuality, heteroglossia, dialogism and polyphony and the differences between them, and the role of the author.

Barthes and Bakhtin shared a lifelong interest in the role of ideology in literature and the influence of authoritarian language or myth on culture in general and the literary text in particular. They looked for ways in which the deadening effect of the mythological (epic, monological) thought and word can be counteracted through literature, and different versions of what Kristeva termed 'intertextuality' played an important part in their treatment of the subject. They also both discussed the role of the author and their voice in the literary text, and the question of their power over the text, its characters (Bakhtin) and the reader (Barthes).

The main thread of Barthes and Bakhtin's thought focuses on the problem of counteracting authoritarian language through literature, and the solutions they proposed can fruitfully be seen in the light of Slavic structuralism's notions of literary structure.
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INTRODUCTION: THE EAST AND WEST OF EUROPEAN STRUCTURALISM

'Like people and schools of criticism', writes Edward Said in his essay 'Travelling Theory', 'ideas and theories travel – from person to person, from situation to situation, from one period to another' (1991, 226). Depending on the historical, social and cultural situations and periods in which they find themselves, as well as on the persons who adopt them, these ideas and theories can take different shapes, and develop in different directions.

Structuralism is, undoubtedly, one of the best-travelled theories of this century. Generally perceived as being born between 1907 and 1911 out of the lectures in general linguistics held by Ferdinand de Saussure at the University of Geneva, structuralism, indeed, travelled far and wide and influenced vast areas of human sciences. It is probably fair to say that its impact on linguistics, literary theory and cultural studies in general is such that even for anti-structuralists it would be almost impossible to imagine what it would be like to think without taking the idea of structure into account. What Edith Kurzveil wrote in 1980 (10) is probably still true today: 'Structuralism has left its mark on the intellectual tradition, and continues to influence scholars.'

And yet, the structuralist approach has not had a good press, and the stereotypical image of structuralism, as described by Scholes (1974, 170), is that it 'has to do... with the reduction of literary texts to bloodless formulae'. For anyone who has read Terry Eagleton’s book Literary Theory, his illustration of the structuralist approach will probably stay forever in their mind. According to Eagleton (1996, 82), what a structuralist critic would do with a story would be to 'schematise' it 'in diagrammatic form', making it irrelevant what the story is actually about, and whether its protagonists are father and son, pit and sun, mother and daughter, or bird and mole, as long as some formal characteristics (in the case of his example, the opposition between 'high' and 'low') are happily revealed. After which, 'flushed with triumph, the structuralist rearranges his rulers and reaches for the next story' (Eagleton, 1996, 83).

However, as Scholes has argued, and as I am going to argue in this thesis, structuralism is far from being some kind of a 'vampire approach' that sucks the life out
of its objects of study. I believe that the main reason why it is sometimes perceived as schematic, and ignorant of the conditions which shape a literary work’s existence in the world, is because there is little awareness of its diversity, its comprehensive history still remains to be written, and its full corpus of texts still remains to be taken into account. That aim goes far beyond the scope of this thesis (which focuses on Roland Barthes and Mikhail Bakhtin in the context of structuralism), but a reassessment of structuralism is nevertheless a part of it, with the hope of a more comprehensive understanding of its history, aims and achievements.

Jonathan Culler, whose *Structuralist Poetics* is probably one of the most well-known and influential books about the subject, considered structuralism to be a purely French phenomenon, and he used the term to designate ‘the work of a restricted group of French theorists and practitioners’, while reserving the term ‘semiology’ ‘to any work which studies signs’ (Culler, 1975, 6). An even stronger sentiment about structuralism’s Frenchness is expressed by François Dosse (1998, I, 393), who claimed that it was ‘beneath the tricolour flag of France, and of France alone, that structuralism would flourish and fascinate other countries’. The idea that structuralism is a ‘specifically French product’ (Ibid..) is accepted by most British and American authors who wrote surveys of structuralist thought, and even when the Frenchness is not explicitly stated, the list of authors taken into account shows that it is taken for granted. Obviously, Jonathan Culler’s or anyone else’s choice to cover only French structuralist thought, considering the scope of research that that entails, can well be seen as a rational assessment of how much of the structuralist theory one can pack in a single book and still make it digestible to even an enthusiastic and specialist reader. And yet, in most of these accounts, one can almost always catch a glimpse of what is missing, and the main name that provides a window into that different structuralist world is Roman Jakobson.

**Glimpses of a Less Known Story**

The paths structuralism took between its Geneva origins and ‘world domination’ appear well documented and reasonably well known. The way Dosse tells the tale (and his version is not that different from Culler’s), after the publication of Saussure’s students’ notes of his lectures under the title *Cours de linguistique générale* in 1916, the next key event in the development of structuralism appears to be the historic encounter between
Roman Jakobson and Claude Lévi-Strauss in New York during the Second World War (1998, I, chapter 8). Lévi-Strauss, fascinated by Jakobson’s account of binary oppositions in phonology, decided to apply the principle to his study of myth. According to Edith Kurzveil (1980, 1), ‘Lévi-Strauss was first to adapt Saussurean linguistics to the social sciences’, with the help of ‘elaborations from linguistic theories’ by Jakobson, Hjelmslev and Martinet (1980, 4). And the rest, as they say, was history.

And yet, Dosse gives us a glimpse of what is missing from the main narrative of his book. When Lévi-Strauss met Jakobson in New York, the Russian scholar already had years of structuralist experience behind him, and had worked not just on binary oppositions in phonology, but also on literary theory, literary history and literary criticism. He had worked with some of the most talented scholars from Russian Formalist and Prague Structuralist circles. He had used Saussure’s terminology in the late 1920s and revised some of its elements, making them more suitable to literary analysis. Dosse at least has a vague idea about most of this, as he mentions Jakobson’s involvement in the Formalist movement (1998, I, 53-55) and in the Prague Circle (1998, I, 54-58). However, his account is full of confusing inaccuracies, and so, for example, Shklovskii, Eikhenbaum and Jakubinskii are listed as ‘poets’ rather than as literary scholars, and one of the greatest structuralists, Jan Mukařovsky gets his name spelt as Makarovsky (1998, I, 55). Dosse also mentions the First International Congress of Linguists in Holland in 1928, where the members of the Prague Circle (Jakobson, Mathesius, Trubetskoy) and the Geneva School (Bally, Scechéhaye) ‘made common reference to Saussure in their description of language as a system’ (1998, I, 44). Dosse adds that ‘Geneva and Moscow [he leaves out the Prague group, who were certainly at the Congress and to whom Jakobson had belonged since the creation of the Prague Linguistic Circle in 1926] were therefore at the beginnings of the definition of the structuralist program. Moreover, this was the first time that the term “structuralism” was actually employed’ (1998, I, 44-45). And yet, driven by his idea that structuralism is essentially a French phenomenon, Dosse side-steps both the Moscow and the Prague Circle, Jakobson's work on literature and anything else that was not destined to influence the French, and quickly concludes that the 'Saussurean break', which was essential for the creation of structuralism, consisted of an insistence on synchrony,

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1 Jan Broekman, however, quotes 1935 as the year when the term 'structuralism' was first used (1974, 19).
rather than diachrony (1998, I, 47), of a ‘linguistic closure’, which meant that one looked only at the relationship between the signifier (the acoustic image) and the signified (the concept) (1998, I, 48), excluding the referent, and of the ‘elimination’ of the (first speaking, and than any other) subject (1998, I, 50-51). Anything that might have been said about Saussure and the application of his terminology on disciplines other than linguistics by the Russians or the Czechs is completely ignored.

However, considering that Roman Jakobson and Iurii Tynianov (1971) wrote about ‘structural laws’ in the history of literature, using the terminology of the Geneva school of linguistics and demanding the elaboration of that terminology in literary studies as early as 1928, and that Jan Mukarovsky talked about the structure of a work of art in 1934,² the absence of Russian and Czech structuralists from most accounts of structuralist ideas can easily be seen as an example of Western European arrogance, or of lack of readiness to consider ideas which do not fit in with the relatively easily defined general tendencies of French structuralism. One would be more likely to agree with Culler’s remark that ‘one cannot define structuralism by examining how the word has been used; that would lead only to despair’ (1975, 3), had it not been symptomatic of the fact that Eastern European strands of structuralist approach have been left almost entirely to the sole interest of Slavic specialists, without much wider appreciation.

For example, John Lechte, in his book Fifty Key Contemporary Thinkers: From Structuralism to Postmodernity (1994) includes Jakobson (and Bakhtin) in his list of main structuralist thinkers, but none of the other Eastern Europeans — the rest are French. Selden and Widdowson’s book A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory (1993) lists Jakobson as the only non-French structuralist (Bakhtin is here listed as a formalist). Jean-Marie Benoist in The Structuralist Revolution states that structuralism’s history began when Saussure’s problem of the sign was carried over into ethnology (Lévi-Strauss) and psychoanalysis (Lacan) (1978, 1). The Prague School is ignored, as it is in Raymond Boudon’s The Uses of Structuralism (1971). Terrence Hawkes in his excellent book Structuralism and Semiotics (1977) does talk about the Formalists and mentions Mukarovsky a few times, but he mostly concentrates on Shklovskii and Propp, and he does not mention anything that Jakobson or Mukarovsky said that does not tie in neatly with French structuralism. Fredric Jameson in his book on formalism and structuralism does a similar thing: Russian Formalism for him mostly

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² 'Art as a Semiotic Fact', in 1978, pp. 82-88.
consists of the works of Shklovskii and Propp, Mukarovsky is not mentioned even in the bibliography, all the structuralists discussed are French, and he says in his preface that he has 'deliberately excluded from the present work any treatment of the very rich materials of Soviet Structuralism, as developed by Yuri M. Lotman and his colleagues at the University of Tartu' (Jameson, 1972, ix-x). Which brings us to another point: even when the Prague Circle gets the mention and the treatment it deserves (as it does, for example, in Jan Broeckman's *Structuralism: Moscow-Prague-Paris* (1974) and J.G. Merquior's *From Prague to Paris: A Critique of Structuralist and Post-structuralist Thought* (1986), the Soviet Semioticians get completely excluded from most general studies of structuralist thought.³

This French-centred view of structuralism can be rather frustrating, and it is difficult not to sympathise with the anger of Leonard Jackson's book *The Poverty of Structuralism*, when, in a fit of rage not entirely untypical of the general tone of the book, he says that structuralism belonged to a 'marginal group of [French] intellectuals, poised somewhere between a very large Stalinist Communist Party and an even larger bourgeoisie'. Jackson adds that structuralism 'briefly succeeded existentialism as a group of popular philosophies; and when the structuralist model collapsed in about 1967, a variety of post-structuralisms succeeded it and were exported to marginal and lonely literary intellectuals all over the world' (1991, 2). The title of the book is misleading, as is the above quote, since Jackson, who mostly attacks French structuralism (and poststructuralism even more), has full respect for Prague structuralism and for Chomsky's extension of structuralist linguistics. It seems that his main grievance is not against the basic notions of structuralism but against the literary part of it which at one point lost touch with developments in linguistics.⁴

³ Although, to be fair, Merquior mentions Lotman, and credits him with being the successor of the Prague School in that he tries to keep the balance between 'form and reality' in the study of literature (p. 27).

⁴ What he calls 'the logical poverty of structuralism' refers to French structuralism's insistence on the notion of meaning as pure difference. Jackson claims that that notion never really worked in linguistics (i.e. could never adequately describe the functioning of language), and was eventually abandoned for the generative model (See pp. 215-35).

In relation to this, see also Ruwet, 1966, where he says that we must remember that 'structural linguistics represents only a movement - now in the past, since the development of generative grammar - in the history of linguistics. There would be little sense in binding the destiny of literary studies to what is merely a transitory stage of a neighbouring discipline. [...] It seems to me that the status of linguistics, in relation to poetics and to literary study in general, can only be that of an auxiliary discipline, whose role is roughly analogous to that played by phonetics with respect to the whole of linguistics' (pp. 296-97). This essay is a clear response to Roman Jakobson's 1958 paper of the same title, where Jakobson argued the exactly opposite view, saying that 'since linguistics is the global science of verbal structure, poetics may be regarded as an integral part of linguistics' (Jakobson, 1996, 63).
I would say that Jackson is somewhat given to exaggeration (to put it mildly) when he insists on the brevity and the intellectual insignificance of French structuralism, but I agree with his main complaint that in the popular intellectual consciousness 'the long history of literary structuralism based on the linguistic model is truncated into a brief French prelude to the wonders of poststructuralism' (Jackson, 1991, 39).

A Tale of Two Structuralisms

It seems to me that, if one looks deeper through the cracks in these surveys of structuralist thought, mostly following the 'Jakobson lead', a story of two fundamentally different types of structuralism emerges. I shall call them 'Western' and 'Eastern' structuralism. Each has its own story of 'origins' and its history of ideas, and they have each provoked different reactions and further developments. Both of these stories begin in some fashion with Russian Formalism, and I want to (briefly) address the question of how much of the Formalist work should be incorporated into the structuralist corpus. Following from there, I want to show how the two versions of structuralism differ on the basis of their attitude to history and diachronic studies (and although they have been generally seen as one and the same thing, I would say that there is a difference between the notion of history and the notion of diachrony).

Although I believe that ultimately a more comprehensive vision of literary structuralism could be attempted only by assessing the two versions together, I shall for now keep them separate, and leave it to the rest of the thesis to gently do its work of 'structuralist unification', as most of the problems raised in this chapter will keep reappearing throughout this study. It is not, however, my intention to give an extensive survey of Structuralism In All Its Glory; this is, after all, just meant to be an introductory chapter explaining the fundamentals of my approach to Barthes and Bakhtin. It best fits my purpose to concentrate on a few key texts and concepts which I

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5 Although Jan Broekman, talking about the sociological studies of the French structuralist movement, done by Améry, Furet, and Schiwy, says something that is not entirely dissimilar to Jackson's outburst against the French structuralists: 'structuralism should be seen as a philosophy of frustrated French leftist intellectuals. Nihilism is a constant companion to this frustration and finds excellent expression in the main thought of the structuralists. This main thought is reduced to three themes: the denial of history, the denial of the subject, and a denial of the individual and pessimistic view of the future of Western society, as developed by Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Barthes, and others'. It is interesting that Broekman does not deny this assessment of French structuralism, but simply reminds us that 'the development of structuralism is far from being exclusively French and post-war. It goes back to the Russian Formalism of the beginning of our century' (pp. 14-15).
think illustrate the differences between the two versions of structuralism most clearly. I also have to admit that I myself am going to be guilty in part of what I have accused others for, in that I shall not talk very much about the work of the Prague Circle and of Jan Mukařovsky. It should be taken as read, however, that what I have to say about the Eastern type of structuralism I believe to be largely true of the Prague Circle as well.

It has to be stressed that my main interest is in literary structuralism, and the discussion will mostly concentrate on that aspect of structuralist thought.

East to West: Synchronic Structures: Propp and the Prehistory of Structuralism

The role of Vladimir Propp’s 1928 *Morphology of the Folktale* in the history of structuralism is well established: Culler says that it ‘has served as the point of departure for the structuralist study of plot’ (Culler, 1975, 207), and Scholes (1974, 60-74), Hawkes (1977, 67-69) and Broekman (1974, viii) all more or less explicitly treat Propp as the first structuralist, seeing *Morphology* as the crucial turning-point, the moment when Formalism grew into structuralism. Tzvetan Todorov quotes Propp’s work as the first structuralist analysis, and the ‘mythological’ narrative with which it dealt as an archetypal subject matter for structuralist thought (Todorov, 1968, 71). With this in mind, let us briefly look at Propp’s work, and see how and why it should fit into the history of structuralism.

Propp’s purpose was to find a descriptive model for the Russian fairy tale, one that would be able to explain ‘the two-fold quality of the tale: its amazing multiformity, picturesqueness, and colour, and on the other hand, its no less striking uniformity, its repetition’ (Propp, 1968, 20-21). His basic finding was that the tales ‘possess one special characteristic: components of one tale can, without any alteration whatsoever, be transferred to another’ (1968, 7), and, judging that it is this repetitiveness and not the multiformity that require more urgent study, he concentrated on the former.6 With the belief that ‘what matters is not the amount of material, but the methods of investigation’, Propp chose to look at a limited number of fairy tales (tales No. 50-151 in the Afanas’ev collection), and justified this by stressing that ‘the repetition of

6 But see also Ch viii, entitled ‘On the Attributes of Dramatis Personae and their Significance’.
fundamental components [...] exceeds all expectations' (1968, 24), even in such a relatively small body of material.

The results of Propp's investigation are well known, and its main points can be summarised very briefly. He found that there are seven *spheres of action* (villain, donor, helper, princess and her father, dispatcher, hero, and false hero) (1968, 79-80) which can be performed by different fairy tale personages (so, for example, the villain could be a bear, or a witch, or a dragon). He also found that 'all fairy tales are of one type in regard to their structure' (1968, 23), which consists of a limited sequence of 'functions'. Propp defined function 'as an act of a character, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of the action' (Propp's emphasis, 1968, 21), and found that there are exactly 31 functions, whose sequence is always identical, on which the fairy tale builds its plot.

Hawkes claims that 'the major breakthrough represented in [Propp's] work derives from his insistence that in the fairy tale the all-important and unifying element is found, not on a quasi-'phonetic' level, within the 'characters' who appear in the story, but on a 'phonemic' level, in the characters' function; the part they play in the plot'. On the strength of Propp's definition of 'function' Hawkes (1977, 68) finds that 'it is clear that Propp's position is truly a structuralist one'.

What is often neglected when Propp's structuralist credentials are discussed is Propp's decision to leave aside 'the historical study of the tale', believing that 'to study genetics, without special elucidation of the problem of description [...] is completely useless', and that, 'before throwing light upon the question of the tale's origin, one must first answer the question as to what the tale itself represents' (Propp, 1968, 5). This is a distinction between synchronic and diachronic approaches, and I would merely like to point out that, also in 1928, Jakobson and Tynianov discussed Saussure's methodology (as we shall see later), so that it is conceivable that Propp had also read or heard of Saussure by then. Another possible answer would be that Propp was, like other Formalists, influenced by the work of Jan Baudouin de Courtenay (1845-1929), who, some 30 years before Saussure, drew a distinction between the study of the evolution of an individual linguistic element and the study of the whole of the language system at one point in its development (i.e., between diachrony and synchrony) (Ivić, 1970, 85-87). Of course, it is also perfectly conceivable that Propp's methodological choice was based on the situation within his own field, which was similar to the state of linguistics criticised by Courtenay and Saussure ('the study of the tale has been pursued for the
most part only genetically, and, to a great extent, without attempts at preliminary, systematic description’ (Propp, 1968, 5), to which Propp responded with a similar solution in the form of the shift to the ‘systematic’, synchronic description. It needs to be stressed that, as with Saussure, Propp’s decision to ignore genetic study is not laid out as a prohibition against it, but as a tactical decision until a better understanding of the structure of the tale is reached. And it must be noted that Propp himself later devoted himself to the historical study of the fairy tale, since in 1946 he published a book entitled The Historical Roots of the Fairy Tale, which he considered to be the second volume of ‘one comprehensive work’ (Propp, 1996).

However, most interpretations of Propp’s work as structuralist tend to disregard the fact that French structuralists have defined themselves and the purpose of their activity through their decision that Propp was their predecessor, even when his model was criticised, by Greimas and Lévi-Strauss, for being ‘too close to the level of empirical observation’ (Culler, 1975, 213). It is not so much that, with hindsight and knowledge of French structuralism and its study of the narrative in particular, it is said that ‘Propp was the first structuralist’, it is more that the French structuralists said from the beginning ‘Propp was the first structuralist and we shall base our structuralist study of the narrative on his’. In the chapter ‘Poetics of the Novel’ of Culler’s Structuralist Poetics, the section devoted to the study of plot to a large extent consists of French reactions to Propp’s work and developments thereof, and both Hawkes and Scholes present things in the same way. As Culler, Scholes and Hawkes discuss different aspects of the relations between the ideas of Propp, Lévi-Strauss, Greimas, and Bremond, I shall just give an example of a fairly typical treatment of Propp’s work by a French structuralist by looking at Greimas and his actantial models. However, I need to stress that I perfectly agree that Morphology can well be seen as a structuralist work; Propp himself uses the term ‘structure’ and makes some methodological choices which resemble those of Saussure. What I am pointing out is that French structuralism has defined itself through an interpretation of his work that disregards the material on which his study is based (i.e. the Russian fairy tale) and which generalises his basic assumptions, which were designed to deal with that particular material, making claims

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7 However, it is important to note that Claude Lévi-Strauss himself considered Morphology to be a formalist work. See Lévi-Strauss, 1960.
8 Culler, 1975, 205-24.
The works of particular interest are: Bremond, 1964; Claude Lévi-Strauss, 1960; and Greimas, 1966.
for his model which go well beyond the scope of its original aspirations. In particular, I am referring to Scholes's assessment that Propp's structuralist breakthrough is contained in his decision to look not at the personages of the fairy tale, but at the functions which they perform within the tale; this in turn implies that all structuralist study of narrative should follow his lead, and treat the characters in a story primarily from the point of view of their function in the plot, treating all characterisation as auxiliary to the basic function. Propp himself responded to this kind of interpretation of his work by saying that 'the absolutely empirical, concrete, and particular character' of his research has not been grasped (Propp, 1996, 230).

According to Dosse, the moment when structuralism proper came into existence was when Lévi-Strauss applied linguistic categories to anthropology. Combined with Propp, Lévi-Strauss gives us an indication of why French literary structuralism made the methodological decisions that it did.

**West: Synchronic Structures: Lévi-Strauss**

Lévi-Strauss’s influence on French structuralism has been great and the basic assumptions of his structural anthropology can be to a large extent taken as the basic, initial assumptions of French literary structuralism as well. Two of his essays have generally been seen as particularly influential on later structuralist development.

In his 1945 essay ‘L’analyse structurale en linguistique et en anthropologie’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1958, 37-62) Lévi-Strauss claimed that linguistics, and more precisely Jakobsonian phonology, since it had a much more developed scientific status than other social sciences, could play a renovating part where the rest of the social sciences are concerned. He suggested that the main principles that can be taken over from phonology are, firstly, the decision to study not so much the conscious phenomena of language but their unconscious infrastructure; secondly, to study not the individual terms, but the system to which they belong; and, thirdly, to try to uncover the general laws which regulate the relations within the system (1958, 40). He considered that the problem with traditional sociology had been the same as the problem of old linguistics, in that it studied the individual phenomena but not their interrelations, and it never asked itself how it a system of, say, family relations in their present form could be just an accidental

The dates of publication are a clear indication of the relatively early knowledge of Propp's work.
result of a meeting of heterogeneous social phenomena and yet function with such efficiency and regularity (1958, 41-2).

The insistence on the study of the 'unconscious infrastructure' behind the directly observable phenomena has been particularly influential. The notion that 'the real structure of a cultural phenomenon cannot coincide with the spontaneous account given by the subjects themselves', was, according to René Girard (1970, 18), very fruitful in literary studies. Girard suggests that it resulted in a 'literary criticism [...] which seeks to define not the unity of the work and the organisation consciously designed by the author [...], but a more comprehensive structure in which the intentions of this author and the generally accepted interpretation of his audiences are [...] no more than elements in a total picture, and these elements can always be reinterpreted according to the requirements of the totalisation' (Girard, 1970, 18-9). This in itself is not problematic; what is slightly more dubious is Lévi-Strauss's basic model of that 'unconscious infrastructure', which is the Jakobsonian phonological model of binary oppositions. Edmund Leach (1982, 88) takes issue with Lévi-Strauss's idea that 'the whole structure of primitive thought is binary', and says that although 'the human brain does have a tendency to operate with binary counters in all sorts of situations', 'it can operate in other ways as well'. Leach makes the same point later made by Jackson when he says that the linguistic model adopted by Lévi-Strauss had its own limitations and was later replaced by a more sophisticated approach; linguists 'have come to recognise that the deep level process of pattern generation and pattern recognition that is entailed by the human capacity to attach complex semantic significance to speech utterances must depend on mechanisms of much greater complexity than is suggested by the digital computer model which underlies the Jakobson - Lévi-Strauss theories' (Leach, 1982, 112-13). The concept of binary oppositions may be useful for the study of phonemes, but it is of a lot less use when we get to syntax.

It is not just the model of binary oppositions which Lévi-Strauss took over from linguistics (and on which he based, for example, his analyses in Le Cru et le cuit), but he also used other notions such as langue and parole, as well as what he called 'structural' and 'statistic' aspects of language. It is worth taking a closer look at the passages in our second essay, 'La Structure des mythes', where Lévi-Strauss discusses these distinctions, as it appears to me that his reading of Saussure is rather more creative than one would like, although I am not denying that the conclusions of the subsequent analysis of the Oedipus myth are extremely interesting (Lévi-Strauss, 1958, 226-55).
Lévi-Strauss starts his discussion of Saussurean terminology by saying:

"En distinguant entre la langue et la parole, Saussure a montré que le langage offrait deux aspects complémentaires: l'un structural, l'autre statistique; la langue appartient au domaine d'un temps réversible, et la parole, à celui d'un temps irréversible. (1958, 230)"

It appears that Lévi-Strauss is bringing together two conceptually quite different distinctions: firstly, the distinction between langue and parole (language system and speech); and secondly, his distinction between 'structural' and 'statistical' aspects of language appears to refer to Saussure's distinction between the associative and the syntagmatic relations, combined with Saussure's principle of the temporally linear character of the linguistic signal (Saussure, 1995, 69). What is problematic is that he puts the syntagmatic on the side of langue and associative on the side of parole. This would not make sense, firstly, because both axes are studied by Saussure as belonging to the study of langue, and secondly, it is the syntagmatic relations which are obvious in speech, while the associative are there as background possibilities which are not immediately visible. It could well be that Lévi-Strauss simply means that langue is governed by structural laws, while parole, being an individual use of the language, can only be studied by statistical means (for example, how many times certain combinations are used).

What Lévi-Strauss makes of this initial mix-up, however, is most interesting. As his analysis of the Oedipus myth is probably the most famous part of his work, I shall not go into it in any great detail, but just summarise the method briefly: Lévi-Strauss proposes that for a structural study of myth we need to take into account all known versions of it, and identify the key events recounted in each version, writing them down in the shortest possible sentences. He stresses that the analysis of myth, although linked with linguistic methods, cannot apply itself to linguistic units shorter than a sentence, but then betrays the principle of his own method when he takes into consideration the meaning of Labdakos's, Laios's and Oedipus's names (1958, 233, 236). Then we need to identify the similarities between these events in different versions and in different parts of the story, regardless of the order in which they appear; i.e., we establish clusters of meaningful relations (1958, 233-34). The result can be graphically presented as
columns of clusters of relations, which we then interpret against each other and try to identify the binary oppositions at work: in the case of the Oedipus myth, Lévi-Strauss identifies the opposition between the negation and the assertion of human autochthony (1958, 237-39). He asserts that the meaning of a myth cannot be understood by taking a single version of the story and following ('diachronically') the events told in it; the meaning of myth is found in the repetitions which point to its deeper structure; it is to alert us to this deeper structure that myths and fairy tales contain so many repetitions (1958, 254). Leach gives a very plausible explanation for this:

Myth is not just a fairy tale, it contains a message. [...] The novices of the society who hear the myths for the first time are being indoctrinated by the bearers of tradition – a tradition, which in theory at any rate, has been handed down from long dead ancestors. Let us then think of the Ancestors (A) as ‘senders’ and the present generation (B) as ‘receivers’.

Now let us imagine the situation of an individual A who is trying to get a message to a friend B who is almost out of earshot and let us suppose that communication is further hampered by various kinds of interference – noise from wind, passing cars and so on. What will A do? If he is sensible he will not be satisfied by shouting his message just once, he will shout it several times, and give a different wording to the message each time, supplementing his words with visual signals. At the receiving end B may very likely get the meaning of each of the individual messages slightly wrong, but when he puts them together the redundancies and the mutual consistencies and inconsistencies will make it quite clear what is ‘really’ being said. (Leach, 1982, 59)

Thus, according to Lévi-Strauss (1958, 240), we can ignore the inconsistencies between different versions, and all additional details which appear in a limited number of versions. Strictly speaking, this is not so much the distinction between the synchronic and the diachronic, as Lévi-Strauss himself maintains, but a distinction between the syntagmatic and the associative axis, or in slightly later terminology, between the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic. Lévi-Strauss’s clusters of relations are associative (paradigmatic), as opposed to Propp’s syntagmatic functions (Dundes, 1968, xii).

Leach stresses that Lévi-Strauss’s interest in geology is revelatory with regard to his interest in the underlying structures of myth and human thought (and also revealing

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9 Controversially, he claims that, in the case of the Oedipus myth, even such very recent versions as
where his attitude to history is concerned). He quotes Lévi-Strauss’s statement from
*Tristes tropiques*:

> Sometimes ... on one side and the other of a hidden crevice we find two green plants of
different species. Each has chosen the soil which suits it: and we realise that within the
rock are two ammonites, one of which has involutions less complex than the other’s.
We glimpse that is to say a difference of many thousands of years; time and space
suddenly commingle; the living diversity of that moment juxtaposes one age and the
other and perpetuates them. (Leach, 1982,17)

Leach points out that it is ‘not really the green plants that arouse Lévi-Strauss’s
interest’, and that ‘his deeper concern is with what is underneath – something altogether
more abstract’ (Ibid.). And although this kind of interest and the resultant procedure
may be perfectly valid in the study of myth from an anthropological point of view, what
happens if we translate the notion of deep structures and irrelevance of surface details
into the study of literature (and even myth and folktale as literary texts)? Greimas may
give us some indication of this.

**West: Synchronic Structures: Greimas’ actantial models**

Starting from the assumption that what matters most in the study of narrative is the plot
and the deep structure which supports it, Greimas used Propp’s fairy tale and Etienne
Souriau’s drama models as a base for his actantial model (Greimas, 1966). It was meant
to create a balance between the over- and under-formalisation that Greimas criticises
both Propp and Souriau (1950) for.¹⁰ To define a genre solely through the number of
actants (Greimas’s term for Propp’s ‘spheres of action’), abstracting all the content,
argues Greimas, is to create an overly formal model. But to merely list different actants
without defining their possible interrelations is to set the formalisation too low
(Greimas, 1966, 176). Greimas’s solution is to get rid of Propp’s ‘false hero’ and to
rename Propp’s and Souriau’s loosely equivalent ‘actants’:

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¹⁰ Scholes also discusses the similarities between Propp and Souriau.
The big methodological difference between Greimas and Propp is that, whereas Propp’s model is intended to describe ‘spheres of action’ in Russian fairy tales (and Souriau’s is to provide a matrix for all dramatic situations possible), Greimas’s model claims for itself to be able to deal with anything from a simple love story to philosophical paradigms. So, in a love story, ‘He’ is the ‘sujet’ and the ‘destinataire’, and she is the ‘objet’ and the ‘destinateur’ (1966, 177), while in Marxism, ‘sujet’ is Man, ‘objet’ is the classless society, ‘destinateur’ is History, ‘destinataire’ is Humanity, ‘opposant’ is the bourgeois class and ‘adjuvant’ is the working class (1966, 181). And although Greimas, like Propp, stresses that the actants can find their incarnation in a great number of different ‘acteurs’, and that a single ‘acteur’ can act as different ‘actants’ (1966, 183-85), the very fact that his model can be applied to pretty much anything prevents him from discussing ‘acteurs’ in any significant detail.

Propp’s model is different: it is based on the concrete material of the Russian fairy tale and it is designed to explain the specific features of that particular material, and not to provide a model for all types of narrative discourse. Propp stresses several times that dual nature of the Russian fairy tale, which gives it great diversity and picturesqueness on the one hand, and obvious repetitiveness of functions on the other, which is precisely what made it possible for him to identify the thirty-one functions of the Russian fairy tale. So when Culler says that ‘a set of thirty-one functions cannot but seem an arbitrary array, and it is structurally much more satisfying to the analyst if he can make them transformations of three or four basic elements’ (Culler, 1975, 213), it is difficult not to respond to this like Mr Bingley when his sister suggested that it would
be 'much more rational if', at a ball, 'conversation instead of dancing were made the order of the day': 'Much more rational, my dear Caroline, I dare say, but it would not be near so much like a ball'. It may be 'structurally more satisfying', but would not describe the structure of the Russian fairy tale nearly so well. Propp himself made a similar argument in his response to Lévi-Strauss's critique of his work by saying that his conclusions did 'not have that universal character which my distinguished critic would like to attribute to them. My method is comprehensive, but the conclusions are valid only for that well-determined type of folklore for which they are devised, namely, the fairy tale' (Propp, 1996, 225).

In some ways, Greimas is a typical example of what a structuralist working in the French context thought his work should be about. He defined 'structure' as 'the presence of two terms and the relation between them' (Greimas, 1966, 19), and the principle of binary oppositions, along with the principle of looking at synchronic relations on the level of deep structures, formed the foundation of his work.

West: Structure and History

At the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, more and more French philosophers, anthropologists, students of literature and psychoanalysts started reading Saussure and studying structural linguistics, which was already well developed. As Lévi-Strauss pointed out, linguistics appealed as it seemed more scientific and more advanced than other human sciences (for example, according to Dosse (1998, 1, 63), Leo Spitzer in 1960 criticised French literary scholars for not moving beyond 'the studies of genesis, of traditional literary history') and more and more social scientists started applying its principles to their own fields of interest. Thus Saussurean terminology, taken at face value, became more and more influential, preparing the ground for structuralism's triumph in the 1960s.

By that time, the basic principles were already developed. Saussure's sharp distinctions between synchronic and diachronic analysis and between langue and parole, as well as the principle of binary oppositions, were well in place. François Dosse in his History of Structuralism points out over and over again that French structuralists, following Saussure's distinction between synchronic and diachronic

11 Jane Austen, Pride and Prejudice, ch. 11.
analysis, completely dismissed diachronic analysis, and 'history' became a word to be avoided. Terry Eagleton in his *Literary Theory* considers structuralism to be

...hair-raisingly unhistorical: the laws of the mind it claimed to isolate – parallelisms, oppositions, inversions and the rest – moved at a level of generality quite remote from the concrete differences of human history. (Eagleton, 1996b, 95)

This is not quite true, though. After all, Barthes in his *Mythologies* set out to prove the historical background of bourgeois myths, and Lucien Goldmann's 'genetic structuralism' rests on the proposition that 'all human behaviour has a meaning; that to understand this meaning one must refer to a larger context - to the biography of the individual in one case or to history in the other – which goes beyond the level of the manifest' (Goldmann, 1970, 103). Goldmann further asserted that 'explanation is the assertion of the structure that we have described and understood into a larger structure in which it has its function and where I can understand the nature of its unity' (1970, 104). Still, one could argue, if one was so inclined, that Barthes's book is still too 'contaminated' by Brecht and Marx to be truly structuralist in the classical sense, and that Goldmann's position is an aberration. This latter view could be supported by Jean Hyppolite's intervention after Goldmann's paper from which I quoted above:

> When I take structure in the algebraic sense of the term, there I know what it means: there are commutative and distributive properties which belong to certain wholes; these are structures. [...] The search for the totality in a structure is fundamental, but you abuse the word *structure* through a functionalism which is different from what we call analysis of structures. (Goldmann, 1970, 111)

This rather alarming 'we' brings us to another question: how has the structure been defined?

**West: Definition of structure: Piaget and Benveniste**

Raymond Boudon started his book *The Uses of Structuralism* by saying that 'the variety of connotations characterising the term when employed by different authors raises
doubts as to the existence of a single meaning which could be attributed to it, or of a single method [...] which could be termed structuralist' (Boudon, 1971, 1).

And yet, it would be difficult to imagine that any of the French structuralists would find fault with Jean Piaget's definition of structure:

En première approximation, une structure est un système de transformations, qui comporte des lois en tant que système (par opposition aux propriétés des éléments) et qui se conserve ou s'enrichit par le jeu même de ses transformations, sans que celles-ci aboutissent en dehors de ses frontières ou fasse appel à des éléments extérieurs. En un mot, une structure comprend ainsi les trois caractères de totalité, de transformations et d'autoréglage. (Piaget, 1972, 6-7)

It needs to be noted that what Piaget means by 'transformation' in his definition of structure is simply that elements coming together into a system change in accordance with its laws, not that structure itself changes. Combined with this is an ideal of intrinsic intelligibility based on the postulate that structures are self-sufficient (Piaget, 1972, 7-8).

We can add to this Benveniste's definition of linguistic structure, with its this principle of hierarchy:

(1) it is a global unit embracing various parts; (2) these parts are in a formal arrangement that obeys certain constant principles; (3) that which gives the character of a structure to the form is that the constituent parts serve a function; (4) finally, these constitutive parts are units on a certain level, in such a way that each unit of a specific level becomes a subunit of the level above. (Benveniste, 1971, 20-1)

Let us also look at the definition quoted by Boudon (1971, 2):

A structure is a sum of elements related to one another, such that any modification in one element or in one relationship entails a modification in other elements or relationships.

Boudon suggests (1971, 5) that most such concepts of structure are 'crude and banal', and rather unhelpfully argues that 'the concept of structure is a collection of homonyms'. However, most of his proposed definitions support the idea that French
structuralism developed a concept of structure that excluded history, as well as extraneous links and elements.

With this in view, it would be difficult not to sympathise with Eagleton when he says that:

> Having characterised the underlying rule-systems of a literary text, all the structuralist could do was sit back and wonder what to do next. There was no question of relating the work to the realities of which it treated, or the conditions which produced it, or to the actual readers who studied it, since the founding gesture of structuralism has been to bracket off such realities. (Eagleton, 1996b, 95)

Let us first provide further evidence for this claim before we try to refute it.

**West: Genette’s Definition of Structuralism**

This highly static and abstract concept of structure undoubtedly had its limitations, and Gérard Genette in his essay ‘Structuralisme et critique littéraire’ (1966, 155) defined them quite clearly. According to Genette, structures are not directly encountered objects (*objets de rencontre*); they are ‘des systèmes de relations latents, conçus plutôt que perçus, que l’analyse construit à mesure qu’elle les dégage, et qu’elle risque parfois d’inventer en croyant les découvrir’. They are not so much deeply buried in the textuality of a literary work, but stand behind it as a blueprint for its most abstract interrelations. As such, far removed from the ordinary perception of an artistic work, the structure of a text bears no direct influence on how this text will be perceived and interpreted by an ‘average’ reader, or, indeed, by a literary critic. Following Georges Poulet and Paul Ricoeur, Genette makes a difference between hermeneutics, as an intersubjective criticism which ‘relives’ the ideas and emotions of a literary work, and structural analysis as a ‘distant’, ‘objective’ analysis ‘penetrating’ into the flesh of a text in order to reach its ‘bone-structure’. Structural analysis exerts ‘une sorte de réduction interne, traversant la substance de l’œuvre pour atteindre son ossature: regard non pas certes de surface, mais d’une pénétration en quelque sorte radioscopique, et d’autant plus extérieur qu’il est plus pénétrant’ (1966, 158).
In this distinction, hermeneutics is decidedly a more ‘human and humane’ analytical approach in which ‘la pensée critique devient la pensée critiquée, où elle réussit à re-sentir, à repenser, à re-imaginer celle-ci de l’intérieur’ (Ibid.). Compared with this description of a perfect intellectual love affair (a love affair that we have all experienced at least once in our lives as readers) structuralism seems to resemble praising a beautiful human being for the grace of their skeleton. Positioning and defining the two approaches thus, Genette can only conclude:

... partout où la reprise herméneutique du sens est possible et souhaitable, dans l’accord intuitif de deux consciences, l’analyse structurale serait (au moins partiellement) illégitime et non-pertinente. On pourrait alors imaginer une sorte de partage du champ littéraire en deux domaines; celui de la littérature ‘vivante’, c’est-à-dire susceptible d’être vécue par la conscience critique, et qu’il faudrait réserver à la critique herméneutique [...]; et celui d’une littérature non ‘morte’, mais en quelque sorte lointaine et difficile à déchiffrer, dont le sens perdu ne serait perceptible qu’aux opérations de l’intelligence structurale, comme celui des cultures ‘totémiques’, domaine exclusif des ethnologues. (1966, 159)

These literatures ‘which are not exactly ‘dead’,’ and which, according to Genette in this essay, would from the hermeneutic point of view constitute structuralism’s legitimate field of study, would be literatures distant in time and place, children’s and popular literature, everything which can be treated ‘like anthropological material’ and studied ‘in great bulk’ (1966, 159-60).

In his discussion of this paper, Scholes (1974, 7-12) claims that Genette defends structuralism from the role thrust upon it by the hermeneutics of Ricoeur and Poulet, and says that it is not so much that structuralism can only study distant literatures, but that its method distances its object of study. In his desire to see Genette defend structuralism, Scholes fails to acknowledge that, although the distinction between hermeneutics and structuralism is not as strong as it would look from the hermeneutic point of view, it nevertheless retains its basic premise: that structuralism treats its object like a kind of an x-ray machine. Structuralism’s activity in relation to a literary text still seems, in words of Eagleton, ‘rather like killing a person in order to examine more conveniently the circulation of the blood’ (Eagleton, 1996b, 95).
For Genette, structuralism as an approach can help us only where an anatomist's help would be needed to reconstruct the living beauty of a human body out of a skeleton which has been found at an ancient archaeological site. It is not needed where that beauty can be seen in its living and breathing glory; and even when we might need an anatomist's expertise to tell us about the bone structures of living organisms, the voice of an anatomist can never coincide with the voice of a lover:

A propos d'une même œuvre, la critique herméneutique parlerait le langage de la reprise du sens et de la récupération intérieure, et la critique structurale celui de la parole distante et de la reconstruction intelligible. Elles dégageraient ainsi des significations complémentaires, et leur dialogue n'en serait que plus fécond, à cette réserve qu'on ne pourrait jamais parler ces deux langages à la fois. (Genette, 1966, 161)

In his own defence of structuralism, Scholes (1974, 9) adds that Genette does not mention 'that the 'subjectivity' of hermeneutic criticism can never be entirely subjective. The critic who 'recovers' the meaning of any given work always does so by establishing a relationship between the work and some system of ideas outside it'. Scholes adopts Piaget's definition of the structure or system as 'a complete, self-regulating entity that adapts to new conditions by transforming its features while retaining its systematic structure' (1974, 10), but, then, discussing formalist tendencies in structuralism, he stresses that

The [formalist] fallacy does not lie in this necessary isolation of certain aspects of the material being studied, it lies in the refusal to acknowledge that these are not the only aspects, or in the insistence that these aspects function in an entirely closed system without influence from the world beyond literature. Structuralism, properly understood, far from being cut off from the world in a formal prison, approaches it directly at several different levels of investigation. (Scholes, 1974, 11)

His assessment goes directly against Eagleton's critique of structuralism as a discipline which springs from 'the ironic act of shutting out the material world in order the better to illuminate our consciousness of it' (Eagleton, 1996b, 95). Although Eagleton is aware, as much as Scholes, of Jakobson's, Bakhtin's and later Formalists' work (and even of Lotman's, whom he presents in a very favourable light) his account and his
vision of what structuralism represents is conditioned not by his knowledge of its full history, but by the general belief that structuralism is (or was) what the French thought it was and how they practised it.

For, looking at the way French structuralism developed, and with Greimas as its most radical practitioner in view, it would probably be fair to say that it did what Genette thought it should do; at the same time, it needs to be stressed that the structuralism of Genette himself, particularly in his later work, is quite different from the structuralism practised by Greimas.

West: Genette's Structuralist Practice

Genette's 1972 'Discours du récit', which was published as a part of Figures III, according to Jonathan Culler, filled the 'need for a systematic theory of narrative', being 'the most thorough attempt we have to identify, name, and illustrate the basic constituents and techniques of narrative' (Culler, 1980, 7). In this book Genette focused on the work of Proust with the intention to elucidate those basic constituents and techniques; 11 years later he commented that the 'duality of object' (i.e. the focus both on Proust and on the general study of narrative at the same time) troubled him more later than at the time of writing 'Discours du récit', for it was responsible for some 'distortions', like the excessive attention to matters of time, or relative neglect of phenomena of mood whose role in the Recherche is minor (Genette, 1983, 9-10). Genette also remarked that at the time of writing 'Discours du récit' he had 'cette imp(r)udente prétention' to emulate the sovereign manner in which Erich Auerbach, deprived of a library, wrote Mimesis one day (1983, 9). Authorial scruples aside, Culler rightly notes that ‘the fact that ['Discours du récit'] uses Proust so voraciously gives it great theoretical power, for it is forced to take account of all the complexities of Proustian narrative’ (Culler, 1980, 9) although it is probably true that the question of time takes over a larger proportion of the book than it would be normal for a book dealing with a purely general discussion of the study of narrative.

Genette himself addresses the question of the emphasis which should be given to the study of the particular in addressing a general problem:
Cette paradoxe est celui de toute poétique, sans doute aussi de toute activité de connaissance, toujours écartée entre ces deux lieux communs incontournables, qu’il n’est d’objets que singuliers, et de science que du général ; toujours cependant réconfortée, et comme aimantée, par cette autre vérité un peu moins répandue, que le général est au cœur du singulier, et donc - contrairement au préjugé commun – le connaissable au cœur du mystère. (Genette, 1972, 68-9)

With the principle that, although the specificity of Proustian narrative on the whole is irreducible, it is not undecomposable Genette (1972, 68) enters into a detailed analysis of Proust’s work with the ambition to show how narrative in general functions. Based on the assumption that any narrative is a linguistic undertaking to tell of one or several events, which can thus be seen as the expansion of a verb, Genette (1972, 75) defines his basic classes of determination according to categories borrowed from the grammar of verbs.

Thus the basic zones of interest are the narrative tense, mood and voice, which replaces the term ‘person’ because its has fewer ‘psychological connotations’ (Genette, 1972, 76).

The problem of tense deals with the order, duration and frequency of the narrated events; whether the events are told in their chronological order, how much narrative time is devoted to them and the relationship between repeated events and their narration or repeated narration and the narrated event.

Mood is defined with the definition of verbal mood in mind: ‘nom donné aux différentes formes du verbe employées pour affirmer plus ou moins la chose dont il s’agit, et pour exprimer… les différentes points de vue auxquels on considère l’existence ou l’action’ (Genette, 1972, 183) and its study is divided into the study of ‘distance’ and ‘perspective’. ‘Distance’ deals with the amount of ‘narrative information’ the reader is given about the narrated events and the world to which they belong, as well the manner in which characters’ speech is presented (whether it is ‘narrativisé, ou raconté’, ‘transposé’ in indirect style, or straight-forwardly mimetic, reported speech) (Genette, 1972, 191-93). ‘Perspective’ deals with narrative ‘focalisation’, the term Genette used in order to replace the older notion of the point of view with its accompanying question ‘who sees?’. As he explains in Narrative Discourse Revisited, the notion of the point of view presupposes only visual perception, while he wanted to
create a term which would cover perception in general, and also one which would not be tied to the notion of a person (be it author or character) in which the ‘point of view’ is located (the notion presupposed in the question ‘who sees?’) (Genette, 1983, 43). On the basis of the types of focalisation, he divides narratives into ‘nonfocalized’ (or narratives with ‘zero focalisation’, which are closest to the old idea of the narrative with an omniscient narrator), narratives with ‘internal focalisation’ or focalisation through a character or characters, and narratives with ‘external focalisation’, in which we are presented with characters whose thoughts and feelings we are never allowed to know, being able only to observe their behaviour (Genette, 1972, 206-7).

Narrative voice is defined as the ‘narrating instance’, the position from which narration is conducted. Temporally, it can be ‘ultérieure’ (the classical past-tense narrative), ‘antérieure’ (predictive, future-tense narration), ‘simultanée’ (‘narrative in the present contemporaneous with the action’) and ‘intercalée’ (between the moments of the action) (Genette, 1972, 229). The problem of voice also addresses the problem of the ‘level’ of narration; according to Genette, any event recounted is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act producing that narrative is placed (Genette, 1972, 238). In the case of a narrative which presents a story within a story, the first narrative is the embedding one, not the embedded, and Genette terms the level of narration of the first narrative ‘extradiegetic’, the level of the events presented in it is ‘diegetic’ or ‘intradiegetic’, while the events of the diegetic narrative are ‘metadiegetic’ (Genette, 1972, 238; 1983, 558). As for the ‘person’ of narration, Genette asserts that the question is not about whether a narrative is told in the ‘first person’ or in the ‘third person’, but about whether it is told by a character in the story (homodiegetic narrator) or by a narrator outside of it (heterodiegetic narrator) (Genette, 1972, 251-52).

Even this brief survey of Genette’s theory of narrative should suffice to show that his terminological apparatus is far from concentrating just on the ‘deep structure’ or ‘skeleton’ of the text, and that it is perfectly capable of dealing with its subtleties; the method is designed to elucidate the structure of the narrative on all of its levels. The decision to use an analysis of Proust as the vehicle for the theory not only adds a certain gravitas to the theory itself, but also adds a voice of the literature lover to the whole

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12 I think that Genette may be too pedantic here; ‘point of view’ is more often than not used as a general term, not necessarily connected with vision alone. For a very productive use of the ‘point of view’ as a structuring force in art, see Uspensky, 1973.
proceedings; while reading *Narrative Discourse* it is difficult not to realize that Genette really likes Proust and that he loves literature in general. And yet, many of the main elements of French structuralism are still to be found even here.

The first is, obviously, the use of the linguistic terminology which underlies the theory (i.e., the use of the analogy with verbal tense, mood and person); although, it could be argued that linguistic terminology is here used as a constructive analogy rather than as guiding light which will show us the way, and the analysis which follows is so refined and well developed that it is difficult to doubt that, had Genette not had the analogy with the grammar of verbs in mind, he would have come up with something similar himself.

Secondly, the whole underlying logic of the analysis is that the sequence of events is the most important thing about a narrative. Connected with this, the treatment of characters in *Narrative Discourse* is minimal, practically non-existent, and Genette later explained why this was so, by saying that characters are only carriers of the action, and that the study of characterisation is the greatest concession narratology in its strict sense can make to the study of character. Moreover, Genette stressed that characterisation is only one ‘effect’ among others, and that we would be making too much of a concession if we granted it the privilege of shaping the analysis of narrative discourse (Genette, 1983, 93-4). This is clearly the legacy of Propp misread as the theorist of all narrative; what may be true of a fairy tale (or of an epic) is not necessarily true of a novel by Dostoevsky, or indeed of any other novel. Can we really say that the plot of, say, *Madame Bovary* is the most important element of the novel; could it not be the character of Emma herself?

Thirdly, Genette refuses to talk about mimesis or representation; he argues that the narrative of events can only ever be an illusion of mimesis, because all narration is a fact of language, and language signifies without imitating (1983, 186). Genette stresses this point even more in *Nouveau discours du récit*, where he explains that he used the term ‘information’ so as not to use representation, which he saw as a hypocritical, ‘bastard’ compromise between information and imitation. And he continues:

> Or, pour de raisons mille fois exposées (et pas seulement par moi), je ne crois pas qu’il existe d’imitation dans le récit, parce que le récit, comme tout ou presque en littérature, est un acte de langage, et qu’il ne peut donc y avoir davantage d’imitation dans le récit en particulier qu’il n’y en a dans le langage en général. Un récit, comme tout acte
But is it true that language does not represent the world in some fashion, obviously not by physically imitating it, but by recreating at least some of its structural aspects? Benveniste, for example, is categorical that it does:

Language *re-produces* reality. This is to be understood in the most literal way: reality is produced anew by means of language. The speaker recreates the event and his experience of the event by his discourse. The hearer grasps the discourse first, and through this discourse, the event which is being reproduced. (Benveniste, 1971, 22)

Genette's anti-mimetic stance also presupposes the refusal to talk about any relationship with reality that the literary text may have: what is the vision of the world expressed in it? How true is it to our experience of the world? The literary text so intricately analysed in *Narrative Discourse* is closed up in its own textuality, or at least in its own state of being an act of language. No questions reaching outside of that immanent view of the literary text can be posed, and so the questions of literary history or relationship between literature and other cultural and historical phenomena remain unanswered because they had not even been posed.

So with these three main points in mind, let us now go back to the year 1928, and see how things can be done differently.

**East: How to avoid poststructuralist revolt**

If one were to search for the beginning of the structuralist approach in literary studies, one could do worse than read Iurii Tynianov's and Roman Jakobson's short 1928 article 'Problems in the Study of Literature and Language'.¹³ This piece is an extremely important and interesting historical document, as well as an infinitely sad reminder of a scholarly programme that in the years that followed was not allowed to be developed to

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¹³One could also look at the *Theses* of the Prague Circle, which were written around that same time. The basic ideas in Jakobson's and Tynianov's article are similar to the *Theses*. (On this, see Broekman, 1974, 50-64).
its full potential by Russian Formalists themselves, but which was brought to its fruition by the Prague Linguistic Circle. A veritable swan song of mature Formalism which was already starting to shape itself as a very interesting version of literary structuralism, Tynianov's and Jakobson's article was published in the same year when the first widespread Stalinist purges began. Jakobson had already been living in Prague for several years when the article was written, and he was thus able to pursue further the ideas outlined in the article in the company of his fellow Prague Structuralists. Tynianov, on the other hand, in order to avoid clashes of opinion with the increasingly powerful (and dangerous) Soviet Marxist critics, chose the path that most Formalists decided to choose in order to stay out of harm's way: he abandoned the study of literary theory and dedicated himself to specialist studies and to writing of monographs. In Russia itself, the problematic of Tynianov's and Jakobson's article would have to wait for the rise of Soviet Serniotics (with Iurii Lotman as its most talented representative) in the 1960s to get its second hearing and a new lease of life.

'Problems in the Study of Literature and Language' is a very dense short text, organised into eight main points. Although the title suggests an overview of a wide range of topics connected with the study of literature and language, the article itself focuses on two main themes: the problems of literary history and the differentiation between linguistics and the study of literature as seen through Saussure's linguistic project.

The first point of the article is the obligatory Formalist call to systematic scientificity, a rejection of 'naive psychologism and the other methodological hand-me-downs' disguised in the new, Formalist, terminology, as well as of 'academic eclecticism, scholastic 'formalism' – which replaces analysis by terminology and the classification of phenomena' (Tynianov and Jakobson, 1971, 79). Obviously, the relatively young Formalism had already encountered the perils of cheap terminological mimicry of its less talented followers.14

The next two points relate the history of literature with other historical series and demand that the correlation between these different historical series be investigated by elucidating the 'complex of specific structural laws' that characterises each of these

14 Boris Eikhenbaum also remarked on this in his article 'The Theory of the Formal Method': 'We are hedged round with eclectics and epigones who have turned the Formal method into some sort of rigid system, a 'Formalism' that stands them in good stead for manufacturing terms, schemes and classifications' (Eikhenbaum, 1971b, 3).
series. In order to do that, every element, literary or extraliterary, which is introduced into the investigation, must be considered 'from a functional point of view'.

Point four introduces the Saussurean distinction between synchronic and diachronic axis of investigation, and suggests that, since 'this fruitful hypothesis' has shown that language has a systemic character at every point of its existence, the same might prove to be true of diachronic series as well, the study of which must also begin. It is worth noting that Russian Formalists, and Tynianov in particular, had by that point already been working on the idea of a systemic nature of literary evolution, and of the way the very concept and corpus of literature changes through history and through its relation with other historical series. 15 What is significant for us here is the way that idea is expressed: by their reference to Saussure and his terminology, as well as by their demand for the elucidation of structural laws, Jakobson and Tynianov, from our post-structuralist perspective, definitively enter into the Structuralist mode of thinking. Nevertheless, at this very dawn of Structuralist thought what later became a defining method of French Structuralism was already rejected. Saussure's 'fruitful working hypothesis' in the study of language, namely the sharp opposition between diachronic and synchronic series, as well as the decision that the latter be viewed as the only acceptable field of study (the very method which French Structuralism later adopted as its own dogma), is viewed not as a foundation stone but as a starting point. And as such, it is open to theoretical revision. According to Jakobson and Tynianov:

The history of a system is in turn a system. Pure synchronism now proves to be an illusion: every synchronic system has its past and its future as inseparable structural elements of the system: (a) archaism as a fact of style; the linguistic and literary background recognised as the rejected old fashioned style; (b) the tendency in language and literature recognised as innovation in the system. (Tynianov and Jakobson, 1971, 79-80)

However, it is not just the presence of archaisms or innovation in an individual work that cut across the division between synchronic and diachronic series, but (as point five of the article tells us) literary periods also contain in themselves not just their own present but also their own past and intended future. The distinction Jakobson and

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15 Eikhenbaum's article is also quite informative here; see also Tynianov, 1971b, as well as Eikhenbaum, 1971a.
Tynianov make is not one of diachronic and synchronic series any more, but one of a synchronic literary system and ‘a naively envisaged concept of a chronological epoch’. While the later consists of the works written in that chronological epoch, the former ‘embraces not only works of art which are close to each other in time but also which are drawn into the orbit of the system from foreign literatures or previous epochs’ (1971, 80). Thus, for example, while Classicism draws into its orbit classical Greek and Latin literature, Romanticism rejects these and embraces medieval and folk artistic tradition. However, as the ‘rejected’ types of literature do not just simply disappear from the general cultural corpus in a certain epoch, ‘an indifferent cataloguing of coexisting phenomena is not sufficient; what is important is their hierarchical significance for the given epoch’ (Ibid.).

Point six deals with another crucial distinction of Saussure’s linguistics: that of langue and parole. While admitting that this distinction has been ‘exceedingly fruitful’ for linguistics, they insist that the relationship between ‘the existing norm and individual utterances’ (Ibid.) must be reworked independently for the purposes of literary study. As Jakobson and Tynianov put it, in literature ‘the individual utterance cannot be considered without reference to the existing complex of norms’. What is implied in this assertion is that, while linguistics defines itself through its study of langue, literary studies are defined by their interest in literary texts, in literary parole, which, however, cannot be understood properly without the knowledge of the ‘existing complex of norms’ in and through which they are constructed. It is clear from this that for Jakobson and Tynianov the need for the study of literary langue comes not from the desire to understand literature’s system of signification for its own sake (as it does in French structuralism), but from the desire to comprehend individual utterances through the language in which they were written. The reason why they insist on the importance of the study of the complex of literary norms is that they believe that any study of a literary work which disregarded this complex would ‘inescapably deform the system of artistic values under consideration, thus losing the possibility of establishing its immanent laws’ (Ibid.).

As we can see, what matters to Jakobson and Tynianov is the understanding of concrete literary phenomena (be it individual texts or synchronic literary systems), not abstract systems of literary signification, divorced from their material and literary-historical reality. Furthermore, the final point of their article introduces what is effectively a final and resolute rejection of the early Formalist hypothesis, advanced by
Shklovskii, that a science of literature can develop successfully as a discipline only if it views literature as an autonomous, self-regulated and self-sufficient phenomenon.  

While point seven of the article suggests that 'an analysis of the structural laws of language and literature and their evolution' will 'inevitably' lead to 'the establishment of a limited series of actually existing structural types (types of structural evolution)' (Tynianov and Jakobson, 1971, 80), point eight insists on stepping beyond immanent analysis. As Jakobson and Tynianov put it, 'a disclosure of the immanent laws of the history of literature (language) allows us to determine the character of each specific change in literary (linguistic) systems' (Ibid.). It is probably quite significant that the linguistic part of their investigation is at this point left in parentheses, almost as an afterthought, as what they say next possibly applies much more to literary than to linguistic studies; and what they say is that immanent laws are certainly not all we need to know in order to understand the way literature functions and changes:

These [immanent] laws do not allow us to explain the tempo of evolution or the chosen path of evolution when several, theoretically possible, evolutionary paths are given. This is owing to the fact that the immanent laws of literary (linguistic) evolution form an indeterminate equation; although they admit only a limited number of possible solutions, they do not necessarily specify a unique solution. The question of a specific choice of path, or at least of the dominant, can be solved only by means of an analysis of the correlation between the literary series and other historical series. This correlation (a system of systems) has its own structural laws, which must be submitted to investigation. It would be methodologically fatal to consider the correlation of systems without taking into account the immanent laws of each system. (Tynianov and Jakobson, 1971, 80-1)

In the context of the evolution of Russian Formalist ideas about literature, however, this methodological reversal from Shklovskii’s early ideas comes as no surprise. Boris Eikhenbaum in his essay ‘The Theory of the Formal Method’ traced the path that Formalism took between Shklovskii’s early pronouncements about the absolute

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16 Victor Erlich quotes Shklovskii say that ‘art was always free of life and its colour never reflected the colour of the flag which waved over the fortress of the city’ (Erlich, 1981, 77). See also Hawkes, 1977, 60-62.
autonomy of literary studies from other disciplines, to mature Formalism’s interest in literary history and realisation that what makes a text literary are not some intrinsic, independently recognisable characteristics, but differential ones, set against the characteristics of the texts of other cultural-historical series. What we also witness here is Jakobson’s critique of an essay written by a slightly younger Jakobson, who said that literary study should be ‘the investigation of the specific properties of literary material’ (Eikhenbaum, 1971b, 7), studying ‘not literature, but ‘literariness’, that is, what makes a given work a literary work’. In order to understand what literature is, one also has to understand what it is not; an immanent analysis alone will not do. And a purely synchronic one will not do either; a suggestion, as Eagleton puts it mildly, which not all later structuralists took up (Eagleton, 97). At least in France; elsewhere was a different story.

East: Mukarovsky’s Definition of Structure

It is only fair that Mukarovsky should be at least briefly mentioned at this point, and I think that his concept of structure, based on this dynamic model of the literary system and its historical development, provides a clear contrast to definitions of structuralism quoted earlier.

In his lecture entitled ‘On Structuralism’, which was given in Paris in 1946, Mukarovsky defined structure firstly in the usual manner, as a ‘whole, the parts of which acquire a special character by entering it’, and added that ‘it is usually said that a whole is more than the sum of the parts of which it is composed’ (Mukarovsky, 1978, 3). However, his further definition of artistic structure goes against the mostly static concept of the structures we have looked at so far:

17 In words of Hawkes, the Formalists (but, in reality, it was just early Formalism, and Shklovskii in particular, not the whole movement) saw art as ‘autonomous: a permanent, self-determining, continuous human activity which warranted nothing less than examination in and on its own terms’ (Hawkes, 1977, 61).

18 We might just as well mention Eagleton, who, in the preface to the second edition of his Literary Theory, said that ‘there is in fact no ‘literary theory’, in a sense of a body of theory which springs from, or is applicable to, literature alone. None of the approaches..., from phenomenology and semiotics to structuralism and psychoanalysis, is simply concerned with ‘literary’ writing. On the contrary, they all emerged from other areas of the humanities, and have implications well beyond literature itself.’ (Eagleton, 1996b, vii). This echoes Tzvetan Todorov’s last sentences in his 1968 Poétique, that poetics can only play a transitory role, and that its true worth and path can only be in initiation of general study of all texts, and not just literary ones (108-9).
We designate interrelations among the components – relations dynamic in their very essence – as the specific property of structure in art. According to our conception we can consider as a structure only such a set of elements, the internal equilibrium of which is constantly disturbed and restored anew and the unity of which appears to us as a set of dialectic contradictions. That which endures is only the identity of a structure in the course of time, whereas its internal composition – the correlation of its components – changes continuously. In their interrelations individual components constantly strive to dominate one another; each of them makes an effort to assert itself to the detriment of others. (Mukařovsky, 1978, 4)

Furthermore, Mukařovsky adds that such a dynamic structure should be studied as a part of even more dynamic social and historical context:

The structure of a work of art, which appears as an event even when we look at a single work, appears even more as motion if we look at the contexts of which the work is a part. [...] In the course of time, the author’s attitude toward reality and his creative method change, and thus the structure of the work varies. Of course, this change is not independent of changes in the national literature as a whole, which, in turn, is liable to changes due to the development of the social consciousness. (Mukařovsky, 1978, 5)

As for the question of the referentiality of literature and art in general, in his paper of 1934 ‘Art as a Semiotic Fact’, Mukařovsky argues that a work of art evokes ‘the total context of so-called social phenomena’ (1978, 84), and adds that, in order to understand the structure of a given work of art, it is ‘very important [...] that we know whether it treats its subject as ‘real’ (sometimes even as documentary) or ‘fictive’, or whether it oscillates between these two poles’ (1978, 86). And he concludes, much as Tynianov and Jakobson do:

Only the semiotic point of view will permit theoreticians to recognise the autonomous existence and essential dynamism of artistic structure and to understand its development as a movement which is immanent but in constant dialectic relation to the development of the other spheres of culture. (1978, 87)

Eagleton has broader social and historical interests in mind, and Todorov is more interested in further textual study, but both predict a death of literary theory as an autonomous discipline.
We can see that later on Mukarovsky played down the idea of artistic structure's immanent nature and emphasised its dependence on the social and historical context. This shift of emphasis is a continuation of late Formalism's notion of the cultural system, which replaced the idea of literature's autonomy, and which, according to Broekman, happened partly out of a dialogue with Marxism, but also of the 'increasing [...] complexity of the structural approach and of examining the connections between literary and non-literary orders' (Broekman, 1974, 38).

As for the fact that the linguistic part of Jakobson's and Tynianov's investigation is put in parentheses at the point when the importance of cultural and historical context is emphasised, a possible explanation for that gesture will come some thirty years later, in the work of Soviet semioticians.

East: Lotman and *The Structure of the Artistic Text*

One of the most able minds among them was Iurii Lotman, probably the greatest Soviet semiotician, who developed a highly sophisticated theoretical system which describes literature, arts and culture in general as systems of communication (languages) which have an essential, irreplaceable role in human society. According to Lotman, since 'every system whose end is to establish communication between two or more individuals may be defined as language', we can apply that term not only to natural languages (French, Russian, Serbo-Croat) or artificial languages (traffic lights, metalanguages of different sciences), but 'also to customs, rituals, commerce and religious concepts'. Therefore, according to Lotman, 'in the same sense, we can speak of the 'language' of the theatre, cinema, painting, music, and of art as a whole, as a language organised in a particular way' (Lotman, 1977, 7).

What distinguishes art and culture from natural or artificial languages, however, is their particular twofold structure: art, religion and culture are secondary languages or, to use the Soviet semioticians' own term, they are secondary 'modelling systems' (we shall return to this term later). Lotman's definition of a secondary language is that it is 'a communication structure built as superstructure upon a natural linguistic plane (myth and religion, for example)' (1977, 9). As art is defined as one of the secondary languages, Lotman is fully aware that the this definition needs additional clarifications,
for the simple fact that there are nonverbal arts, arts which are not built as ‘superstructures upon a natural linguistic plane’ in the way that literature is. Thus,

We should understand the phrase ‘secondary in relation to language’ to mean more than ‘using natural language as material’; if the phrase had such implications, the inclusion of nonverbal arts (painting, music, and others) would be clearly impermissible. The relationship here is more complex: natural language is not only one of the earliest, but also the most powerful system of communication in the human collective. By virtue of its very structure, it exerts a powerful influence over the human psyche and over many aspects of social life. Secondary modelling systems, like all semiotic systems, are constructed on the model of language. This does not imply that they reproduce all aspects of natural languages. (Ibid.)

As natural language is our first and most powerful system of communication, it is also the primary foundation on which human cultures are based. Natural language, with its ‘powerful influence over the human psyche and over many aspects of social life’, is the structuring force of any cultural system: whatever belongs to the system, visual arts and music included, is refracted through the prism of natural language; even nonverbal arts are pulled into (or spring from) the verbal universe of human culture.

Nevertheless, what makes literature into a special case is that its own secondary nature in relation to natural language is, quite literally, literal; literature uses language as its primary material and other arts do not. As Mukalrovsky pointed out, although language is a material in relation to literature, as stone is in sculpture, or paint and canvas are in painting, what clearly differentiates language from stone, paint and canvas or musical notes is they acquire meaning only when they enter a work of art. Language, as Mukařovsky (1977, 9) pointed out, is already a system of signs, and these signs already carry meaning.

This results in the extremely complex sign system in which two language systems are being combined into one, one participating as the ‘raw material’ and the other as the structuring force; at the same time, both these language systems retain their full signifying potential. This ‘great complexity’ of ‘poetic speech’ is precisely what makes it irreplaceable in human culture; as Lotman puts it:

If the volume of information in poetic speech (verse or prose - here the distinction is unimportant) and in ordinary speech were identical, artistic speech would lose its right
to exist and, indisputably, would die out. But the case is somewhat different. A complicated artistic structure, created from the material of language, allows us to transmit a volume of information too great to be transmitted by an elementary, strictly linguistic structure. It follows that the information (content) given can neither exist nor be transmitted outside this artistic structure. (Lotman, 1977, 10-11)

Lotman clarifies his notion of the relationship between the idea of a work of art and its structure with the help of a metaphor, one taken from biology:

For a graphic representation of the relation of idea and structure, we might (...) imagine the bond between life and the biological mechanism of living tissue. Life, the main property of a living organism, is unthinkable outside its physical structure; it is a function of this working system. The literary scholar who hopes to comprehend an idea independently of the author's system for modelling the universe, independent of the structure of a work of art, resembles an idealist scholar who tries to separate life from that concrete biological structure whose very function is life. (Lotman, 1977, 12)

It is worth noting that this conceptual metaphor which likens a literary text to a living organism is one that was used by Russian Formalists (Propp and Zhirmunskii, for example)19, as well as by Mikhail Bakhtin in his later years; as Lotman's writing is discretely peppered with appreciative nods to both Formalists and to Bakhtin, his own use of it is probably not just a coincidence. The way Bakhtin uses 'the organic metaphor' is particularly telling, and provides us with a most suitable extension to Lotman's own use of it.

In his 'Concluding Remarks' to the collection of essays on the representation of time and space in novelistic genres ('Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel') Bakhtin defines the relationship between the world of a literary text and the real world as a relationship between a living organism and its environment. Although a living organism never merges with its environment in the way that its dead body one day will, its life nevertheless depends on that environment; if separated from it, the organism will die. In the same way, argues Bakhtin, the world of a literary text enters into the real world and 'enriches it'; at the same time, the real world enters into the text both as an element of its production and as a factor that will determine the way it will be
perceived and received by its readers (Bakhtin, 1996a, 254). It is quite clear that this idea fits perfectly with Bakhtin’s lifelong interest in the concepts of dialogue and polyphony; what is interesting about it is that Bakhtin wrote ‘Concluding Remarks’ two years after Lotman’s book *The Structure of the Artistic Text* was published. It would certainly be worth investigating whether Bakhtin read Lotman’s book before writing ‘Concluding Remarks’. At any rate, the two uses of the organic metaphor seem to me to be perfectly suited to each other, reflecting general similarities in the theoretical concepts of Bakhtin and Lotman.  

Apart from that, as we have seen already, the idea that a literary work of art cannot be perceived in isolation from the literary system, cultural system and, ultimately, social system in which the work of art is produced or perceived, is one of the main ideas of mature Formalism, most notably expressed in the work of Iurii Tynianov. In his essay ‘On Literary Evolution’ from 1927, Tynianov unequivocally dismissed the possibility of immanent study of a work of art as a theoretical fantasy, sternly stating that ‘the very existence of a fact as literary depends on its differential quality, that is, on its interrelationship with both literary and extraliterary orders’ (Tynianov, 1971b, 69). Lotman himself restated the case in much the same way as did Bakhtin with his organic metaphor:

A work of art, which is a particular model of the universe, a message in the language of art, simply cannot exist apart from all the other languages of social communication. Its meaning is extremely distorted for the reader who is trying to decipher the work with the help of arbitrary, subjectively chosen codes; but it has no meaning whatsoever for the man who would like to deal with the text totally apart from all its extra-textual relations. The entire sum of historically determined artistic codes which make a text meaningful is related to the sphere of extra-textual relations. (Lotman, 1977, 50)

Here we should perhaps return to the term ‘modelling systems’ which we encountered earlier, as it largely concerns that same monumental question about the relationship between the word and the world. Soviet semioticians claimed that, apart from being systems of communication, languages (natural, artificial and secondary ones) also serve the function of modelling the world to which they refer. According to Ann Shukman, 19

the term 'modelling system' was first used at the 1962 Symposium of the Moscow-Tartu School in Moscow, and it was then defined by V. V. Ivanov as 'the apparatus through which a community or individual perceives the world, and which models the world for him' (Shukman, 1977, 12). To use Lotman's example, in the language of chemical signs the signs can be divided into two groups: those designating chemical elements and those describing their relations. If we introduce a certain system for organising the signs that refer to chemical elements into groups (metals and non-metals, for example), we shall at the same time be adjusting the language of chemical signs to 'model a particular chemical reality' (Lotman, 1977, 14). According to Lotman and other Soviet semioticians, every communicative sign system models reality in its own way; some modelling systems will be more abstract (like the one of mathematics, for example) or refer to certain narrow aspects of the real world (the 'stop-ready-go' universe of the language of traffic lights), and others will have a high modelling capacity, fit to deal with vast areas of human life and human society (religion, for example). Shukman notes that the Moscow-Tartu group already in 1964 (at the Summer School in Kaarika, Estonia) decided to focus on the secondary modelling systems (Shukman, 1977, 11).21

What distinguishes literature from other communicative - modelling systems is not just its twofold structure comprised of two signifying systems, but also a special relationship between langue and parole, literary language and literary message, system and text. Lotman points out that for every communicative – modelling system the distinction between code and message is a useful analytical tool, and literature is no exception (Lotman, 1977, 15).

Moreover, in every language one can make a distinction between those linguistic elements which, as Lotman puts it, are 'characterised by the presence of extra-linguistic content' (Lotman, 1977, 16-17) and thus carry meaning, and those which are purely formal (like, for example, grammatical gender). Although on the level of 'linguistic facts' these two elements are in the process of 'constant interpenetration' (Lotman quotes the example of 'the apprehension of grammatical gender as a sexually meaningful characteristic' in reference to, say, inanimate objects) (Ibid.), on the abstract level the distinction can be quite successfully maintained. Lotman does not say this, but

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20 See also Allan Reid, 1990.
21 For more general information on Soviet Semiotics, see Shukman, 1977, 8-37.
we could perhaps add with some caution that in a more general treatment of the difference between langue and parole, the meaning belongs more to the domain of the message, and the formal elements are more a part of the language as an abstract system of sign interrelations. However, within both the language and the message, we can distinguish between formal and meaningful elements.

These two distinctions (code and message, formal and meaningful) can also be applied to artistic texts, and Lotman particularly stresses the importance of maintaining a clear conceptual differentiation between language and message in dealing with art:

The distinction of these aspects is also essential for the literary critic (and for any art critic). Here the problem lies not only in the constant confusion of an artistic text’s aesthetic value (coupled with constant assertions that what is incomprehensible is bad) with the peculiarities of its language, but also in the failure to consciously analyse the problem to be researched, the refusal to ask what is being studied: the general artistic language of an epoch (its schools, its writers) or a particular message transmitted in that language. (Lotman, 1977, 16)

Nevertheless, Lotman observes that precisely this ‘persistent identification of the problem of a language’s specificity in some form of art with the problem of the value of the information transmitted through it’ shows that there is something peculiar in the way that differentiation functions in the artistic text (Ibid.). Unlike natural language (as well as other communicative-modelling systems) in which, as we have seen, the difference between the meaningful and the formal in both language and speech is more or less strictly maintained throughout, art exhibits a tendency to formalise its content, to transform it into cliché, to transfer it ‘to the conventional realm of code’. At the same time, our tendency to interpret everything in a work of art as meaningful (even its most ‘formal’ elements, like meter, for example), as Lotman puts it, ‘is so great that we rightfully consider nothing accidental in a work of art’ (1977, 17). Here we come back to the idea that every communication system is also a modelling system, that every sign system besides enabling us to create messages in it also models and reflects our conceptions of the universe which it describes. What happens, however, in an artistic text is, according to Lotman, quite different from any other ordinary act of communication in both natural and artificial languages. Since the language of the artistic text is at the same time the artistic model of the world which that text portrays, it
is a part of the text's content and carries meaning. Moreover, the language of the text, which models the world of that text in its most general categories, conditions the nature of the concrete phenomena depicted by the message of the text. Thus, according to Lotman, in literature "the most important information is that which arises when a type of artistic language is selected" (1977, 18).

Obviously, what we have here is the not just the collapse of the old distinction between form and content (quite similar to the one performed by mature Formalism), but also the collapse of the distinction between language and message. This happens in particular when language itself becomes the basic content of a work, and thus, as Lotman puts it, "closes in on itself" (as it does, for example, in literary parody) (1977, 19). However, it is not just in the case of parody that language and message become so inextricably intertwined; according to Lotman, this collapse of language and message into one is one of the main distinguishing characteristics of literary language in general. As many of the Formalists were arguing as well, in literature

It becomes difficult... to take the planes of expression and content and demarcate them in the usual structural linguistic sense of that word. A sign models its content. It is clear that the semantization of the extra-semantic (syntactic) elements of natural language occurs under these conditions in an artistic text. Semantic elements are no longer clearly differentiated; a complex interweaving takes place. What is syntagmatic on one level of the hierarchy of an artistic text proves to be semantic on another. (Lotman, 1977, 21)

And so, to sum up: according to Lotman, literature (verbal art) is a secondary modelling system which uses natural languages, as well as other secondary modelling systems (religion, philosophy, other arts, etc.) - and, we might add, sometimes even artificial languages - as its material. This combination of two or more hierarchically structured sign systems results in an extremely complicated structure in which all of its elements come into play and 'balance off' one another, while at the same time maintaining the text's link with other literary texts and with extra-literary orders, making it impossible to understand its structure outside of these relations. A communicative modelling system like all other languages, the language of literature differs from them in that it becomes part of the message (or the 'content') of the work, rather than staying in the background purely as a system of abstract invariant relations. The idea of a work of art is rather like life in a living organism: inseparable from it and contained in all its cells
and their interrelations. A verbal work of art is form and content inextricably intertwined; its structure is one in which semantics and grammar are interwoven into a complex system; literature is the site of langue and parole collapsing into one.

Some final thoughts on the difference between French and Soviet (or Eastern European) Structuralism

As we have seen, one of the main differences between Western and Eastern structuralism is in the different view they take of their 'source discipline', linguistics. To make a sweeping statement, it seems that French literary structuralism based its main postulates on the idea of language as a system of abstract sign interrelations based on binary oppositions, and on the strict differentiation between langue and parole. Thus it is possible for Genette to make a distinction between structuralism and hermeneutics, the first exploring the codes of 'distant' literatures and the second grasping the messages of living works of verbal art. Soviet semiotics, on the other hand, seems to have paid more attention to the idea of language as a modelling system, the one which both reflects and shapes our idea of the world; hence its interest in the complex role that literature plays in modelling our view of the world and its participation in the overall system of culture.

Speaking of the more literary sources, the general view of what structuralism can and should do in France, and in the West in general, seems to assume that the whole of the Structuralist approach where literature is concerned has its sole origin in Vladimir Propp's Morphology of the Folktale, but one which interprets its methodology quite narrowly and without taking into account the specific material which it had as its subject.22

Propp's text, being, indeed, one of the key texts in the development of structuralism, did to its subject matter what the Russian Formalists and early Structuralists thought should be done in any case: adapting one's method of analysis to one's subject matter, however loose a principle it might be, was believed to be the key to a scientific, reliable and responsible approach to literary texts. As Propp demonstrated, fairy tales are repetitive in their plot, segments of plot appear in different tales in the same order, and the characters are very different from characters in realist

22 See also Shukman, 1977, 4.
novels. Propp applied his ‘morphological approach’ to Russian fairy tales, and not to Russian nineteenth-century novels; along with other Formalists he probably would have thought that it would be ridiculous even to try the same approach on Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. However admirably effective on its proper subject-matter, the conclusions of Propp’s analysis are by no means representative of what the Russian, Soviet (and Eastern European in general) structuralist project in general thought happened within a literary text. But the spirit of the project was fully in keeping with that ‘organic’ approach which we have noted where Lotman was concerned. After all, Propp chose the title of his book in reference to Goethe’s notion of ‘morphology’, ‘a novel approach to the study of the laws that undergird and interpenetrate nature’ (Propp, 1996, 221). Broekman also stresses that Czech structuralism ‘bears a decided functionalist stamp, a general legacy from biology’. Such a theoretical model rests on the analogy with organic life as ‘an adoptive system reacting meaningfully by its own doing, upon changing environmental circumstances’ (Broekman, 1974, 64).

Apart from the folklorist Propp, within the Formalist school (which in its late stage approached structuralist positions) also worked Boris Eikhenbaum (with, for example, his study of the literary environment), Iurii Tynianov (with his idea of cultural systems)23, Boris Tomashevskii (with, amongst other things, his paper on the relevance of biographical legend in poetry), and Roman Jakobson. The ideas these extremely talented theorists of literature developed about culture as a system and about the concepts of what was later on named ‘intertextuality’ fed into the development of Soviet Semiotics and the ideas of its greatest representative, Iurii Lotman. Moreover, although I have used the year 1928 as my ‘end of formalism and the beginning of structuralism year’, it could well be argued that Formalism proper ended when ‘the Formalists’ original endeavour to pin down some particular constructional device and trace its unity through voluminous material had given way to an endeavour to qualify further the generalised idea, to grasp the concrete function of the device in each given instance’ (Eikhenbaum, 1971b, 29). Propp himself made a similar distinction between formalism and structuralism, saying that for the formalists, ‘the whole appears to be a mechanical conglomerate of heterogeneous parts’, while the structuralist, ‘on the other hand,

23 See Todorov, 1968, 92-97, for his discussion on Tynianov and the link between structure, literary evolution and ‘intertextuality’.
examines the parts as elements of a whole; the structuralist sees a whole, a system, which the formalist cannot even discern' (Propp, 1996, 238).

I would argue that the true structuralist manifesto of the 1920s would be Jakobson and Tynianov's essay 'Problems in the Study of Literature and Language', but also that some of the Formalists (like Tynianov, Eikhenbaum and Tomashevskii) had been already working in the framework outlined by the 'Problems'. The very term 'Russian Formalism' is useful as a name for a group of critics and theorists working together in Russia between 1915 and the early '30s, but to talk of the 'formalism' of their endeavour for the whole of that period is simply wrong.

Frederic Jameson suggested that 'for the spirit of the Formalist enterprise, imagine the New Critics with collective enthusiasm taking apart the nursery rhymes of Mother Goose!' (Jameson, 1972, 82) I would say that, in order to understand the Russian Formalist spirit, 'formalism' as an approach should be seen as the initial hypothesis, later discarded; enthusiasm should certainly be imagined, but it is literature as a whole that should be seen as the object of its loving attention; and, as for the history of Formalism's further influence, culture as a whole became the object of Slavic structuralism's analyses. Scholes, polemicising with Jameson's assessment of Formalism, notes that 'formalism has lasted until now mainly because we have been so slow in assimilating it and so feeble in improving it. But in another sense the achievement of the formalists, like that of Aristotle, will be permanent because it will have to be incorporated in any later poetics of fiction.' (Scholes, 1974, 158). Furthermore, Scholes stresses that 'the formal method has given us virtually all the poetics of fiction we have' (1974, 76-77). The polemic between Scholes and Jameson underlines the differences in the assessment of both Formalism and structuralism which spring from different Formalist-structuralist canons taken into account by different critics. For those who are inclined to believe that literature has some connection with the world at large and with culture, society, and history in general, and who see Formalism as exemplified by Shklovskii and Propp, and structuralism as consisting only of its French version, it is easy to be critical (as Jameson and Eagleton are). For those who also take into account Jakobson, Tynianov, the Prague structuralism and Soviet Semiotics, a very different picture is formed. Sometimes, as in the case of Eagleton, who read Lotman and obviously liked him, the image of the received Structuralist canon (Propp and the French) can distort the final assessment of the whole movement.
Amy Mandelker in her essay ‘Logosphere and Semiosphere: Bakhtin, Russian Organicism, and the Semiotics of Culture’ sums up the historical and theoretical differences between Western and Eastern structuralism, much in the spirit of this thesis. She is primarily talking about later stage in the development of Soviet semiotics, which happened soon after the semiotics and structuralism in the West evolved into their post-structuralist phase:

The evolution in Moscow-Tartu school semiotic theory during the 1980s might be compared with the shift from Newtonian relativistic physics. Western critical theory has comfortably assimilated semiotic theory in its earlier structuralist mode, yet this appropriation has often distorted the basic premises of Slavic theory, resulting in elisions, misreadings, or impoverished interpretations. (Mandelker, 1995, 177)

According to Mandelker, the later development of Slavic semiotic theory ‘explodes the bipolar grid of significance erected to fit a Saussurean model and adopts a less mathematical-linguistic, more biologically based method of modelling, experimentation and inquiry’ (1995, 178). However, as we have seen, the biological model was there even in Propp, and certainly existed in both the Prague Circle and the Moscow-Tartu School from its beginning. Mandelker, on the other hand, suggests that because this later development happened at the same time as the post-structuralist phase in the West, and because the Soviet semioticians were happy enough to call themselves ‘structuralists’, it becomes tempting to name this phase of Slavic semiotics as post-structuralist. However, this would probably create a completely wrong picture, and cause even more misunderstandings on the Western side, as the picture in the East is a lot more complicated than that (and Mandelker paints it so clearly that I shall refrain from paraphrasing her, and quote her at some length):

Russian ‘post-structuralism’, however, is discontinuous from Western post-structuralism. So-called Slavic structuralism (Prague school structuralism) is more accurately a ‘post-Formalist’ movement, and Russian Formalism is arguably already structuralist in its intent, especially in the culminating publications of the Russian Formalists Jakobson and Tynianov.24 By contrast, Western structuralism (especially

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24 Mandelker is here referring to ‘Problems in the Study of Literature and Language’, by Jakobson and Tynianov, which we have already looked at.
French structuralism, as represented by such figures as Roland Barthes and others of the Tel Quel school) more closely resembles early Russian Formalists. French structuralism in the practice of its adherents Girard or Guiraud is often more formalist than the Formalists themselves, in its reliance on the types of Proppian manoeuvres that can reduce texts to a series of functions and strategies. This type of mathematical textual analysis in a contextual vacuum provided an impetus for a recontextualisation of discourse analysis among the opening moves of what has become to be known as post-structuralism. But the term post-structuralism does a disservice to Slavic structuralism, which was way ahead of its European homonym. [...]

In fact, the Russian Formalists, in their last publications by Jakobson and Tynianov (1929), were already debating and probing the issues that became critical not only to structuralists but also to Western post-structuralist debates more than half a century later. Therefore, if we are going to fall in with the contemporary critical practice of ‘post’-al designations, Slavic structuralism would have to be considered equivalent to Western post-structuralism, since Slavic structuralism from its inception rejected isolationist heuristic methodologies, that is, critical focus on the structures of a text to the exclusion of all ‘extraliterary’ factors. (Mandelker, 1995, 178-9)

Mandelker here suggests that, in Eastern terms, Western poststructuralism can be considered as ‘a persistent or an unreconstructed structuralism’, since its main exponents (like De Man or Derrida) still ‘operate within an essentially Saussurean conception of language’. In the light of all this, concludes Mandelker, ‘a post-structuralist semiotics in the Russian context, which posits spherical enclosures and generative explosions that blast away the logocentrism of post-structuralist thought, would thus have to be registered as post-post-structuralist in Western terms’ (Mandelker, 1995, 179).

There is also another difference between the Western and the Eastern literary approach as a whole, and Roman Jakobson’s essay on Mayakovsky, entitled ‘On a Generation That Squandered Its Poets’ is probably one of the best illustrations of it. Jakobson, who is far too often portrayed as a dry and analytical linguist obsessed with phonological parallelisms in poetry,25 wrote this bitter and passionate essay in 1931, a year after the poet’s suicide. ‘On a Generation That Squandered Its Poets’ is an almost

25 See, for example, Jonathan Culler’s account of Jakobson’s analytical method in his Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature (1975).
unbearably moving piece, combining a masterful analysis of Mayakovsky’s poetry with Jakobson’s personal account of the poet and his sense that he shares the blame for his death with the rest of those who believed that all those images of unbearable life and allusions to suicide in Mayakovsky’s poetry were just a poetic device. Far from being an ‘automatic discovery procedure’ (as Jonathan Culler describes Jakobson’s method), this essays shows clearly the amount of knowledge and intelligence and instinct (and even, if you will, ethical wisdom) which is necessary for a great literary analysis.

That kind of essay is possible only where a close knowledge of a culture is interwoven with a personal sense of belonging and responsibility for that culture; and this brings us to another point. The majority of Eastern European theorists bring into their investigation their firm belief in the capital importance of literature and art for the life of a nation. The writers they are dealing with are very much alive in their culture’s perception, and their work carries a fundamental importance in the way that culture defines itself. The sense of pride and passion for one’s work and one’s subject matter that one finds even in the driest of Lotman’s formulations is quite unparalleled in the majority of Western scholarly works; not so much because of lack of personal love for literature amongst those Western scholars, but more because of the lack of a strong social and cultural need for that kind of love and that kind of need. Although this distinction between Eastern and Western approach to literature is of the most general and elusive kind, I believe that it influences scholarly discourse in a very real way. After all, there are very few Western scholars who would dare write as a conclusion to their book on literary theory what Lotman wrote at the end of The Structure of the Artistic Text, in that infuriatingly dry style of his that so unsuccessfully tries to disguise his passion for literature:

We can declare with certainty that more than anything else created by man, the artistic text most clearly manifests those properties which draw the cybernetician’s attention to the structure of living tissue.

For this reason, the study of the structure of the artistic text is significant for all scientific disciplines. (Lotman, 1977, 300)
Chapter 1:
Locating Barthes and Bakhtin: Why Talk About Structuralism?

Roland Barthes is one of the great French structuralists, whose name is mentioned in the same breath as the names of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault. The question ‘Why talk about structuralism?’ would be strange if applied to him alone.

Mikhail Bakhtin, however, is an altogether different issue. Although in many respects structuralists helped bring him to the fore in Russia, France, and the United States, he has in recent years been mostly seen as an arch-antistructuralist, who preferred dynamic, exciting ‘architectonics’ and dialogism, to boring, static old structures.

In this chapter I shall briefly present the main ideas of Barthes’s literary structuralism, as well as discuss why it could be helpful still to think of Bakhtin as a structuralist of the Tynianov-Mukarovsky-Lotman kind. The two parts of the chapter will situate Barthes and Bakhtin in their respective contexts (French and Eastern European structuralisms) and briefly indicate why Barthes may be closer to the Eastern variety of structuralism than fitting in purely with the French, the argument which will be continued throughout the thesis.

But, before we continue, three important remarks:

Firstly, I have left the discussion of the question of the body out of the thesis, although both Barthes and Bakhtin wrote extensively about it. A comparison between their ideas about the body could certainly be very fruitful and interesting, but lies somewhat outside of the main topic of this thesis, which focuses on the inter-related problems of literature and ideology, social languages and their literary representation, intertextuality and the role of the author. The question of the body lies somewhat outside of that set of problems.

Secondly, I consider only those of Bakhtin’s texts that were originally published under his own name, leaving aside those originally published under the names of Medvedev and Voloshinov (and Kanaev). The arguments in favour of Bakhtin’s
The authorship of Voloshinov’s *Freudianism* and *Marxism and Philosophy of Language*, and Medvedev’s *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* appear very shaky indeed, and no material proof has so far been offered to support the claims that Bakhtin was the real author of these books. This subject has already been dealt with quite extensively by Caryl Emerson, Gary Saul Morson and Allan Reid, and I shall not repeat their arguments, as there is very little new to be said about an issue that should not have been raised at all.26

Thirdly, I have mostly referred to the English translations of Bakhtin’s texts. This was done partly because most of the debate about Bakhtin to which I refer was conducted in English, but also in order to make the things easier for readers who are more likely to be familiar with the French part of the subject matter, and less likely to know Russian as well. The Russian editions can be found listed in the bibliography.

**Barthes the Structuralist**

Scholes lists Barthes as one of the ‘high structuralists’ (alongside Lévi-Strauss, Michel Foucault, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida); he calls him ‘a star performer, an individual who must be approached as a system in himself, and understood for the sake of his own mental processes’. Scholes adds:

> Whatever contributions of these men are absorbed by the general culture, their texts will not suffer the same absorption but will remain — like philosophical texts, which they are, and literary texts, which some of them aspire to be — as unique objects to which later thinkers must return in order to grasp the ideas and methods that have been developed therein. This is what we may call ‘high structuralism’ — high in its aspirations and in its current prestige. (Scholes, 1974, 157-58)27

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27 He defines ‘low structuralism’ as ‘practised by men whose intelligence and learning is considerable – often not inferior to that of the high structuralists – but whose aspirations are more humble... The low structuralist writes to be immediately useful, to be ultimately superseded’— like Genette, for example (Ibid.).

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And yet, Scholes lets us know that there is more to Roland Barthes than his structuralist fame: he is 'a literary critic, an advocate of *le nouveau roman* and a practitioner of *la nouvelle critique*, a student of popular culture, a scholar of Racine, a brilliant polemicist, a formidable rhetorician, an ingenious, mercurial man of letters'. Scholes continues:

> He is an essentially unsystematic writer who loves system, a structuralist who dislikes structure, a literary man who despises 'literature'. He loves to take up the outrageous position on any question and defend it until it becomes plausible, or – better still – attack the other views until they seem inferior. (Scholes, 1974, 148)

Barthes is not only a structuralist, then, and some of the surveys of his thought stress this quite forcefully. Andy Stafford, for example, quotes Culler's definition of Barthes as a 'Man of Parts' (Culler, 1990, ch. 1), giving us a list of things that Barthes was that is not that dissimilar to Scholes's (Stafford, 1998, 13), and considers that 'Barthes's contribution to [the structuralist] mode of analysis was a highly ambiguous one' (1998, 103). Rick Rylance makes a strong point of this, saying that 'although he did work with structuralist ideas for a time from the late 1950s to the late 1960s, it is essential not to isolate this period' (Rylance, 1994, 32). However, regardless of Rylance's assertion that Barthes's 'most celebrated reputation [that of a structuralist] is probably spurious' (Ibid.), Barthes is still enough of a structuralist for Jonathan Culler to adopt his definition of structuralism as (in Culler’s own words) a ‘mode of analysis of cultural artefacts which originates in the methods of contemporary linguistics’ (Culler, 1975, 3). François Dosse in his *History of Structuralism* pronounces Barthes ‘the mother figure of structuralism’, ‘a mythic figure’ and ‘structuralism’s best barometer’ (Dosse, 1998, 1, 71). And in his introductory essay to *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, J. Harari uses Barthes’s ‘L'introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits’ in order to ‘put in perspective the aims and achievements of ‘literary structuralism’ (Harari, 1979, 23).

Although structuralism and semiotics were something he did for only a part of his life (arguably for about 15 years, between 1956 and 1970), it is one of the great intellectual systems (apart from existentialism, Marxism and psychoanalysis) which had influenced Barthes profoundly, and he, in return, greatly influenced its course in the West. Leonard Jackson, however, would not agree with this, as he sees Barthes’s
significance not so much in the importance and originality of his ideas, but more in his 'representative quality' for French structuralism. He claims that Barthes is essentially an essayist, and not a creator of theoretical systems, at least none of any real interest (he is talking primarily about *The Fashion System*) (Jackson, 1991, 145). He sees Barthes's structuralist 'rigour' as a form of masochism 'at the level of unconscious fantasy':

Structuralism, to the extent that it is conceived of as a net to bind desire, is a masochistic fantasy: literally, a bondage fantasy. So far as it is a net to bind other minds and bodies, it is a sadistic fantasy. (Jackson, 1991, 146)

The works which Barthes himself lists among his 'semiotic' works are *Mythologies* (to be more precise, their theoretical postscript 'Le Mythe, aujourd’hui*'), *Système de la mode* (to which Jackson’s comment could largely apply), *Eléments de sémiologie*, and ‘L’introduction à l’analyse structurale des récits’ with *S/Z* as a turning point which changed the focus of his research from the work to the text, from aesthetic product to aesthetic activity, and from structure to structuration – in other words, away from structuralism and into post-structuralism (Barthes, 1974a, 37-39). As Barthes himself was quite clear about which of his works should be considered as representative of the structuralist movement, one would expect little debate about this. However, whereas Michael Moriarty pretty much follows Barthes’s own classification of his own work, interpreting *S/Z* as a radical departure from the structuralist programme, but also adding *Sur Racine* to the discussion of Barthes’s structuralist and semiotic studies (Moriarty, 1991, 53-143), Jonathan Culler, on the other hand, in his own book on Barthes claims that the alleged break with the structuralist model in *S/Z* is not as radical as is often claimed, since many of the basic structuralist assumptions still inform its theory (1990, 87-90), and that the true departure began when Barthes discovered the 'body' as a critical tool. Furthermore, George Wasserman, having defined structures as 'the systems of relations human beings construct, consciously or unconsciously, in order to endow things with meaning', suggests that it could be said that Barthes was always a Structuralist (1981, 58-59). In a similar vein, Steven Ungar suggests that, although 'structuralism is but one of a number of phases in his writing' (1983, 55), after the 'critical break' with structuralism, Barthes nevertheless ‘still remains somewhat of a structuralist – *un structuraliste encore* – who seeks self-knowledge by trying to make himself into a kind of text: a body to be observed, analysed, and ultimately understood'
(1983, 56). Roland Champagne claims the complete opposite of any of the above, claiming that Barthes’s structuralism was just a mask for much deeper concerns: ‘while Barthes maintained that he was a “structuralist” (perhaps there was some security in that identity) his research and writing took him into explorations beyond the linguistics of structuralism into how meaning is transferred from one person to another’ (1984, 11) – thus Champagne turns Barthes into Bakhtin’s perfect double, a most encouraging claim in the context of this thesis, but, unfortunately for me, as we shall see later, one that is not necessarily true.

The story of Barthes’s belonging to the structuralist movement is further complicated if one looks at it from the point of view of ‘Slavic structuralism’, as we discussed it in the introductory chapter.

How can he be located, not so much within French structuralism, for his belonging there can hardly be seriously disputed, but within the larger history of structuralist thought? I shall not attempt to give the full answer right away, and at least some of the problems raised by the question shall be tackled in the following chapters. For the beginning, let us just look at some of Barthes’s pronouncements on structuralism and try to see how his views might have changed and what impact they may have on the possible answer to our question.

‘Introduction à l’analyse structurale des récits’

We have already mentioned that for Barthes, as well as for other French structuralists, linguistics was a discipline which provided a methodological framework for other humanistic disciplines. However, in his Structuralist Poetics, Jonathan Culler notes that there are two different understandings of the link between linguistics and structuralist study of literature as presented by Barthes: one that claims that ‘the literary work offers structuralism the picture of a structure perfectly homological with that of language itself’, and the other that suggests that structuralism aims at founding ‘a science of literature, or, to be more exact, a linguistics of discourse whose object is the “language” of literary forms’ (Culler, 1975, 96). Thus, there is, as Culler points out, a decided

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28 Culler is here quoting Barthes's 'Science versus literature' as it appeared in The Times Literary Supplement (28 September 1967); the French version of the article is entitled 'De la science à la littérature', in J, pp. 428-433. This article was also the source of Culler's definition of structuralism.
ambiguity here: does a literary work as such function like language, or does literature as a whole function like language? Culler suggests that this ambiguity resulted in the creation of two types of structuralist research. The first aims to 'deconstruct and understand' the individual literary language found in a work or a group of works, and the second studies 'works as manifestations of a literary system and show how the conventions of that system enable the works to have meaning' (Culler, 1975, 97). Barthes's *Sur Racine* belongs to the first type, and 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits' would belong to the second. We shall leave Barthes's book on Racine aside for now, and glance at his work on narratology.

Josué V. Harari, in his essay 'Critical Factions/Critical Fictions', looks at Barthes's 1966 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits' from a post-structuralist perspective, and notes that 'one is struck by the rather modest claims Barthes makes for structural analysis in the literary domain' (Harari, 1979, 26). He remarks on the 'mildness of the tone' with which Barthes made his suggestion that, taking into account 'the current state of research' (in Barthes's own words) 'it seems reasonable to elect linguistics itself as a basic model for the structural analysis of narrative' (Harari, 1979, 24). Harari also stresses the pragmatic stance of Barthes's article, and argues against the more radical interpretations of it:

Although Barthes emphasised from the beginning of 'Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative' that a grammar of the narrative would have to rely on linguistics and linguistic categories, clearly he was never advocating in this structuralist project a wholesale transposition of grammatical structures into narrative structures, that is, the kind of transposition which would make of narrative theory an applied linguistics. [...] Linguistics and narrative theory must inevitably intersect as each one, in its own manner, questions language; but it is never a matter for Barthes of assimilating one to the other, or of confusing them. The analogy between them rests on the practical belief that a number of linguistic concepts can be borrowed to help generate a narrative or a literary model. (Ibid.)

Harari also stresses that for Barthes linguistics is not an absolute but simply a 'hypothetical model of description', a phrase which, as Harari points out, Barthes also used in *Critique et vérité* when talking about the postulates of the 'science of literature' (Barthes, 1966a, I, 41). Thus, for Barthes, 'the aim is not a fixed, unchanging, a priori
model, but a pragmatic model, given the necessity to classify a great number of narratives' (Harari, 1979, 25). Harari also points out that neither this model nor the discipline of narrative analysis was meant to ‘explain all the articulations of narrative discourse’ nor study the meanings of the text: ‘to study the grammar of narrative is to attempt to specify the possibilities of meaning and not to fulfil them’ (1979, 26). And so, Harari claims that ‘structural analysis can be seen to be schematising only if one loses sight of its limited objectives, namely, to cause the possibility of a theory of structure to appear and to make the functioning of narrative discourse apparent’ (Ibid.).

Lavers also notes Barthes’s ‘Saussurean’ gesture, ‘which accepts the limitations of the scientific attitude and thereby hopes to achieve a manageable object’ at the beginning of ‘Introduction’ (Lavers, 1982, 189).

Let us now look at ‘Introduction à l’analyse structurale des récits’ itself. Firstly, Barthes’s claim does not seem to be as modest as Harari suggests, as he stresses the presence of narrative everywhere and always, and remarks that the aim of structuralism is to ‘master’ the infinitude of narratives and to describe the language from which they issue (Barthes, 1966b, 74). An aim as grand as they come; however, this is where the pragmatism that Harari speaks of is introduced, as Barthes suggests that it is precisely the infinitude of narratives that forces their analyst to use a deductive method of description, and one which, for practical reasons connected with the current state of research, might just as well be derived from linguistics (1966b, 76).

The linguistics thus transposed onto the narrative would a create a ‘second linguistics’ whose subject matter would go beyond the sentence and into narrative discourse. Barthes suggests that discourse itself is organised and that its organisation makes it seem like a message written in another language, which is at a level above the language studied by linguists (1966b, 76).

According to Barthes, what makes narratives resemble the messages created in (to use Lotman’s handy term) the natural language, is the fact that, just like the sentence, the narrative can be divided into different levels. Although the elements of each of these levels (i.e., in a sentence, the phonetic, morphological, grammatical levels) has its own rules of combination, none of them can produce meaning on its own. In order for meaning to be created, all of the elements have to be integrated into the whole of the sentence or of the narrative according to a hierarchical order (1966b, 78-79). Barthes cites several examples of different ways of distinguishing between different
levels and the one he uses partially to create his own differentiation is Benveniste's distinction between two basic types of relation: distributional (relations on a single level) and integrative (relations which connect one level to another) (1966b, 78). Barthes notes that if one is to understand a narrative text, one cannot proceed purely on a horizontal axis, just by following how the story and its 'events' develop; one also has to establish vertical links of how different aspects of the story are related to one another. The 'provisional' model Barthes proposes here establishes three basic levels, which are then further subdivided: the level of 'functions', the level of 'actions', and the level of 'narration'. Barthes stresses that the elements of each of the lower levels acquire meaning only when integrated into the higher level and into the whole of the narrative (1966b, 79-80).

Barthes was clearly guided by Hjelmslev's Prolegomena when he devised his method for the study of narratives. According to Hjelmslev,

Since linguistic theory starts from the text as its datum and attempts to show the way to a self-consistent and exhaustive description of it through an analysis — a deductive progression from class to component and component of component — the deepest strata of its definition system must treat the principle of analysis. (Hjelmslev, 1961, 21)

Hjelmslev also stresses that 'both the object under examination and its parts have existence only by virtue of these dependencies', that 'a totality does not consist of things but of relationships, that not substance but only its internal and external relationships have scientific existence' (1961, 22-3).

Following Hjelmslev's procedure, Barthes suggests that one must first isolate the smallest structural unit of the narrative, stressing that sense and functionality must be the main criteria for the definition of the unit. As he puts it, 'c'est le caractère fonctionnel de certains segments de l'histoire qui en fait des unités', and, in an obvious nod to Propp, he calls these smallest types of units 'functions' (Barthes, 1966b, 79). He adds that the functional fullness of a narrative has nothing to do with the writer's intention, and has all to do with the structure of the artistic text (1966b, 80).

The units of the narrative are not the same as linguistic units. Sometimes, a narrative unit can be longer than a single sentence, but sometimes it can also consist of a single word (1966b, 81-2); an important correction, it seems to me, of Lévi-Strauss's
methodological indecisiveness over whether it is just sentences that he takes as the smallest units of a myth or whether these units can also be names or the like. In other words, as much as linguistics can help us, we must not confuse its methods and subject-matter with those of the analysis of the narrative.

To go back to ‘functions’, Barthes further divides them into distributional and integrative ones, and, confusingly, the former are termed ‘functions proper’ while the later are named ‘indices’.

Functions proper are those which relate to the horizontal axis of the story; in order to find out what the role of such a function is, all we need to do is read further and see what happens later in the story. Indices, on the other hand, have no meaning on the level of the narrative events, and they need to be integrated into a higher level of the text in order to acquire meaning. Indices, according to Barthes, usually relate to characterisation, information on character’s identity, notation of ‘atmosphere’ and so on. For example (to use Barthes’s example, which he took from Tomashevskii), the purchase of a pistol is related to the moment when it is fired, and it can be seen as function proper. But, to extend the example, if a character possesses a pistol which remains at the back of a drawer, unused, then, depending on the general context of the story, it becomes an index of the character’s ‘nature’ and/or of the atmosphere in which the story takes place.

Functions proper are further divided into ‘cardinal functions’ (or noyaux) and ‘catalysers’. Barthes defines the cardinal function as one which opens up alternatives for the action that follows; it is the point of risk in the narrative (1966b, 83-85). Catalysers, in the words of Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan (1983, 16), ‘expand, amplify, maintain or delay’ cardinal functions; in Barthes’s own words, catalysers are still functional by virtue of their link with the cardinal functions, but their functionality is ‘parasitic’ and ‘unilateral’. As a matter of fact, catalysers’ most important function is phatic, that is, they maintain the contact between the narrator and the narratee (Barthes, Ibid.). Furthermore, catalysers have, as Barthes puts it, a purely chronological functionality: they are purely consecutive units, just filling in the time between two cardinal functions, while cardinal functions are at the same time consecutive and consequential. However, Barthes also adds that the consequentiality of cardinal functions is to a large extent the effect of their consecutiveness, which then gets misinterpreted according to the logical fallacy post hoc, ergo propter hoc (1966b, 84). A bit later, Barthes picks up on this problem of confusion between time and logic again, suggesting that the question is still
open as to what guides our sense of time in narratives: chronology of events or narrative logic which then gets reinterpreted as time? This time, Barthes suggests that, just as in language tenses do not represent real time but are an element of the system, 'real' time in narrative is a 'referential illusion' (1966b, 86-87): it does not belong to the narrative itself but is, as Michael Moriarty puts it, ‘the projection of an atemporal logical matrix’. Moriarty quite convincingly un-picks this rather confusing conclusion:

> We read a narrative in time, and we encounter the order of its functions as successive. This gives us the impression both that time is a fundamental dimension of the narrative as it is of our experience (including the experience of reading) and that the events of the narrative are connected by the causal patterns we use to interpret our lived experience (outside reading). Whereas in fact the connections follow a peculiar narrative logic, unrelated to the time and even the causal régime of lived experience, even though certain types of text try very hard to make the link, or make us believe in the link: the link being nothing other than the referential illusion. (Moriarty, 1991, 93-94)

Thus, according to Barthes, functions proper open up logical alternatives for action, and we recognise the possible sequences of action which could follow from there partly because words which describe them form groups of semantic oppositions (a phone rings: a character answers it or he does not; if he does, he speaks, or is silent, listening; he does not, and the phone continues or stops ringing, etc.), partly because of certain narrative conventions, and partly because of the strength of stereotypes (Barthes, 1966b, 88, 100). What is problematic here is Barthes’s assumption that readers really believe that real time is a ‘fundamental dimension of the narrative’. Surely, all readers (bar the very naïve ones) know that the time and the events represented in the narrative are ‘nothing other than the referential illusion’. Having said that, the only way we can follow and enjoy a story is by playing along, by wilfully believing in that illusion, and making connections between the story and our lives that only the illusion makes possible.

As Moriarty points out, the role of catalysers is quite important in establishing the illusion of real time, because they, ‘as flesh on the skeleton of cardinal functions’, mask ‘the narrative’s intelligibility by imparting to it something of the density and opacity of life’ (Moriarty, 1991, 94). Thus, if we were to take too seriously Barthes’s
comments about the ‘parasitical’ nature of catalysers and disregard them as mere ‘zones of security, of rest’ and as narrative ‘luxuries’ (Barthes, 1966b, 84), we would seriously impoverish the narrative. As Barthes himself puts it, if we change a function proper, we change the story, but if we change a catalyst, we change the narrative discourse.

To go back to Barthes’s definition of indices, we also need to mention that he divides them into ‘indices proper’ (which refer to the character, sentiment, atmosphere or philosophy) and ‘informants’ (which serve to place the story in time and place). Barthes also notes that indices proper signify implicitly, by suggestion, and the reader needs to learn to decode them, while informants signify directly, telling us straight away and in full what we need to know (Barthes, 1966b, 84-85).

Although Barthes from the beginning stressed the importance of all narrative units, he nevertheless makes the same point about informants that he made about catalysers: their functionality is much weaker than that of cardinal functions, and belongs to the level of the narrative discourse and not to the level of the story (1966b, 85). Informants and catalysers are arranged around the basic plot, and can be added on or taken away without affecting it in any way. This plot-centred concern of ‘Introduction à l’analyse structurale des récits’ is fairly typical of the rest of structuralist narratology, and owes a clear debt to Propp understood as the grandfather of the study of narratives.

The importance of the plot is also carried over to the second narrative level, the level of actions. This is the level on which characters are structured, and, as, we can guess from that very fact, they are also to a large extent plot-based. According to the structural analysis of narratives, says Barthes, characters are not perceived as ‘beings’ or ‘personalities’ in psychological terms any more, but simply as agents or participants in a ‘sphere of actions’ (1966b, 91-92). A character is an agent which performs a certain number of actions within a story, and that is its most important aspect; again this is pure Propp and Greimas. Apart from giving us a very brief survey of some of the structuralist actantial models (namely, Greimas’s and Todorov’s), Barthes devotes hardly any time and space to the notion of the character on the level of actions, remarking simply that the character acquires its meaning only on the level of narration. The purely ‘functionalist’ idea of a character’s role in a narrative is even more stressed in ‘Les suites d’actions’, which also directly points to Propp as its originator (Barthes, 1971c).

29 Also, Moriarty, 1991, 94.
Discussing the level of narration, Barthes notes that there are three basic conceptions of the originator of the narrative. The first is that of the author, as psychological entity which expresses himself or herself in his or her art; the second is that of the impersonal narrator whose point of view is similar to that of God; and the third, more recent (Henry James, Sartre), postulates that the narrator should limit himself to depicting the points of view of the characters. Barthes claims that the problem with each of these models is, firstly, that they all see both the narrator and the characters as real persons (1966b, 94-95), and he proposes to get rid of such naïve notions by saying that, just as the character was conceived as simply a complex of actions performed, so the author is an arranger of signs. As Barthes puts it, the author is not any more the one who invents the prettiest stories, but the one who best masters the code which he shares with his audience (1966b, 97).30

Barthes also points out that the author and the narrator cannot both be discussed as the ‘originators’ of a narrative, for the question of the role of the author (is he expressing himself or is he just arranging the literary and social codes?) is a completely different question to that of the role of the narrator. The two types of narrator that he mentions here (roughly, the omniscient and the ‘unreliable’ narrator) can in no way be talked of as being seen as the originators of the narrative, for they are its functions, and important elements of the text itself (Barthes, 1966b, 95).

In the final part of the essay, Barthes points out once again that each of the units of the narrative has different functions, creating sequences of relations which intersect on different levels (1966b, 99-100). Furthermore, the narrative is pulled in two different directions: toward expansion by addition of more and more catalysers, and toward subtraction and résumé. According to Barthes, on one level, a narrative can translated from one language or medium to another without much damage done to it (1966b, 101). On the other, the combination of horizontal distribution and vertical integration of narrative units establishes not so much a symmetrical architectonic structure, but a complex and dynamic ‘wobbling’ structure which presents itself like ‘an incessant play of potentials’, and which is situated between two codes, that of language and that of art (or, in Barthes’s own terms, that of linguistics and that of translinguistics) (1966b, 102). It is this dynamism of the relations of all of its elements which makes a narrative what it is.

30 We shall see that this view is carried over into the famous essay ‘La mort de l’auteur’ (1968).
According to Lavers, in 'Introduction' Barthes makes the point of proving that none of the elements of the narrative carries meaning independently, but only when integrated into a higher level, but then when we reach the higher level, it 'retrospectively spreads its meaning over all its components, so that the meaning is not 'at the end', as the law of suspense suggests, but pervades the whole system' (Lavers, 1982, 191).

This concluding dynamic image of the narrative structure strikes me as completely surprising, and rather out of context with the rest of the text. We were led to build in our minds an image of an architectural object, and then Barthes suddenly ends the piece with a definition of a literary structure which is closer to Mukařovsky’s than to any of the French structuralists. This is doubly surprising, considering the essay's status as the classic of French structuralism. However, as we shall see later in the thesis, it seems to me that Barthes through some of his ideas (which somehow seemed to have passed unnoticed or were not dwelt on too much) was often closer to Eastern structuralists than he was to his own intellectual environment.

As for the point that it is naïve to see either the narrators or the characters as real people, or to assume that the narrative has some kind of a referential function, all we can answer to that is: why read, then? Of course, only a very naïve reader would think that Emma Bovary really existed, only a staunch positivist one would look for a 'real-life' person on whom she might have been based, but we still read Madame Bovary because the novel can tell us something about the world and human life, because it can help us situate ourselves in the world, and because we like reading stories about people. We even read stories about animals because they can tell us something about human beings. And to repeat the criticism of the Propp-based types of narrative analysis well exemplified by the ‘Introduction’, although different characters with their different characteristics can fulfil the same function in a fairy tale, if we try to replace Emma with Anna, and what you get is not Madame Bovary but Anna Karenina. And I am pretty sure Tolstoy would argue that this in not so much because the story is different, but because the character and her motivation are not the same. And I would argue that we get drawn into both of those novels not so much because we want to see 'what
happened next' but because the characters and the world portrayed in them interest us in a way that a character in a fairy tale does not.\textsuperscript{31}

But because Barthes chose \textit{Goldfinger} as the main text on which to base his analysis, and because he is faithful to Aristotle, he cannot see this. Geoffrey Strickland (1981, 135) makes a more general point connected with this by saying that 'commercial fiction, of course, like folk-tales or children's stories, obeys the dictates of the genre far more readily than those works which [...] have owed their success to their power to disconcert'. He also adds:

\begin{quote}
What is absurd (though it may also seem attractive) is to see this arrangement of levels as corresponding to some other necessity than that of convention and the expectations of a particular public. This is not to deny the psychological or social interest in these conventions and expectations (which Barthes ignores). The absurdity lies in the view that a narrative, however conventional, could correspond to the same \textit{kind} of necessity as the phonemes that make up a sentence. (Strickland, 1981, 135-36)
\end{quote}

I think that Strickland is being rather unfair here, for, as we shall see later, Barthes was very much aware of the social and psychological role of conventions and expectations. Furthermore, even in ‘Introduction’, Barthes says that, although structural analysis can hope to describe different narrative strategies, that is as far as it can go, because narration receives its ultimate meaning from the world which consumes it. Barthes suggests that the term of the ‘situation of the narrative’ be adopted to define the set of factors which determine how a narrative is consumed by a society. However, in order to describe this process, Barthes adds, we would need another kind of semiotics (1966b, 98). Although he does not say how this ‘other semiotics’ could be established nor what would its methods be, maybe it could still be claimed that he was already looking forward not only to Western post-structuralist developments, but also to those post-post-structuralist ones that Lotman brought about in the 1980s.

\textsuperscript{31} We shall later see that Bakhtin proposed a theory of the novel which was based around the role of the character, their motivation and ideological position, and not on the primacy of the plot.
Against Mimesis

We first have to say something about the status of the notion of mimesis in 'Introduction'. I have already mentioned that Barthes dismissed the idea that a literary text had any referential function as essentially naïve, with the suggestion that any realist aspiration in literature is just a further compounding of a literary myth (Barthes, 1966b, 95). 'L’effet de réel' (1968a) reads like an attack on Engels’s idea that 'realism [...] implies, besides truth of detail, the truthful reproduction of typical characters under typical circumstances'. Barthes argues that the 'reality effect' of realist novels' excessive attention to detail (which cannot be accounted for on the grounds of its function within the story itself) comes from the popular belief that 'life' cannot be fully accounted for, that not everything in it fits together or is fully intelligible. Instead of producing meaning within the world of the text, this type of non-denotative detail connotes 'reality' in all of its 'messiness'. This, says Barthes, although it claims to appeal directly to our experience of reality, is just as conventional a technique and just as dependent on the public opinion of what is vraisemblable as any literary creation which, following one of Aristotle's suggestions, finds its justification in 'reference to what is commonly said'. At the end of 'Introduction', Barthes puts forward a similar argument against mimesis to that we saw Genette insisting on: a narrative cannot represent anything, as it is fully made up of language, and language alone. Part of the argument is the obvious point that a narrative does not create a 'vision', that it does not make us 'see' anything; instead, it produces a meaning. We believe in the 'realness' of its actions not because they recreate a course of real actions, but because we believe in the logic which makes them follow one another (Barthes, 1966b, 103) - which is largely the logic of 'what is commonly thought to be so'. In Critique et vérité, Barthes argues that it is precisely this circular notion of the vraisemblable which makes it impossible for some people to see that what they thought was, say realistic psychology of characters, is in fact just a literary convention which every pupil who studied Racine and Corneille at school will have absorbed (1966a, 22).

It seems to me that, and this is probably true of Genette as well, Barthes embarks upon such a strong critique of mimesis precisely because he identifies it with the idea

33 Aristotle, 'Poetics', in Classical Literary Criticism, 87.
that, in order to be truly mimetic or representational, literature would somehow have to make us see the world, to create a clear vision. Since it does not, it cannot be mimetic. In some ways, this critique of mimesis stems from too demanding an expectation of what language would have to do in order to be truly mimetic.

But creating a vision is not the only way of representing reality, and I would say that Barthes knew this even as he was arguing against the usefulness of the notion of mimesis.

**Two Types of Structuralism and A Different Concept of Mimesis**

In his essay ‘L’activité structuraliste’ (1964a) Barthes proposed a definition of structuralism which is often referred to, and which lies at the basis of the more popular conceptions of what structuralism is. Structuralism, said Barthes in this essay, is to a large extent the question of the terminology used. And it is not so much words like ‘structure’, ‘function’, ‘form’, ‘sign’, and ‘signification’ which make up the structuralist discourse – these have become too widely used for that – but it is the more specialised, Saussurean terms and binary oppositions, like ‘signifier’/‘signified’ and ‘synchrony’/‘diachrony’. Barthes adds that this second pair is probably the more pertinent for identification of the structuralist discourse, because it refers to a specific notion of history (seen as a ‘pure succession of forms’) which is uniquely structuralist (1964a, 1328).

This is the notion of structuralism which lies behind *Eléments de sémiologie* (1965). The book explains the main semiological concepts going through the linguistic pairs of *langue*/*parole, signifié/signifiant, syntagme/*système, and dénotation/*connotation*. It is important to note, however, that here the distinction between the synchronic and the diachronic is confined to the discussion of value in linguistics, with it being simply taken for granted that linguistics is a science which studies synchronic phenomena, much as economics does (1965, 1495-96).

However, continues Barthes in ‘L’activité structuraliste’, structuralism is neither a school nor a movement (at least it was not yet at that point), and there is no need to limit it *a priori* to a certain set of ideas and terms. One should rather search for a broader definition, and assume that there are not only theorists and critics who can be

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34 Aristotle, Ibid.
considered structuralist, but that there are also artists whose art is an exercise in structure. Thus, a ‘structural man’ should not be defined through his terminology but through his imagination, that is, ‘the way in which he mentally lives the structure’ (1964a, 1329).

Therefore, says Barthes, structuralism can essentially be defined as an activity, by which he means ‘an ordered succession of a certain number of mental operations’ (Ibid.). Seen in this light, the aim of all structuralist activity is to reconstitute an object by means of exposing the rules by which it functions. Thus, the structure is a *simulacrum* of an object, but a *simulacrum* whose purpose is not to copy the object, but to make it intelligible, to impart a sense to it. As Barthes puts it, the *simulacrum* is the ‘intellect added onto the object’. The ‘structural man’ takes the real, decomposes it into functional units, discovers the rules of their relations, and then recomposes it again, producing a new object which is similar to the first, but which has in the process acquired a certain ‘anthropological value’. Thus, art and structuralist activity share a common purpose: the imitation or *mimesis* of reality, one which is not based on the ‘analogy of substance’ (like in realist art), but on the analogy of function (Ibid.). It seems as if, according to this definition, structuralism is less about finding out what things are, and more about finding what they mean for us, of what importance they are to us as human beings (1964a, 1332). Barthes makes the point that structuralism has a great deal to reveal to us about our own humanity, one of the most important things being the truly human manner in which we give meaning to things (1964a, 1331). It seems as if Barthes wants to argue that, far from being anti-humanist (the charge often heard against structuralism, and the identity which many structuralists embraced readily), structuralism is all about humanity. However, this is not the humanity which is full of ready-made meaning and which searches for the ready-made meaning in the world around it, but the humanity which continually *produces* new meaning. *Homo significans* is the true subject of structuralist activity; he is its active agent, but also, to a certain extent, its object of research (1964a, 1332). Furthermore, concludes Barthes, far from wanting to exorcise history from its sphere of interest, structuralism adds to our understanding of history, by explaining the role of the forms of intelligibility (of which structuralism is one) which influence or determine our understanding of history and historical change, and of our own place in it.

This echoes Barthes’s notion of structuralism from his essay ‘Sociologie et socio-logique : A propos de deux ouvrages récents de Claude Lévi-Strauss’, where
Barthes claimed that structuralism’s formal analysis is deeply socially and historically responsible, because forms themselves have a responsibility of their own (1962, 975). As we shall see later, this in itself is a continuation of Barthes’s main thesis in Le Degré zéro de l’écriture. In ‘Sociologie et socio-logique’ Barthes argues that structuralism is profoundly justified as an approach because a society always structures reality through language, images and objects (1962, 967). However, Barthes also stresses that in literate societies writing is the most important medium through which social structuring is carried out; it is the written commentaries accompanying images and objects that stamp them with a socially recognised meaning. This is the same argument behind the method of Système de la mode, where Barthes focused on the written representation of clothes and fashion, and not on the images or the actual garments, believing that it is the commentary that reveals the logic of the fashion system. In ‘Sociologie et socio-logique’ he also argues that structural sociology is better equipped to handle the rare, the exceptional and the particular than statistical sociology, which demands a considerable ‘quantitative’ presence of a social phenomenon before including it into its analysis (1962, 969). The same principle holds for literary analysis, as he argued in Sur Racine: the role of a structural unit is not determined by its frequency, but by its position in the system of relations (1963, 1097). Furthermore, in ‘Sociologie et socio-logique’ Barthes also argues that a system of binary relations alone cannot suffice to describe the complexity of a sociological (i.e. literate) society. A sociological society, according to Barthes, may be different from an ethnological society precisely through its ability to multiply the systems of logic by which it creates meaning and represent reality (1962, 974).

This notion of mimesis as recreating not substance but function, is, I think, the only kind of mimesis available to verbal art, for no literary work (‘realist’ or not) can recreate the substance of the world. It seems to me that this same notion of mimesis lies behind Soviet Semioticians’ notion of modelling systems and behind Benveniste’s insistence that ‘language re-produces reality’ (Benveniste, 1971, 22). And Barthes expresses a similar idea when he says in Critique et vérité that ‘écrire, c’est déjà organiser le monde, c’est déjà penser (apprendre une langue, c’est apprendre comment l’on pense dans cette langue)” (1966a, 28). To organise a world by speaking about it through a certain language, to create its simulacrum, or to model it – these ideas seem to me quite similar.
The Dynamism of Literary Structure

Let us now return to Barthes's idea at the end of 'Introduction', where he suggests that a literary structure is not as architecturally firm as he has led us to believe through the notion that the smaller units acquire significance only through their integration into the larger units.

In *Critique et vérité* Barthes makes a distinction between a 'practical' and the literary use of language in relation to its intelligibility and context. In the practical use of language, according to him, any ambiguity in wording can be pinned down to just one meaning through intonation, gesture, or simply the context in which it appears.

A literary work, on the other hand, is free from such a clear contextual frame, there is no clearly identifiable situation or context which can anchor its meaning (1966a, 39). It is, literally, open to interpretation, and Barthes stresses that each age has its own favourite interpretation of literary works. This is because, Barthes says, a literary work is 'symbolic', i.e. its structure allows for the production of secondary meanings, depending on the historical and social circumstances which surround its reading (1966a, 37-8).

Thus, Barthes proposes, a science of literature would not have as its task the interpretation of literary works; this he leaves to literary criticism, which he defines not as the 'uncovering' of the work's meaning, but as its covering with another language (1966a, 44; 1963, 1098). If we know in advance that our interpretation in different cultural, social and historical circumstances is going to be seen in the same way as we see other interpretations – as conditioned by its cultural, social and historical circumstances – we might just as well consciously and openly put a stamp of our own time and context onto the work through our critical activity.

But the role of the science of literature is different: it is not to search for 'the meaning', 'a meaning', or even past meanings of literary works, but to examine its signifying mechanism, its intelligibility (1966a, 43). Science's role is to describe 'selon quelle logique les sens sont engendrés d'une manière qui puisse être acceptée par la logique symbolique des hommes, tout comme les phrases de la langue française sont acceptées par le "sentiment linguistique" des Français' (Ibid.).
This is, of course, a famous methodological proposition, but it seems to me that it comes up against a serious problem, consisting of several conflicting issues. The French in general are capable of determining the 'acceptability' of a French sentence, but only if it is the French language which they themselves speak, and not, say, medieval French. The French could not judge the acceptability of a sentence in Serbo-Croat from the position of their 'linguistic feeling'. Since Barthes suggests that the interpretations of literary works change with the change in the context, how could a reader abstract himself or herself fully from those social circumstances and try to judge the intelligibility of a literary work from a position of general humanity? It could be that Barthes's analogy with the acceptability of French sentences for the French is misleading, and that the analogy with the Chomskian notion of 'universal grammar' would be better.

Secondly, in order to study the potential of a work for the production of meaning, one would need to imagine what those possible meanings could be, but then one would be back to the beginning, into one's own historical context and its interpretative potential, possibly enriched by the knowledge of past interpretations. It is clear that Barthes wanted to open up a space where different interpretations can co-exist with equal validity, but how can we be sure that we could exhaust a work's intelligibility beyond what our age and context allows us to imagine? In other words, if we asked Aristotle whether he thought that Freud's interpretation of Sophocles's King Oedipus was acceptable to him as a human being, I would be very surprised if he were to say 'Yes'.

But, still, the knowledge of the historical conditionality of our ability to understand literature is an extremely valuable one. It is this ability of the work to create secondary meanings that could explain why Barthes ends the 'Introduction' with that dynamic, 'wobbly' image of the literary structure: although the narrative may want to integrate all of its functions into a firm architectonic construction, readers' responses to each segment of the structure follow their own (historically conditioned) logic, which can throw the work off its balance. It also explains why some literary works seem 'eternal' - it is precisely because they allow each historical period to make them fiercely their own, that is, very much historically relevant.35

35 On this, see also Lotman, 1977, 23-25.
It was partly on this idea that Barthes based his definition of what literary history should be.

**Literary History**

In the ‘Histoire ou Littérature’ part of *Sur Racine* (1963), Barthes presented a new conception of literary history. Criticising the positivist literary-historical model, which focused its attention on the figure of the author and on the story of his life and work, Barthes suggested that a true literary history would have to be the history of the literary function, defined as the production, communication and consumption of literary works. Barthes claims that a historical study of literature should base itself on the premise that literature is a social institution, situated amidst a body of social beliefs, taboos, and values (1963, 1091). Furthermore, there is the audience for whom a literary work is intended, and, according to Barthes, one should ask what the audience’s expectations and demands were. Who was this audience and how did it (or they) perceive and define literature (1963, 1092-93)? Barthes insists that by concentrating on the author and his immediate environment alone, positivist literary history leaves aside the properly historical part of its subject (1963, 1093). What is needed, he argues, is a systematic and sociological approach to literary history.

Patrizia Lombardo, in *The Three Paradoxes of Roland Barthes* points out that Barthes ‘proposed a confrontation between history and literature’, that is, bringing literary history in relation to history proper:

[...] because history is not a sequence but a constellation of forces, a process placing things in relation to each other and, one might also say, the point of contact between structure and event, between generality and particularity. (Lombardo, 1989, 10-1)

We could compare this to Eikhenbaum’s assertion that one of the most important literary-historical problems is ‘the problem of the interrelationship between the facts of literary evolution and those of literary environment’ (1971a, 59). Eikhenbaum makes a distinction between literary evolution (of the literary system according to its own rules) and literary genesis (the question of sources and influences), and claims that after the initial period in Formalist theory, the time had come for the two notions to be combined, by ‘incorporating the genetic facts into the theoretical-evolutionary system [...] at the
very least, incorporating those facts which can and should be interpreted as having a historical bearing, as being connected with the facts of *evolution* and *history* (Eikhenbaum, 1971a, 60).

Barthes and Eikhenbaum approach matters from two different positions: for Eikhenbaum, the theoretical model of literary evolution has already been developed, and is now in need of some positivism to 'help it along'. Barthes starts from a critique of positivism, and suggests that the development of a model capable of perceiving a system in the mass of disparate data is now in order (Barthes, 1963, 1093). At the same time, it is clear from what Barthes says that literary history, in the context of his discussion about Racine, is not so much about literary evolution, but about a synchronic study of a literary-historical period. Roland Champagne, however, mostly bases his discussion of Barthes's ideas on literary history on the notion of 'mutations' of the literary text which are brought about by different readings of the same text by different generations (Champagne, 1984, 9-10).

The comparison between Barthes and Eikhenbaum may be simply another proof how close Formalism was to a very fruitful form of structuralism just before the purges began; and also, how far in 1963 Barthes felt there was still to go.

**The End of Structuralism?**

1970 is the year regarded by many critics as the year of Barthes's departure from the structuralist course. It was the year in which he wrote *S/Z* (which I shall look at later) and an essay entitled ‘L’analyse structurale du récit. A propos d’ ‘Actes’ 10-11’ (1970a).

In ‘L’analyse structurale du récit’ Barthes claims that what is generally considered as ‘structuralism’ is a fabricated sociological notion, as there is no unified school of structuralist thought. He points out that there are profound ideological differences amongst structuralism’s most prominent representatives (such as LéviStrauss, Lacan, Derrida and Althusser), and warns against putting too much hope into a scientific method like structuralism, which can scarcely be considered as a unified method and which is certainly not a science (1970a, 842-43).
Nevertheless, he adds that there are some basic principles which would be acceptable to all who occupy themselves with the structural analysis of narratives, and these are the principles of formalisation, pertinence and plurality.

The principle of formalisation or abstraction is derived from the Saussurean distinction between langue and parole. Barthes repeats the claim he made in 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits': each narrative is a message articulated in the general language of narratives, and narrative analysis is there not to study and interpret the content of each of the narratives, but to compare their form and their relations to the shared 'narrative language'. Linguistics does not study this 'other language', and a new linguistics (which he calls translinguistics) should be established if we are to answer the question of what happens beyond the sentence. We still do not have the answer to this question, says Barthes; we once thought we knew, when rhetoric was still being studied, but now it has become outmoded and nothing has come to replace it. Narrative analysis should form a part of that future translinguistic discipline (1970a, 844).

The principle of pertinence, says Barthes, has its origin in phonology, as it postulates that one should not seek to focus on the intrinsic qualities of an object or a phenomenon, but its differential value in relation to other objects or phenomena. One examines whether and what kind of implications formal variations can have on the level of content in order to decide whether a trait is pertinent or not. This is also connected to the specific use of the term 'meaning' or 'sense' in this context. Barthes here defines 'sense' as 'all types of intra-textual and extra-textual relations', i.e. all traits in the text which link us to other traits of the same text or to other aspects of culture which are necessary for reading of the narrative. Thus, meaning is not defined as 'a full signified', but as a correlation or connotation (1970a, 845). Barthes also adds that a good analyst must have an ear for alternative possibilities that a text implies but does not explore, an ear for aberrations and 'narrative scandals', which would help him not take the workings of the text for granted (1970a, 846).

The principle of plurality implies that the aim of the structural analysis of the narrative is not to establish its meaning, but to point out the spaces in the text where meaning becomes possible. Furthermore, for Barthes, meaning is conceived not as just one signifying possibility among many, but as the very being of the possibility for the creation of meaning, the very essence of plurality. Because of this, structuralist analysis can never become a method of interpretation, and it differs radically from 'literary
criticism' (which searches for a meaning or for the meaning of the literary text) and from its different schools, which are always, at least to some extent, content-oriented (say, psychoanalytic or Marxist criticism) (1970a, 847). We can see that this is a toned-down and more acceptable version of the similar thesis put forward in Critique et vérité, mostly because it makes no Lévi-Straussian appeals to human symbolic logic in general.

The analysis of Acts 10-11. itself is based on a study of the codes through which the text's meaning is constructed. Barthes here looks at far more codes than he later used in S/Z, listing the narrative code (the code of narration), the topographic and chronological codes (which bear the logic of the vraisemblable), the historic code, the metalinguistic code, and several others, as the codes which contribute to the process of the text's structuration of meaning. Barthes points out the conventionality of the codes, their dependence on our culturally conditioned expectations and view of the vraisemblable.

'L'analyse structurale du récit' is different from 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits' in that its focus moves away from the plot onto the general intelligibility of the text. The choice of the text analysed is a strong indication of the shift in itself. As Barthes points out, Acts is all about communication and the sending of messages; there is none of the what-will-happen-next suspense of Goldfinger. Although this is a move away from the classical narratology as practised by Greimas and even Genette, it is at the same time a continuation of what Barthes already knew during his structuralist period: that the literary text has the ability to create a multitude of new meanings depending on the context in which it is read.

There is a double movement in Barthes's structuralism. On the one hand, he was trying to stay within the bounds of French structuralism, with its love of Saussurean linguistics and closed synchronic structures based on binary oppositions. The structuralism of Système de la mode is an example of such a tendency; for the most part, so is 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits'. This is Barthes's 'scientific delirium', in which it seemed important to stress over and over again that what one reads in stories is not real, that it is all just a logical matrix which we mistake for the image of the world, and that the textual mechanism by which meaning is made possible is what should be studied, independently of any actual interpretations of literary texts.

On the other hand, the second strand of Barthes's structuralist thought was exploring the complexities of cultural and social contexts in which literary texts operate.
It defined structure as a simulacrum of an object (in ‘L’activité structuraliste’) and stressed the social and historical responsibility of forms (‘Sociologie et socio-logique’), while praising structuralism’s ability to study the exceptional and the rare as a part of the social system. It believed that a society follows its own processes of structuration when representing the real, and it stressed the importance of language as a mediator in those processes of structuration. It is this second, socially, historically, and, as we shall see, ideologically aware strand which I find more interesting, and on which I shall concentrate in the following chapters.

Let us now take a look at Mikhail Bakhtin and his structuralist credentials.

But Is Bakhtin a Structuralist?

The answer to this question will require a lot more space than the problem (or the relative lack of it) of Barthes’s structuralist credentials. Discussing the early reception of Bakhtin’s work in the States, Gary Saul Morson listed the circumstances which had contributed to ‘the American misreading of Bakhtin’:

It was not inevitable, for instance, that his works were translated so that the least characteristic, Rabelais and His World, should have appeared first and his early writings last. If Jakobsonians had not been so well ensconced in American Slavic departments, would we have had to contend with the exceedingly odd view of Bakhtin as a structuralist semiotician? The unnecessary, unsupported, and arbitrary ascription to him of V. N. Voloshinov’s and P. N. Medvedev’s books created the weird impression that he was some sort of Marxist. Bakhtin, who saw life and history as fundamentally messy, would have appreciated the way the reception of his ideas has been shaped by contingencies. (Morson, 1995, 35)

Morson is here to certain extent repeating the claim he and Caryl Emerson made several years earlier about the weirdness and messiness of the reception of Bakhtin, caused by the ignorance of his early work and by the authorship debate (Morson and Emerson, 1989, 32, 46-47). And although I would be perfectly happy to agree with Morson’s view that the translation of the Rabelais book as Bakhtin’s first in the American market was
one of those weird and messy events in life and history, and that the attribution of some of Voloshinov's and Medvedev's books and articles to Bakhtin was a veritable scholarly scandal, I find it a lot more difficult to concede Morson's second point that any view of Bakhtin as a structuralist semiotician would be "exceedingly odd". After all, it was through the eyes and in the context of structuralism and semiotics that Bakhtin became known and grew to be the intellectual phenomenon we know today, not only in the States, but also in France (through Julia Kristeva and Tzvetan Todorov) and to some extent even back home in the former USSR. Had his own works not supported this 'appropriation' to at least some extent, it would hardly have been possible for the similar kind of reading to occur in these three countries with their different scholarly and cultural traditions and contexts. However, since Morson and Emerson are probably the most influential Bakhtinian scholars, it is worth examining their arguments against the view of Bakhtin as a structuralist before I present the arguments why such a view may, indeed, be not only possible, but could also shed some interesting light on Bakhtin's ideas about literature.

Before we do that, though, it is worth, remarking that Caryl Emerson may be a bit more sympathetic to the structuralist cause than Morson is. In her book *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin*, she places the late 1950s Soviet discovery of Bakhtin and the early debate about him (the 1960s) in the context of what Russians called the 'struggle between physicists and lyricists'. The 'physicists', according to Emerson, were 'young, high-tech linguists who advocated cybernetics, computer modelling, machine translation, and impersonal quantifications as the coming future of literary science', while the title of the 'lyricists', somewhat amusingly, was in this debate given to the 'old-fashioned Marxist-Leninist humanists' who believed that literature's 'ideal mission' was 'to reflect human being whole within a humane society' (Emerson, 1997, 39). Emerson stresses that one of the most important subtexts of this debate was the rehabilitation of Russian Formalism, and, more concretely, the rehabilitation of 'the celebrated émigré' Roman Jakobson, 'the great paradigmatic Formalist' and one of the first structuralists, whose works became 'selectively available in his homeland' in the aftermath of his visit to Moscow in 1956. As Emerson points

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36 See, for example, V. V. Ivanov, 1976.
37 See also Seyffert, 1985.
out, the 'lyricists' 'hastened to discredit' Jakobson, accusing him of non-Marxism and of indifference to history and class struggle; they were also complaining that in Russian Formalism one could scarcely 'find love, intuition, social justice, the humanistic horizon of art' (Emerson, 1997, 41), and in many ways this criticism was extended to structuralism and semiotics as well.

However, Emerson also notes that Dmitri Segal, 'one of the original 'physicists', 'has strenuously insisted' 'that the Structuralist approach to literature, far from being a scientific straightjacket for ideas and values, was widely perceived at the time as Liberationist' (Emerson, 1997, 39). In a rather Barthesian manner, Segal argued that in the Russian context, the ethical component of criticism was much more likely to be 'subsumed by an absolutist politics', whereas 'an objective methodology like cybernetics (and later, semiotics), was equipped to demonstrate the conditioned nature of cultural value', and thus resist political myths (Emerson, 1997, 40). Furthermore, she also notes that Soviet semioticians were far from being indifferent to historical and social issues in art:

The Tartu semioticians were 'specifiers' and 'segmenters', completely at home with quantification; in this sense their origins can be traced to the Formalists of the 1920s. But important differences obtain between them and hard-core early Formalism (as well as the more technically oriented Structuralists of a later day). The Tartu scholars were quantifiers who had been raised in a socialist ethos, however disfigured by Soviet practice. Not surprisingly, they insisted from the start that any sensible Structuralist approach to art also attend to thematic and social dimensions, that is, to authentic communication between real people with a cultural continuum. (Emerson, 1997, 42)

Thus, Soviet structuralists grew to be less interested in 'internally autonomous systems of signs' and dedicated themselves to 'the dynamic interplay of codes' 'that provide ground rules for personal honour, exchange of goods and values, and the reciprocal trust binding individuals within a society'. As Emerson points out, the Tartu semioticians were not that far away from the 'familiar Marxist-humanist concerns' – to use her own words again, they promised 'Structuralism with a human face' (Ibid.).

Around the same time when the debate between 'physicists' and 'lyricists' was heating up, Bakhtin, who by then was living quietly in the provincial town of Saransk, teaching Russian and world literature at a local teacher's college, was rediscovered by a
group of graduate students from the Gorky Institute of World Literature in Moscow. As Emerson notes, the story of how it came about is now ‘the stuff of legend’. In the late 1950s, they chanced upon his 1929 book on Dostoevsky, and, to their great surprise and delight, discovered that its author was still alive. Throughout the 1960s the Gorky Institute group (among them Vadim Kozhinov and Sergei Bocharov, who were to become Bakhtin’s literary executors) ‘made numerous pilgrimages to Saransk’, persuaded Bakhtin to rework his book on Dostoevsky, helped him publish his dissertation on Rabelais, generally encouraged him to continue working and start publishing, and, as Bakhtin grew older, increasingly took practical care of the frail old man. Apart from their passion for Bakhtin’s work and their determination to make it better known, the Gorky Institute group, as Emerson puts it, ‘was not without its own agenda’ (Emerson, 1997, 43). Namely, Kozhinov ‘began to evolve into a neo-nationalist, ostentatiously Russian Orthodox in religious orientation while remaining in aesthetic matters an ambitious, conservative ‘lyricist’.’ In 1965 he published a piece entitled ‘Is a Structural Poetics Possible?’ which attacked ‘the entire idea of a linguistic-based methodology for literary studies’, and in order to support his views, he ‘evoked’ those of Bakhtin’s friends and colleagues (up till then pretty much unknown) ‘who had written against Formalism in the 1920s’ (Emerson, 1997, 43-44). It is worth noting that he was only quoting Bakhtin’s friends, and not Bakhtin himself. None the less, according to Emerson, ‘with this move, Kozhinov began the practice – soon to become endemic – of selectively deploying the writings of Bakhtin and his circle, culled from archives available solely to him and other select disciples, in the struggle against the ‘physicists’ and the Tartu school’ (Emerson, 1997, 44).

At the same time, the Tartu semioticians themselves were claiming Bakhtin for themselves, pointing out, as Emerson says, that ‘in spirit’ ‘Bakhtin was not so anti-Formalist’. Emerson continues with the Semioticians’ arguments for claiming Bakhtin as one of their own:

He [Bakhtin] was, after all, a technician, a generator of typologies, a thinker who had always resisted the simple ‘refraction theory’ of literary analysis in favour of more complex theories of cultural refraction. Like the Formalists, he celebrates craftsmanship and analysis; he constructs his literary theory not out of subjective categories such as genius or intuition but out of concretely observable devices (his ‘dominant’ just happens to be a hero’s consciousness rather than a work’s literariness). He had specifically
limited his Dostoevsky book to a discussion of the formal functioning ideas and words in a polyphonic novel, disregarding the suspicious ideology or content that fill them. In sum the Tartu scholars insisted that Bakhtin, despite all the nonquantifiable aspects of his thought, was still a ‘scientist’ – and to be scientific, nauchnyi, did not mean to dehumanise or de-historicize. Scientific criticism is dehumanized, Lotman intimated archly, only when it repeats itself, stuffs itself with stock phrases, and labels writers reactionary or progressive according to preestablished criteria. (Ibid.)

In 1973 the Tartu semioticians devoted an issue of their journal Trudy po znakovym sistemam to Bakhtin, and, as Emerson puts it, ‘devoted much space in their journals to tidying up Bakhtin’s unruly ideas’ (Emerson, 1997, 45). Their attempts to distinguish between ‘shapeless, open, real-life dialogues and the highly organized dialogic relations that obtain in art (a line Bakhtin refused to draw)’ and to ‘stratify polyphony into discrete layers’, came under criticism from ‘many sceptics’ (Ibid.). These critics (whom Emerson does not name) claimed that in the semiotic analysis live dialogue is turned into ‘the residue (what Bakhtin referred to as the ‘sclerotic deposits’) of a dialogic exchange’, and that the most important element of Bakhtin’s thought – the potential and promise of human activity – is lost in the attempt to translate his thoughts into the terminology and theoretical framework of semiotics.

However, as Emerson noted, the Gorky Institute group had an agenda of their own in bringing out Bakhtin’s writings (Emerson, 1997, 45). According to Emerson, this group included not only the ‘Marxist-Leninist brand of official ‘lyricist’,’ but also ‘neo-nationalist, mystical-religious brotherhood’, who in the early 1970s founded a ‘counter- or antisemiotic journal, Kontekst’ and ‘began dribbling bits of his early and late unpublished manuscripts into print’. ‘Naturally’, says Emerson, ‘they favoured those parts where Bakhtin’s distaste of fixed codes and mechanical modelling combined with quasi-mystical, although often Aesopian, references to Christianity’ – to the extent that Bakhtin’s brief comments on what he saw as Dostoevsky’s understanding of Christ became ‘by extension Bakhtin’s own convictions’ (Emerson, 1997, 46). Furthermore, ‘the politics of Kontekst became so inflexible and obscurantist that in 1982 even Pravda, a paper not known for its pluralism, reprimanded the journal’s editorial board for intolerance’ (Ibid.).

Nevertheless, Emerson considers the claim of the lyricists to Bakhtin to have been somewhat stronger, mostly because of his early and late comments against
‘abstraction and system buildings of all sorts (what he called ‘theoretism’), as well as because of the ‘similar sentiments’ ‘reflected in the notebook jottings of his final half-decade’ (Ibid.). We shall return later to Emerson’s interpretation of those ‘jottings’; for the time being, let us quote the somewhat disturbing conclusion Emerson reaches on the Russian debate over Bakhtin:

As Communism moved into its final decade, then, it seemed that Bakhtin had been won for the ‘lyricists’ — a motley band of traditionalists, anti-Jakobsonians, antisemioticians, religious revivalists, and Russian nationalists. What had not yet been attempted was an impartial study of Bakhtin’s life and texts relatively free of the reclamation wars. That task seemed to under way with much more vigour abroad. (Emerson, 1997, 48)

To a certain extent, Emerson is here presenting the intricately woven argumentation against the view of Bakhtin as a structuralist that she and Gary Saul Morson devised in their earlier joint work. This argumentation, which Emerson in The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin presents with somewhat dampened enthusiasm and probably better awareness of Soviet Semiotics, has three main clusters of points as its basis. The first one is Bakhtin’s youthful attack on what he called ‘theoretism’, which Morson and Emerson claim he maintained throughout his life. The second cluster of points is centred around Bakhtin’s late attacks on Saussure and his criticism of certain structuralist notions, like ‘code’ and ‘system’. The third argument is their very analysis of Bakhtin’s own terminology and ideas, which they maintain to be incompatible with either structuralism or Russian Formalism.

The argument whether the Soviet semioticians were ‘tidying up Bakhtin’s unruly ideas’ or developing them further is a topic for an entirely new thesis, and would not in any case prove whether Bakhtin himself was a structuralist or not. I would just like briefly to suggest that the semioticians were prepared to engage actively with Bakhtin’s ideas, rather than try to preserve their ‘original’ meaning, as the Gorky Institute group were (and are) trying to do. If ‘the potential and promise of human activity’ is the essence of Bakhtin’s thought, than the promise and the potential of Bakhtin’s ideas is
what people like Lotman and Uspensky were more than ready to pursue, by
reinterpreting them and putting them into new contexts.\textsuperscript{38}

Emerson highlights further the distortion vs. development aspect of this
problem:

Where the semioticians really recuperating and explicating Bakhtin or where they
transforming him into something else? The question is not trivial. For although good
reasons can be found for desiring more preciseness in Bakhtin’s thought, his entire
phenomenology and discursive cast of mind appear to resist it. (Emerson, 1997, 48)

The last sentence brings us to a new question: whether Bakhtin’s ‘entire
phenomenology’ or even philosophy of life is relevant to every segment of his thought.
Since this question is closely intertwined with my main question (‘Is Bakhtin a
structuralist?’), I shall first look at a work which has been seen both as Bakhtin’s most
anti-structuralist work, and as his most openly philosophical one.

\textit{Toward a Philosophy of the Act: Theoretism}

Bakhtin’s critique of ‘theoretism’ appeared in one of his early manuscripts (written
probably between 1919-1921) which was discovered in 1972 and published for the first
time under the title (chosen by S. G. Bocharov, the editor) \textit{K filosofii postupka (Toward
a Philosophy of the Act)} in 1986 (Holquist, 1999; Bocharov, 1999). This long essay
(together with another manuscript, later published under the title ‘Author and Hero in
Aesthetic Activity’ in \textit{Art and Answerability}) was discovered in ‘a lumber room’ in
Saransk where it was ‘severely damaged’ by ‘rats and seeping water’, so that the first
couple of pages were missing, and parts of it were difficult or impossible to decipher.
Between its ‘rescue’ and publication it was accessible only to a small group of
Bakhtin’s ‘disciples’, literary executors and guardians of his ‘chaotic, uncatalogued
literary estate’ (Emerson, 1997, 46). So when these early essays were finally published,
the effect was dramatic: as Michael Holquist and Katerina Clark argued all along in
their 1984 book \textit{Mikhail Bakhtin} (which was, as far as I understand, written at the time

\textsuperscript{38} Just two examples of a constructive and interesting use of Bakhtin’s ideas: Lotman, ‘K strukture

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when they alone among the American scholars had access to the manuscripts), Bakhtin was discovered to have had great interest in moral philosophy, and his early work bore witness to his early (and, Holquist and Clark claimed, enduring) devotion to ethical ideas and concerns. One of those enduring and 'constant' concerns was, according to Morson and Emerson, Bakhtin's 'hostility to all forms of "theoretism", evident in 'The Philosophy of the Act'... His many attacks on "dialectics", his criticism of the Saussurean view of language, and his attempts to outline a theory of psychology inimical to both Freud's and Pavlov's all derive from his concern for the "eventness" of the event. They reflect as well his belief in the unsystematicity of culture, the "unfinalizability" of people, and the centrality of genuine responsibility to human experience' (Morson and Emerson, 1989, 29).

So how is 'theoretism' defined and what objections does Bakhtin raise against it in Toward a Philosophy of the Act? Morson and Emerson propose the following definition:

["Theoretism"] is described as a way of thinking that abstracts from concrete human actions all that is generalisable, takes that abstraction as a whole, transforms the abstraction into a set of rules, and then derives norms from those rules. But this process loses the most essential thing about human activity, the very thing in which the soul of morality is to be found: the ‘eventness’ (sobytiinost') of the event. ‘Eventness’ is always particular, and never exhaustively describable in terms of rules (Morson and Emerson, 1989, 7)

In stressing the importance of the notion of ‘event’ for Bakhtin, Morson and Emerson make it clear enough that it is a notion which is extremely important for his arguments on ethics and morality, but it is less clear why the critique of 'theoretism' in general (such as would implicate not yet existent structuralism and semiotics) would appear in the context of such a discussion. The first question, of course, is whether the notion of such a thing as 'literary theory' existed at the time, or whether literary scholars still simply talked about 'poetics'. Since Shklovskii published his O teorii prozy in 1929, I shall assume that the idea that one can write a 'theory' of literature was around in the

1920s, so that the assumption that 'theoretism' applies to literary theory is not immediately invalidated by an anachronism.

The idea of the 'event' is central to Bakhtin's argument in 'Towards the Philosophy of the Act'; according to Bakhtin, real life is always in the process of becoming; it consists of 'never-repeatable' and unique events which we experience in unique and unrepeatable ways. In such a world, our every act, thought and word needs to be a responsible (in Liapunov's translation 'answerable'), active response to a particular situation, time and circumstances. As Michael Holquist points out in his 'Foreword' to 'Towards the Philosophy of the Act', the essay is to a large extent a critique of Kant's notion of moral categorical imperatives: according to Bakhtin, there can be no universal rules in ethics which can be applied in each and every situation. To act ethically, we must respond to the unique and never-repeatable context in which we find ourselves, and act not purely on the basis of abstract rules and norms but also from our own individual feeling of what ought to be done in that particular situation. As Bakhtin puts it, 'any universally valid value becomes actually valid only in an individual context.' (Bakhtin, 1999b, 36). From here Bakhtin develops his notion of what he calls 'non-alibi in Being' as an ethical category. Since each one of us is placed in a unique time and place which has never been and will never be occupied by anyone else, the only ethical thing to do is to take full responsibility to act from that particular and individual position, to develop fully the potential offered us by that position. Liapunov's translation of Bakhtin's argument for this, with its rhythms and repetitions, reads almost like a poem, so I shall quote it in its entirety:

I, too, exist... actually – in the whole and assume the obligation to say this word. I, too, participate in Being in a once-occurent and never-repeatable manner: I occupy a place in once-occurent Being that is unique and never-repeatable, a place that cannot be taken by anyone else and is impenetrable for anyone else. In the given once-occurent point where I am now located, no one else has ever been located in the once-occurent time and once-occurent space of once-occurent Being. And it is around this once-
occurrent point that all once-occurrent Being is arranged in a once-occurrent and never-repeatable manner. That which can be done by me can never be done by anyone else. The uniqueness or singularity of present-on-hand Being is compellently obligatory. (Bakhtin, 1999b, 40)

The point Bakhtin makes is that this experience of uniqueness can never be expressed in abstract, theoretical terms – although one could easily argue that he has just done that within his philosophical essay (Holquist, 1999, xii). As Michael Holquist notes in his ‘Foreword’ to Toward a Philosophy of the Act, ‘Bakhtin is condemned from the outset by the nature of his subject to perform an impossible task...Recognizing that all accounts of acts fundamentally differ from those acts as they are actually performed, he nevertheless seeks to describe – the act itself. It is a particularly complex way to demonstrate the truth of the old dictum that states you cannot escape theory, because any opposition to theory is itself ineluctably theoretical. Also, and not coincidentally, Bakhtin here reveals some of the existential pathos that sleeps in such ineluctability’ (Holquist, 1999, xi-xii).

Nevertheless, Bakhtin claims that there is a difference between the theoretical cognition of one’s uniqueness and responsibility that comes with it and its acknowledgement and affirmation which can only come about in ‘a unique and once-occurrent manner’ (Bakhtin, 1999b, 40). If I simply recognise my uniqueness on a theoretical level, I also generalise it: ‘everyone occupies a unique and never-repeatable place, any being is once-occurrent’ (Ibid.). Once generalised, the active sense of uniqueness is gone and with it the moral responsibility, and I become a ‘pretender’. As Morson and Emerson point out, ‘in Bakhtin’s vocabulary... a pretender is not someone who usurps another’s place, but someone who tries to live in no particular place at all or from a purely generalised, abstract place’ (Morson and Emerson, 1989, 19). Thus, my attitude toward my uniqueness and responsibility needs to be not only epistemological but also active, ‘emotional-volitional’, and I, most importantly, must act upon it:

I am actual and irreplaceable, and therefore must actualize my uniqueness. It is relation to the whole actual unity that my unique ought arises from my unique place in Being. I, the one and only I, can at no moment be indifferent (stop participating) in my means), collapses Bakhtin’s ‘pre-dialogue’ and ‘dialogue’ phases into one, and implies dialogism where there is none.
inescapably, compellently once-occurrent life. I must have my ought. In relation to everything, whatever it might be and in whatever circumstances it might be given to me, I must act from my own unique place, even if I do so only inwardly. (Bakhtin, 1999b, 41-42)

Nevertheless, the role of 'theory' is not seen by Bakhtin as so irrelevant or obstructive to this process as Morson and Emerson claim. However, the problem is that it appears that those first few missing pages of 'Toward the Philosophy of the Act' were the ones which first dealt with the question of relationship between 'theory' and life in greater detail, so what we are left with what is (or seems to be) the centre of the argument without much exposition or definition of terms. However, what Bakhtin says about 'theory' in the rest of the essay, at the beginning of the essay applies in fact to all, for want of a better word, 'cognising disciplines', i.e. 'discursive theoretical thinking (in the natural sciences and philosophy), historical description-exposition', and even art. And what Bakhtin says about them is that:

The moment which discursive theoretical thinking (in the natural sciences and in philosophy), historical description-exposition, and aesthetic intuition have in common, and which is of particular importance for our inquiry, is this: all these activities establish a fundamental split between the content or sense of a given act/activity and the historical actuality of its being, the actual and once-occurrent experiencing of it. (Bakhtin, 1999b, 1-2)

An action, which can be real 'only in its entirety', participates fully in 'the unique unity of ongoing Being'; however, once its sense or content are extracted from it, they become part of a certain theoretical (scientific or artistic) discipline, which then develops and interprets the sense or content according to its own rules. As Bakhtin says, 'the detached content of the cognition act comes to be governed by its own immanent laws, according to which it then develops as if it had a will of its own. Inasmuch as we have entered that content, i.e., performed an act of abstraction, we are now controlled by its autonomous laws, or, to be exact, we are simply no longer present in it as individually and answerably active human beings' (Bakhtin, 1999b, 7). As a matter of fact, the whole of culture seems to serve the purpose of extracting meanings from our living actions:
And as a result, two worlds confront each other, two worlds that have absolutely no communication with each other and are mutually impervious: the world of culture and the world of life, the only world in which we create, cognize, contemplate, live our lives and die or - the world in which the acts of our activity are objectified and the world in which these acts actually proceed and are actually accomplished once and only once. (Bakhtin, 1999b, 2)

Faced with these two worlds, every act we perform is 'like a two-faced Janus', looking 'in two opposite directions: it looks at the objective unity of a domain of culture and at the never-repeatable uniqueness of actually lived and experienced life' (Ibid.). And it is only through the unity of an act of a responsible or 'answerable' consciousness with its 'ought' that these two worlds can be united — this unity can never be achieved from within the theoretical world alone. Talking about thought as an act, Bakhtin says:

As a performed act, a given thought forms an integral whole: both its content/sense and the fact of its presence in my actual consciousness — the consciousness of a perfectly determinate human being — at a particular time and in particular circumstances, i.e., the whole of concrete historicalness of its performance — both of these moments (the content/sense moment and the individual-historical moment) are unitary and indivisible in evaluating that thought as my answerable act or deed. (Bakhtin, 1999b, 3)

This does not mean that one cannot 'take its content/sense moment abstractly, i.e., a thought as a universally valid judgement'; it simply means that if one does that, then the historicity of the thought becomes irrelevant as it enters into the 'theoretical unity of the appropriate theoretical domain' (Ibid.). Viewed in the context of a given theoretical discipline, the thought's 'place in this unity exhaustively determines its validity', and Bakhtin says explicitly that it is perfectly possible and justified to consider thoughts in this abstract manner (Bakhtin, 1999b, 3). As he says a few pages later, 'insofar as the abstractly theoretical self-regulated world (a world fundamentally and essentially alien to once-occurrent, living historicalness) remains within its own bounds, its autonomy is justified and inviolable' (Bakhtin, 1999b, 7). What is not justifiable, however, according to Bakhtin, is to either evaluate or perform an individual, historical act or a thought on the basis of its abstract content alone. What ought to be thought, said and done in a given moment must be determined by the moral subject, based on the possibilities
offered both by the historical, unique and unrepeable circumstances and by the propositions as they appear in ‘theory’. ‘Theoretical veridicality is technical and instrumental in relation to the ought’ (Bakhtin, 1999b, 4). It is the ought that can have no theoretical expression; it always has to be created anew by the responsible individual human subject for each of the situations in which they find themselves:

On the whole, no theoretical determination and proposition can include within itself the moment of the ought-to-be, nor is this moment derivable from it. There is no aesthetic ought, scientific ought, and – beside them – an ethical ought; there is only that which is aesthetically, theoretically, socially valid, and these validities may be joined by the ought, for which all of them are instrumental. These posittings gain their validity within an aesthetic, a scientific, or a sociological unity: the ought gains its validity within the unity of my once-occurrent answerable life. (Bakhtin, 1999b, 5)

To repeat, Bakhtin does not deny the validity of theoretical knowledge in general; he just warns us that we are entering a dangerous ground if we ascribe to theory the power which it does not have – the power to help us navigate through the full complexity of moral action in an ever-changing world, and to regulate that action.

However, Morson and Emerson shift the debate from action to understanding, and this is probably why they attribute to Bakhtin a much sharper and more hostile critique of ‘theoretism’ (which they, it seems to me, often take to simply mean ‘theory’) than the one he actually made. ‘To understand human acts’, say Morson and Emerson, ‘one must take into account unrepeable “contextual meaning” (smysl). The failure to take this step beyond theoretism is utterly fatal for any understanding of ethics’ (1989, 8). However, it seems to me that the main question Bakhtin is asking is not: ‘How can we understand the moral actions of others?’, but: ‘Under what circumstances do I act ethically? When am I fully responsible for my actions?’ It is mainly a question of active morality, and the question of cognition and understanding is only secondary to it.

When using the term ‘theoretical knowledge’ in this essay Bakhtin did not have just science in mind, but the whole world of culture, which, according to him, gives us a framework for the abstractions of sense or content out of once-occurrent and never-repeable events. Thus, when Morson and Emerson talk of Bakhtin’s enduring ‘belief in the unsystematicity of culture’ (1989, 29) they could not possibly have Toward a Philosophy of the Act in mind, as here Bakhtin talks of ‘objective unity of a domain of
culture' as opposed to 'the never-repeatable uniqueness of actually lived and experienced life' (Bakhtin, 1999b, 2).

The essence of Bakhtin's argument is that theoretical knowledge (of any kind) has a tendency to organise itself according to its own rules and logic; in order to act responsibly, we must bring this theoretical knowledge back into the communion with the world-as-event; at the same time, if we choose to follow the abstractions of a certain theoretical discipline, we are justified in doing so, but only on condition that we are fully aware of what we are doing and that we take full responsibility for it. However, Bakhtin is giving us two different and rather contradictory ideas: the first is that theoretical knowledge has a tendency to pull our thoughts along a certain route whether we want it or not; but, the second is that, as he puts it in a footnote (which may or may not have been read accurately by his editor), 'the whole sense [?] [I illegible word] of a judgement consists precisely in the fact that it usually does not remain a theoretical judgement, but rather is actually brought into communion with once-occurrent Being', i.e., 'any abstracting from one's actual participation is very difficult' (Bakhtin, 1999b, 51). In short, theory, according to Bakhtin, is an inescapable dimension of human activity, but it ca never provide a key to specific situations. Furthermore, 'an answerable deed', says Bakhtin, 'must not oppose itself to theory and thought, but must incorporate them into itself as necessary moments that are wholly answerable' (Bakhtin, 1999b, 56). It is hard to see how this can be seen as a critique of any theoretical discipline or approach as such, structuralism included.

Morson and Emerson, however, maintain that through this essay's insistence on the importance of the particular we encounter a 'problem that was to concern Bakhtin throughout his life':

What can we say in general about particular things except that they are particular? What responsible discipline can be elaborated for the humanities, if the essential subject of those disciplines is all those things that are inevitably impoverished by being reduced to a system? (Morson and Emerson, 1989, 29)

First of all: what are 'all those things' that they have in mind? Bakhtin was talking specifically of moral action and moral philosophy's failure to deal with it, and not of the humanities in general. But even with this puzzling proposition, Morson and
Emerson came to a rather useful conclusion, that 'the concept of genre was to become central to that effort'.

Genres of speech and literature, he was later to argue, provide specific complexes of values, definitions of situation, and meanings of possible actions. [...] These 'complexes' provide a relative stability, but they do not exhaustively define the members of the genre. Each act of speech and each literary work uses the resources of the genre in a specific way in response to a specific individual situation. The genre is changed slightly by each usage; it 'remembers' its uses, as Bakhtin was to put the point, anthropomorphically, in the Dostoevsky book. We need genres to understand specific acts, but in understanding genre we have not understood everything that is important about those acts. (Morson and Emerson, 1989, 22-23)

It seems to me that Morson and Emerson have a much bigger problem with 'systems' than Bakhtin ever did, and as Igor Shaitanov noted (1997, 238-39), Bakhtin's and Tynianov's work on literary genres is not so very different. He even explicitly states that 'both Bakhtin and the Russian Formalists considered themselves to be working in the field of historical poetics, and in so doing, agreed on the verbal nature of genre and the generic nature of the word'. Morson and Emerson are probably right in identifying Bakhtin's later work on speech genres as, in effect, resolving some of the problems posed in 'Toward the Philosophy of the Act'. But I would not say that the main problem was how to describe the general aspects of the particular; it was much more how to bridge the gap, created in this early work, between culture and life, between abstract content or meaning and the eventness of Being. Furthermore, half way through Toward a Philosophy of the Act, Bakhtin had already found the path which he was later to follow, and realised that a theory of the utterance may provide him with a way to solve the problem:

It would be a mistake to assume that this concrete truth [pravda] of the event that the performer of the act sees and hears and experiences and understands in the single act of an answerable deed is something ineffable, i.e., that it can only be lovingly experienced in some way at the moment of performing the act, but cannot be uttered clearly and distinctly. I think that language is much more adapted to giving utterance precisely to that truth, and not to the abstract moment of the logical in its purity. That which is abstract, in its purity, is indeed unutterable: any expression is much concrete for pure
meaning – it distorts and dulls the purity and validity in-itself of meaning. That is why in abstract thinking we never understand an expression in its full sense. (Bakhtin, 1999b, 31)

In other words, the utterance is always full of concrete, contextual meaning that refers to a specific situation, time and place. I believe that it was from here that Bakhtin started his own theory of language and utterances.

Ken Hirschkop notes (1999, 13) that literary-critical readings of Bakhtin have tended to disregard the philosophical implications of his work, while philosophical readings have disregarded the more literary-historical aspects of it. There is nothing necessarily wrong in this, for a search for productive and fruitful ideas in Bakhtin’s work, those which could be further developed through one’s own interests, seems to me a much healthier order of procedure than the obsessiveness with which the ‘Bakhtin industry’ is searching for the ‘real Bakhtin’. Is it really in the spirit of Bakhtin’s very thought to limit it just what his own ‘entire phenomenology’ would allow for? 41

But also, it has to be stressed one more time that Toward a Philosophy of the Act is a work that deals primarily with ethics, and that the term ‘theoretism’ refers to a tendency to contemplate an ethical problem in general and abstract terms, and not as a particular and unique event which demands our responsible action. As such, it is quite divorced from the specific problems of literary and cultural theory.

The question of language and speech, however, is very close to the structuralist problematic, and here the anti-structuralist reading of Bakhtin is on a firmer ground.

‘Speech Genres’ and Other Late Essays

There are two short paragraphs in one of Bakhtin’s late ‘essays’, entitled (by the editor) ‘From Notes Made in 1970-71’, which have been quoted by everyone who wanted to prove that Bakhtin was an antistructuralist and antisemiotician (including Morson and Emerson, 1989, 29):

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41 Michael Gardiner raises a similar appeal against Morson’s and Emerson’s refusal to discuss Bakhtin as in any way connected with Marxism, saying that ‘Morson and Emerson seem determined (for whatever reason) to foreclose this potential dialogue from the outset, a closure which is seemingly at odds with the tenor of Bakhtin’s own open-endedness and antidogmatism’ (Gardiner, 1999, 263).
Semiotics deals primarily with the transmission of ready-made communication using a ready-made code. But in live speech, strictly speaking, communication is first created in the process of transmission, and there is, in essence, no code...

Context and code. A context is potentially unfinalized, a code must be finalized. A code is only a technical means of transmitting information; it does not have a cognitive, creative significance. A code is a deliberately established, killed context. (Bakhtin, 1999a, 147)\textsuperscript{42}

None of it is really followed up by any clarifications, and there are no similar sentiments expressed in any of Bakhtin's earlier work (some of the other later essays, in fact, and in great detail, contradict the above quote). The claim that there is no such a thing as code in communication, apart from being startling, is also rather unclear, as the code is defined in the most unusual way: what can it mean to say that a code is a killed context, when, and not just in semiotics, those two notions are clearly separate and mean rather different things? Caryl Emerson, who quoted the above with approval and without questioning in 1989, expressed a rather more critical view of these two paragraphs in Bakhtin's notes in 1997, saying that 'to be sure, we should not make too much of this startling remark, a casual private jotting of Bakhtin's whose implications he never works out'. But, she also says:

But it is also, of course, not true; codes can be cognitively and creatively significant to an enormous degree. For whatever reason, during fifty years of scholarly activity Bakhtin choose not to deepen or make more sophisticated his understanding of signs, codes, and their interaction with more inchoate human material – as so many contemporary semioticians and socio-ethnographers (including Yuri Lotman himself) have done. Znak, 'sign', remained for Bakhtin the rather crude, binary Saussurean instrument that had been criticized by his circle in the 1920s. (Emerson, 1997, 46)

Is it then not remarkable how close Bakhtin came in his ideas to the work of Lotman in particular, without actually using much of the semiotic vocabulary or even knowing much, as Emerson claims, about the changes in the structural approach to language in

\textsuperscript{42} There are actually three paragraphs that come one after the other, and they are usually quoted together; the second one, however, is used to prove that Bakhtin was not a Marxist, as it contains his critique of dialectics: "Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualising ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgements from living words and responses, cram everything one abstract consciousness – and that's how you get dialectics".
general? However, with or without the serious consideration of the ‘there is no code’ and ‘a code is killed context’ paragraphs, Bakhtin’s late essays, just like his early ones, are also supposed to be antistructuralist. I shall now examine some of the ideas put forward in some of those late essays, namely ‘The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis’, and ‘From Notes Made in 1970-71’. I shall leave ‘The Problem of Speech Genres’ for the next chapter, noting only that in it Bakhtin insists on the great complexity and diversity of our use of speech.

‘The Problem of the Text’

So how is linguistics to cope with this complexity of speech genres and of the utterances which incarnate them? In no way, responds Bakhtin, in his notes which were published under the title ‘The Problem of the Text’:

Language and the word are almost everything in human life. But one must not think that this all-embracing and multifaceted reality can be the subject of only one science, linguistics, or that it can be understood through linguistic methods alone. The subject of linguistics is only the material, only the means of speech communication, and not speech communication itself, not utterances in their essence and not the relationships among them (dialogic), not the forms of speech communication, and not speech genres. Linguistics studies only the relationships among elements within the language system, not the relationships among utterances and not the relations of utterances to reality and to the speaker (author). (Bakhtin, 1999a, 118)

Although this could be read as a critique of one great structuralist, namely Roman Jakobson, who claimed that linguistics can be seen as dealing with the ‘problems of relations between the word and the world’ (Jakobson, ‘Linguistics and Poetics’, 1996, p. 63), it can also be seen as ultra-Saussurean, resolutely keeping linguistics within the bounds given to it by the Swiss linguist. ‘The Problem of the Text’ retraces some of the

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43 See, for example, Allan Reid, 1990 and 1999; also, a dense analysis of the concepts Bakhtin shares with the Moscow-Tartu school of semiotics in Grzhibek 1995. Amy Mandelker (1995) gives an interesting parallel between Bakhtin’s late work on the concept of the logosphere and Lotman’s late work on the concept of the semiosphere.
problems tackled in 'The Problem of Speech Genres' (which we shall examine in the next chapter), but looks at them from a different angle. The title given to the piece is a fair description of that angle, as the problem of the text is one of the central to this section of Bakhtin's late notes.

As Grzybek points out (1995) one of the (many) aspects of Bakhtin's thought which he shares with the Soviet Semioticians is his understanding of the text (in Bakhtin's own words) 'in the broad sense - as any coherent complex of signs', which means that 'even the study of art (the study of music, the theory and history of fine arts) deals with texts' (Bakhtin, 1999a, 103; Grzybek, 1995, 243-44). For Bakhtin, the distinctive characteristic of human sciences is precisely the fact that they deal with 'thoughts about thoughts, experiences of experiences, words about words, and texts about texts' (Bakhtin, 1999a, 103). And the distinctive characteristic of the text is that it has two 'unconditional' (Bakhtin, 1999a, 107) and irreducible poles from which it can be observed:

Each text presupposes a generally understood (that is, conventional within a given collective) system of signs, a language (if only the language of art). If there is no language behind the text, it is not a text, but a natural (non signifying phenomenon)... And so behind each text stands a language system. Everything in the text that is repeated and reproduced, everything repeatable and reproducible, everything that can be given outside a given text (the given) conforms to this language system. But at the same time each text (as an utterance) is individual, unique, and unrepeatable, and herein lies its entire significance (its plan, the purpose for which it was created). This is the aspect of it that pertains to honesty, truth, goodness, beauty, history. With respect to this aspect, everything repeatable and reproducible proves to be a material, a means to an end... The second aspect (pole) inheres in the text itself,... is linked not with elements (repeatable) in the system of the language (signs), but with other texts (unrepeatable) by special dialogic ... relations. (Bakhtin, 1999a, 105)

We can see here a considerable presence of structuralist terminology and ideas. According to Bakhtin, this also means that, although languages (sign systems), which 'have a common logic' (Bakhtin, 1999a, 106), can be ultimately all translated one into the other, the text, as seen from the second (dialogic) pole, in which it appears as an utterance, can never be fully translated (Ibid.), as the context which the text addresses cannot be carried from one culture, or even one speech situation, to another. This also
means that there are two different ways in which a significative unit behaves, depending on whether we look at it as a language unit or a unit of an utterance (or of a text):

Two or more sentences can be absolutely identical (when they are superimposed on one another, like two geometrical figures, they coincide)... But as an utterance (or a part of an utterance) no one sentence, even if it has only one word, can ever be repeated: it is always a new utterance (even if it is a quotation). (Bakhtin, 1999a, 108)

And so, according to Bakhtin, and Saussure as well, we cannot and should not expect from linguistics to deal with such 'absolutely unrepeatable individualities as utterances'. That does not mean that we cannot found a science that could do it (Ibid.), and Bakhtin is adamant that that science can never be linguistics. This should not be understood as a critique of linguistics, simply a very determined insistence that it should know its place. 'The linguist is accustomed to perceiving everything in a single closed context (in the system of a language or in the linguistically understood text that is not dialogically correlated to another, responding text), and as a linguist, of course', says Bakhtin, 'he is correct'. The linguist is not correct, according to Bakhtin, when he tries to 'smuggle in' the problems of 'the relations of utterances to reality, to the real speaking subject, and to other real utterances — relations that first make the utterances true or false, beautiful, and so forth' into linguistics. As a (former) Yugoslav literary theorist put it to the linguists while making a relatively similar argument: *Ne sutor ultra crepidam* (Petrović, 1972, 103).

The Notes from 1970-71

In the notes from 1970-71, Bakhtin suggested that the dialogic relations of the utterance should be defined 'metalinguistically', and he briefly defines 'the area of metalinguistics' as including 'various kinds and degrees of otherness of the other's word and various forms of relations to it (stylisation, parody, polemics and so forth) as well as various methods of expunging it from speech life' (Bakhtin, 1999a, 133). Unfortunately, this is the part of Bakhtin's late work which is to a large extent unintelligible, and many of the thoughts are not fully thought through, or at least are not fully disclosed. There is only one other very sketchy mention of metalinguistics in this essay (Bakhtin, 1999a, 152), and as it is not mentioned anywhere else in *Speech*
Genres, it can be said that the idea of metalinguistics as a new science is only barely defined in Bakhtin’s late essays, but that we can safely guess its subject and to a certain extent its methods from what Bakhtin has written about speech genres and the utterance.

Nevertheless, many of the fragmented thoughts in ‘From Notes Made in 1970-71’ point to some great possibilities for literary scholarship and the human sciences in general. For example, close to the beginning of the essay Bakhtin makes a comment that ‘through the utterance, language joins the historical unrepeatability and unfinalized totality of the logosphere’ (Bakhtin, 1999a, 134), and then picks up on that thought several pages later:

The link between literary scholarship and history of culture (culture not as a sum of phenomena, but as a totality). Herein lies Veselovsky’s strength (semiotics). Literature is an inseparable part of the totality of culture and cannot be studied outside the total cultural context...

Science (and cultural consciousness) of the nineteenth century singled out only a miniature world (and we have narrowed it even more) from the boundless world of literature. This miniature world included almost nothing of the East. The world of culture and literature is essentially as boundless as the universe. We are speaking not about its geographical breadth (this is limited), but about its semantic depths, which are as bottomless as the depths of matter. The infinite diversity of interpretations, images, figurative semantic combinations, materials and their interpretations, and so forth. We have narrowed it terribly by selecting and by modernizing what has been selected. We impoverish the past and do not enrich ourselves. We are suffocating in the captivity of narrow and homogenous interpretations. (Bakhtin, 1999a, 140)

And here we come across that idea of the ‘boundlessness of culture’, defined as the culture’s ability to produce continuous interpretations of itself, to dig deeper and deeper in the search of new meanings and interpretations of its texts. The culture of ‘Toward the Philosophy of the Act’, which Bakhtin defined as severed from the eventness of Being, has by now become, through the particularity of the text and the utterance, linked to the infinite diversity and ever changing nature of life. At the same time, Bakhtin grew closer to semiotics and to the Eastern European brand of structuralism, sharing with them (sometimes, if his ‘disciples’ are to be believed, involuntarily) many of his concerns, problems, solutions to problems, and sometimes, but not always, the terminology as well. Lotman in particular shall stay with us for most of this thesis,
however, as many of his ideas I found extremely useful in my discussion of the relation between the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin and Roland Barthes.

But let us now return to Morson and Emerson, and to a more concrete example of how Bakhtin resolved the problem of the gap between life and culture.

**Bakhtin’s Chronotope**

In his essays published under the title ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel’ from 1937–38 (with ‘Concluding Remarks’ essay written in 1973), Bakhtin elaborated the idea that the presentation of time and the presentation of space in literary works of art are always intertwined and mutually dependent, and that one cannot be studied without the other. The term he uses to refer to this mutual dependence, chronotope (literally time-space), is taken from Einstein’s theory of relativity ‘as a metaphor (almost, but not entirely)’ (Bakhtin, 1996a, 84); according to Morson and Emerson (1990, 367), this ‘cryptic comment’ ‘appears to mean that the relation of “chronotope” to Einsteinian “time-space” is something weaker than identity, but stronger than mere metaphor or analogy’. Within the context of literary theory Bakhtin employs it as a category which belongs to the domains of both form and content (insofar as these can be used as separate concepts) and which defines literary genres and determines their historical development.

Although these essays carry the subtitle ‘Notes toward a Historical Poetics’, the development of the genres themselves, however, is not what interests Bakhtin most in this context. The historical development he is interested in is the complicated and interrupted process of capturing real historical time and space and the real historical man living in them in literary works of art (Bakhtin, 1996a, 84). The philosophical tint of this phrase has led critics like Morson and Emerson to see the essays on the chronotope as an example of Bakhtin’s philosophy in disguise: while pretending to discuss ‘only’ literature, these essays really discuss ethics and deal with philosophical ‘discoveries about the relation of people and events to time and space’ that ‘have been made by narrative genres of literature’ (Morson and Emerson, 1990, 366). According to
Morson and Emerson, the chronotope essays can be seen as a continuation of the ethical problematic raised by *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*.

Morson and Emerson are here partly arguing for their concept of Bakhtin as a philosopher (or a ‘thinker’) who never did straightforward literary theory. However, Bakhtin’s terminology in the chronotope essays is quite different from the terminology in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, and his interest decidedly literary, which is something Morson’s and Emerson’s presentation of the later essays fails to reflect, or tends to gloss over to move on to the ‘more interesting’ political or ethical subtext.

For example, one of the definitions that they propose for the chronotope is that it is ‘a way of understanding experience; it is a specific form-shaping ideology for understanding the nature of events and actions. In this sense, the chronotope essay may be understood as a further development of Bakhtin’s early concern with the ‘act’ (in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*). Actions are necessarily performed in a specific context; chronotopes differ by the ways in which they understand context and the relation of action and events to it’ (Morson and Emerson, 1990, 367). We can see that nowhere in this definition (nor in the preceding and following paragraphs) is literature mentioned, and the chronotope is presented almost as a purely cognitive-ethical category which can be firmly put in the context of Bakhtin’s early ethical considerations. But between the chronotope essays and *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* Bakhtin had discovered the importance of language, developed the notions of dialogism and polyphony (in his book on Dostoevsky), and had turned more and more towards a literary problematic and the novel in particular.44 I am not denying that one can uncover the underlying ethical concerns of the chronotope essays, I simply do not believe that they can be translated into pure ethical philosophy.45

As Bakhtin sees it, literature (that is, European literature) of different periods developed different ways of representing different aspects of time and/or space, but the art of representing historical time and man in it has only gradually been developed. Furthermore, although Bakhtin does not state this explicitly, it is clear from his remarks

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44 Morson and Emerson divide Bakhtin’s career into four main periods: the first, philosophical, influenced by the Kantian tradition, concentrated on ethics; the second, in which Bakhtin discovers language and the dialogue (Dostoevsky); the third, divided into two parts, the first focused on the analyses of the novel, chronotope and heteroglossia, the second on Rabelais and the carnival; and the final, fourth, period, in which Bakhtin is looking at the speech genres, the nature of the humanities, and the problem of the text (1990, 64-68).

45 Although some of Bakhtin’s ideas on the chronotope have proved useful for the critics dealing with moral problematic in works of fiction. See, for example, Eckstrom, 1995.
about the chronotopes in the novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky (or Goethe, whom Bakhtin considered to have been the first to discover ‘historical time’ alongside ‘personal time’, and describe how the combination of the two made the individual human character that he believed that even the works of these giants of realism were capable of recreating only a limited and selective chronotope compared to the chronotope of the real historical process. Nevertheless, even with the awareness that real historical time and space can never be captured fully within a literary work of art, the history of the efforts to do so yielded some very interesting results which reflected the way man saw himself and his role in the world in the given historical moment. The role of language, as we shall see, is of considerable importance here, as the choice of words not only makes up the genre but also the world that that genre describes. And although Grzybek (1995, 243) suggested that the concept of the modelling system was one of the few that Bakhtin did not share with the Tartu and Moscow school semioticians, there is, I believe, good ground for arguing that Bakhtin’s genres and their chronotopes can be seen as modelling systems, as they shape reality (or certain aspects of it) in a particular way, through their particular use of language. I believe that there is also a link between the principle behind the notion of the chronotope and Barthes’s notion of a literary work as a simulacrum, reproducing the world’s structural elements through language.

The individual chronotope essays look at several, historically quite distant, sources of the main chronotopes which developed in the European literature. Three of these are ancient Greek and Roman forms: the early Greek adventure novel, Roman satirical novel and Greek and Roman biographical and autobiographical forms. Apart from them, Bakhtin analyses medieval romances, different types of chronotope in 'The essay on Goethe is a part of Bakhtin’s early work on the Bildungsroman, which, having probably been written between 1936 and 1938 (Morson and Emerson, 1990, 405.), dates from the same period as the chronotope essays, and, as Morson and Emerson argue, can be read as their continuation. Unfortunately, the manuscript on the Bildungsroman was the one Bakhtin famously used as cigarette paper during the WW2, and we are left only with its beginning (Bakhtin, ‘The Bildungsroman and Its Significance in the History of Realism (Toward a Historical Typology of the Novel)’, in 1999a.)

46 ‘In Bakhtin’s thought, Goethe and Dostoevsky represent two different impulses taken to their extremes. It will be recalled that Dostoevsky (as Bakhtin describes him) thought away development in order to present a world of pure simultaneity – ‘the cross section of a single moment’. He also tended to confine his heroes to small spaces (thresholds, corridors, and other locales for scandal). This way of visualising the world allowed Dostoevsky to create the most intense dialogues among people from different ideological camps, professions, backgrounds, even different eras... For Bakhtin, Dostoevsky was the extreme dialogist, even though his works lacked a sense of everyday life and historical development; Goethe, on the other hand, was the model of prosaics, even at the expense of some dialogic complexity.’ (Morson and Emerson, 1990, 418-19)
folklore and the way they influenced François Rabelais's writing and his chronotope; then idyllic chronotopes, as well as the role of the character of the fool, jester and buffoon in the history of the novelistic genre and its chronotopes.

Morson and Emerson note that the ground covered by these essays ends, historically, with Rabelais, and argue that the chronotopes discussed in these essays should be seen against the much more developed chronotopes of the nineteenth-century novel. They claim that 'Bakhtin's main impulse is evidently to celebrate the novel since the eighteenth century', but, perversely, he chooses to talk of 'much earlier works' whose chronotopes he considers as 'most naïve', and we are meant to construct Bakhtin's view of the novel 'by a cautious process of inverting the features of other [older] genres' (Morson and Emerson, 1990, 373).

However, I do not believe that this is quite right. As Bakhtin pointed out in the beginning, the development of the literary devices by which to represent time and space and their links was slow and complicated, and I would rather think that each of its steps should be, if not 'celebrated', then considered with the patience and respect. Furthermore, I believe that this is exactly what Bakhtin is doing: rather then discussing these earlier genres just in order to dismiss them as 'naïve' in comparison with the nineteenth century novel, he talks of them as important milestones in our changing understanding of the world we live in, and in narrative literature's ability to reflect that.

As Bakhtin himself stresses, these essays are meant to be just an introductory study of the history of genres and their chronotopes, and the list of chronotopes he proposes as having had the crucial role in shaping European literature, and the novel in particular, is neither exhaustive nor conclusive. Besides, the chronotopes which stand as the main topics of these essays are all 'macro-chronotopes'; they are the ones that create and define literary worlds in their broadest terms, and although they can help define different currents in the development of literary genres, they can only to a limited extent help explain the considerable differences between individual works within a single genre and describe the works' individual worlds. As Bakhtin stresses in the 'Concluding Remarks' to this collection of essays, every scene, every motif in a literary work of art is a small chronotope, and all of the chronotopes within a work of art enter into complex, dialogic relations with each other. However, in these essays he does not develop an interest in smaller chronotopes and their mutual relations, but concentrates
mostly on large chronotopes and the way their development has shaped the development of European novelistic tradition.

So, for example, the first chronotope Bakhtin analyses is that of the classical Greek 'adventure novel', or, to follow more precisely Bakhtin's own terminology, the 'adventure novel of ordeal'. The basic plot involves a love story between a boy and a girl, who get separated and have to go through a series of adventures and ordeals to find each other. Bakhtin terms the chronotope of this type of novel 'foreign world in adventurous time'. Adventurous time is characterised by the words 'sudden' and 'unexpected'; everything that happens in it is a result of pure chance. The hero and the heroine do not do anything actively and intentionally, but everything just happens to them: unexpectedness and suddenness are the initiative - bearing elements in the plot of these novels. The main characters themselves do not show (or, in the whirl of unexpected and sudden events, do not have time to show) any signs of active initiative, but are just passive toys at the hands of blind chance. As they are separated by chance, so they will be reunited by chance; enemies might put obstacles to their love and friends might help them overcome them, but the hero and the heroine are 'passive players' to the end. And, as Morson and Emerson put it (1990, 378), the historical process 'remains entirely abstract, just another source of random disruptive forces'.

Furthermore, the world through which the hero and the heroine are carried by the whims of their fortune is a completely foreign world. It is full of strange animals and buildings and objects and customs; however, all these elements of strangeness and foreignness never cohere into an intelligible world, nor are they given any historical concreteness. They just remain strange and isolated in their strangeness. Moreover, this strangeness is not even set against the familiarity of their home country (besides, the hero and the heroine often come from two different countries); there is no sense of comparison between what is known and what is strange, but everything just remains perpetually and irredeemably fragmented and unfamiliar. The hero and the heroine seem unable to comprehend the world through which they are travelling, least of all in its historical and social aspects. Bakhtin suggests that it is precisely this absolute, fragmented, unintelligible foreignness of the world of the novel which makes the purity of its adventurous time possible.
According to him, a world that is known and understood in its social, historical and cultural concreteness could not fail to impart some of its causal laws onto the events of the plot. If everything remains incomprehensible in its fragmented strangeness, the bonds of cause and effect will not be able to establish themselves, and everything that happens will indeed appear to be a pure game of chance. It is as if the manner in which these plots are constructed (with their lack of causal relations and human initiative) locks both the readers’ and the author’s perspective to the characters’ point of view. It would be possible to narrate the same story (whether in first or third person is of less importance) while indicating that events belong to the level of the world itself, while their randomness belongs to the level of the characters’ perception. Everything that happens in that world could have been presented as only seemingly random, with a hidden truth (or at least explanation) behind that apparent randomness. Here, however, the two levels are indistinguishable, and the randomness of events intrinsically belongs to the world itself. The hero and the heroine are not the only ones who are lost and helpless in this incomprehensible foreign world; more disturbingly, we as readers are there on the same journey with them, bewildered, unable to tell a cause from an effect, subject to a game of chance in the world that cannot be known or understood (Bakhtin, 1996a, 86-110).

In contrast to this, medieval romances, which are in principle set in the same type of chronotope as Greek novels, that is, ‘a foreign world in adventurous time’, manage to place their protagonists into that chronotope in a completely different manner. The hero of medieval romances is, unlike the hero of Greek novels, entirely at home in this world of chance meetings and unexpected events. He is far from being a passive player in his adventures and a pure victim of frivolous chance, who will in the end be so fortunate as to go back to ‘normal life’ and marry his beloved outside the chronotope of his adventures; on the contrary, he throws himself into that strange and marvellous world and into his adventures like a fish into water. The chance world of medieval romances has its strangeness and wonder emphasised as its most appealing feature, and the hero, far from being perceived as a poor soul going through a series of misfortunes and catastrophes, is portrayed as experiencing fantastic, fascinating and enchanting adventures (interesting and enchanting even for himself). The world of medieval romances is full of strange and marvellous things, and its hero is just as wonderful and fascinating as it is; as Bakhtin puts it, far from being its victim, he is its essence and its best representative (Bakhtin 1996a, 151-58).
In addition to the bewildering and alienating strangeness of the chronotope of the Greek adventure novel, the space and time in it are linked in a purely mechanical manner. Space itself exists only in its expansiveness: the plot of the novels demands that its heroes travel great distances, that they be separated from each other by great distances, that they miss or find each other across great distances. What these distances cover in concrete terms is of far less importance. Thus the foreignness of the world of these novels is a sign of the great distances travelled; it is not of much interest in itself. The only likeness between the space and the time aspect of the novels' chronotope is the speed with which these distances are traversed. What matters is whether the characters make it on time to save each other from various misfortunes, or the fact that these misfortunes mostly happen because characters have the bad luck to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. The link between space and time is purely mechanical: the world is a map with a grid, and time matters only insofar as there could be no movement without it.

However, there are other aspects of this chronotope which were, according to Bakhtin, extremely important for the development of the adventure novel as a genre. In that context, a particularly important aspect would be the peculiar private-biographical time frame of these novels. As Bakhtin points out, there are two main points on which the organisation of time is based in the novels of this type: the characters' first meeting and their falling in love from the point which sets the story going, with their fortunate union in marriage as the final point of the plot. What happens between these points is, as Bakhtin puts it, 'an extratemporal hiatus between two moments of biographical time' (1996a, 89-90). Characters come out of all those trials and tribulations completely unchanged; their love for each other has stayed the same, they themselves are as young, fresh and beautiful as they were when they first met. Had they changed, had the events they went through affected them in any way, it could be said that what they went through was a part of their real biographical time. As it is, this gap in biographical time can be as long or as short as the author or his audience desire. Lost between numerous 'suddenly's' and 'just at that moment's', the real amount of time it would take for all those adventures to take place remains unaccounted for. Bakhtin notes that in the seventeenth century novels of this type became ten or fifteen times longer than their Greek 'ancestors'. Voltaire in his Candide ridiculed the clichés of those novels by
taking into account the amount of time it would take for a man or a woman to go through all these adventures and the traces they would leave on their character, psyche and body. Thus, at the end of *Candide* all the characters are old and scarred by all the misfortunes that befell them; Candide and Cunégonde are both too old, and Cunégonde too ugly, for their marriage to mean the fulfilment of their life-long desire for each other.

Another element of this is that the heroes of Greek adventure novels have no links outside their private, biographical worlds and their love for each other; family, home, country, class, historical circumstances have no bearing on their identity. They are isolated, private individuals in a foreign world, and their love is the axis of that world. Even historical, political and social events (like wars, religious rituals, existence of slavery) enter into this private time and space only insofar as they are relevant to the love story about the hero and the heroine. And the fact that the characters do not change as a result of all the misfortunes that they go through represents in fact their victory over that random, foreign world of blind chance and sudden encounters. They might have seen completely helpless and passive, toys in destiny’s hands, but it was, in fact, precisely that passive resilience to the world’s attempts to change them that proved their identity, character and love as strong and enduring.

Thus, according to Bakhtin, Greek adventure novels paint a picture of a human being that resists the world’s attempts to change him or her; they sing the praises of the resistance and purity of human nature. As Bakhtin puts it: ‘The hammer of events crumbles nothing, and it forges nothing; it just tests the strength of the finished product. And the product endures the test. There lies the artistic – ideological meaning of the Greek novel’ (Bakhtin, 1996a, 219). And in this plot of tests and trials lies the Greek novel’s greatest legacy in the history of genres.

However, Morson and Emerson (1990, 382) claim that Bakhtin was principally interested in ‘the great nineteenth-century novels’ in which a new element was introduced – ‘the idea of becoming’. As they put it:

Novels of pure testing presuppose either a stable identity (as in Greek romance) or, in other variants, an identity that undergoes a single crisis of rebirth. What these novels do not contain is the concept of true development, by which Bakhtin means ‘becoming, a person’s gradual formation’ (DiN, p. 392). In traditional novels of testing, the hero displays unchanging ‘inert nobility’ (Ibid.), whereas in the nineteenth century, major
narrative events and his or her own decisions. Choices not only reveal the hero and heroine, but make them. (Ibid.)

However, it seems to me that, if one chooses to read Bakhtin through his ethical subtext, there is another way of interpreting his analysis of the Greek romances. Although Greek novels of ordeal do not pay any attention to how a person might change, they do portray how a person might stay the same in a mad world of random chance. There is sometimes a merit in staying the same when the world around you seems a strange place which functions according to some inhumane and inexplicable laws; sometimes, one better not 'develop' and adapt to one's circumstances, because those circumstances are not worthy of being adapted to. I shall not pretend that I know that this is how Bakhtin felt in the Soviet Union during Stalin's rule, but it is possible that he, and many others, did. After all, he was probably arrested in 1929 just because his name was found in a wrong address book—by mere blind chance—and he afterwards chose not to participate in Soviet public life because he refused to compromise with his surroundings. And I believe that the achievement of Greek romances, if seen in this light, does not seem at all naïve or 'primitive'. It still tells a relevant story of human life; its chronotope, although sometimes seemingly quite abstract and unsatisfactory, offers a framework for an image of human personality which would be more difficult to convey in a realist novel.

Chronotope is defined as the organising centre of the main narrative events in the novel (Bakhtin, 1996a, 250), and as such it implies the notion of narrative structuration. This is obviously not the structuralism of Greimas and Genette, but a structuralism similar perhaps to that of Northrop Frye. A particular chronotope determines the logic of the events that can take place in it. The abstract, fragmented foreign world of the Greek adventure novel allows for little else but for random events to take place in it; its lack of coherence and logic determines the lack of causality, coherence and logic in its plot as well. Or to use a more familiar example, in nineteenth-century literature, the chronotope of the provincial town came to the fore. This type of chronotope presents us with a life monotonous and cyclical, without any changes or variations. Precisely because this chronotope is so static, it can never be the only chronotope in a novel, it always has to be contrasted with chronotopes of movement and
energy (Bakhtin, 1996a, 247-48). Thus, in *The Dead Souls* the mouldy atmosphere of a small provincial town is contrasted with the mad, frantic chronotope of Chichikov's journey; and even in *Madame Bovary* the grey province she never escapes is contrasted with the world in which she would like to live, with the chronotope of journeys and adventures, of strong winds, picturesque storms and fascinating landscapes. After all, we could say that the whole tragedy of Emma Bovary is that she ended up in a novel with the wrong kind of chronotope.

If we compare this to the plot-centred analysis proposed by Barthes in 'Introduction à l'analyse structurale des récits' (and by structural narratology in general), it becomes apparent that, far from being functionally weak, Barthes's informants and catalysts serve a very important purpose indeed: that of creating the world in which certain types of things can happen and others cannot. In Bakhtin's scheme of things, 'flesh' carries more weight than bare 'skeleton'.

As for the representation of time in the novel, Bakhtin gives us an alternative viewpoint to Barthes's assertion that time in the narrative is a referential illusion which misinterprets logical relations as temporal. Of course the time of the events in the novel is not 'real' time, but Bakhtin argues that language can represent different experiences of time, with their varying degrees of causality between events and different speeds with which they follow one another. Barthes seems to assume that all narratives try to create the illusion of the 'real' time of lived experience, of which causality is an important part, but he does not take into account that not all experience of time is linked to the experience of causality, and that, moreover, a narrative can be set in a completely non-realist, fantastic chronotope. Bakhtin's argument would be that the chronotope of the novel determines what kind of events are possible in it; the representation of time can either try to create a referential illusion of real time or create a completely fantastic world in which people can sleep for centuries while staying young throughout that time. Bakhtin's chronotope is Barthes's topological and chronological code combined into one (Barthes himself says (1970a, 850) that the two are connected through the creation of the rules of the *vraisemblable*), but the purpose it serves is to create the framework for the characters and the action, whether realist or not. Creating the illusion of the *vraisemblable* is just one of its many possible functions.

Bakhtin also uses the notion of the chronotope to discuss the relationship between the author and the reader, whose worlds have their own chronotopes (Bakhtin, 1996a, 252). The worlds and chronotopes of the author and of the reader can be
separated by many centuries and they can come from different countries, but, according to Bakhtin (1996a, 253), they still belong to the real, unfinished historical reality which is separated by a sharp border from the world represented in the text. This, however, does not mean that there is no connection between them; on the contrary, the real, historical world of authors and readers can be regarded, according to Bakhtin, as ‘the creating world’, as it helps the author create the world represented in the text as much as it helps the reader reconstruct that world.

According to Bakhtin, we must never confuse the real world with the one represented in a work of art, and readers from one epoch with readers from another epoch, but, nevertheless must never forget that the two worlds (the real world and the represented world) are inextricably linked. To use the organic metaphor Bakhtin himself uses, between the two worlds there is a continuous exchange going on, similar to the continuous exchange of matter between the living organism and its environment: while the organism is alive, it does not merge with that environment; but if you separate it from it, the organism will die (Bakhtin, 1996a, 254).

Bakhtin here somewhat exaggerates the continuity and universality of the experience of history that human beings have. Nevertheless, the idea that the context of reading as much as the context of writing influences our view of the literary work is undoubtedly here, providing us with another link with Barthes. In Sur Racine Barthes proposed that literary history should study literature as a social institution, that it should study the history of the literary function, defining it as the production, communication and consumption of literary works. In Critique et vérité he argued that the structure of the literary work allows for the production of secondary meanings, depending on the historical and social circumstances which surround its reading. The idea that a literary work owes its life to its ability to create connotative meanings and to engage readers across time and space is shared by both Barthes and Bakhtin.

So, is Bakhtin a structuralist? Soviet semioticians and other structuralists who actively engaged with his ideas certainly thought so; but their views have in recent times been replaced with a strong anti-structuralist sentiment among many of Bakhtinian scholars. We have seen that the arguments against Bakhtin’s status as a structuralist which rest on his early work (Toward a Philosophy of the Act) are faulty to the extent that they mistake an argument about ethics for an argument about literary theory. We have also seen that those later writings (on the problem of the text, for example) which
have been read as attacks on structuralism and structuralist linguistics, can also be read as productive dialogues with and developments of structuralist ideas. They also contain standard structuralist statements such as ‘behind each text stands a language system’, and maintain a strong distinction between the notions of speech and the language. Whatever Bakhtin says about the unrepeatable nature of the utterance (which has been read as a distinctly anti-structuralist notion) is in perfect agreement with Saussure’s point that a word can be coloured by different meanings depending on the context and intonation (Saussure, 1995, 106-7). Much of Bakhtin’s supposedly anti-structuralist ideas can simply be read as extensions of structuralism, in the manner of Benveniste, for example. 48 As for his other works, one could argue that because he does not use a typically structuralist terminology or a set of ideas (synchrony/diachrony, signifier/signified, etc.), they cannot be regarded as structuralist. However, as Barthes argued, a structuralist is recognised not by his vocabulary (Genette, for example, does not use those terms very often), but by a ‘structuralist imagination’. For Barthes, a structure is a simulacrum of an object (or of a world) which recreates its inner relations and modes of functioning. Bakhtin, in his essays on the chronotope, provides us with just such a notion of the simulacrum of a world through a particular use of language. A chronotope is a blue-print of a world, a set of relations which outline the limits of all possible action within that world. Bakhtin may not have used structuralist terminology often, but his ideas rest on the distinction between speech (as dependent on its context) and the language as a system, and on the idea that each language shapes the world in a particular way (which is, again, a very Saussurean notion). Bakhtin’s insistence on the importance of the context for the understanding of an utterance or of a literary work may not be in agreement with French narratology’s view of the functioning of a literary text, but it is in perfect agreement with Tynianov’s, Mukařovsky’s, Lotman’s and Barthes’s more socially-oriented strands of structuralism.

48 As for the seemingly anti-structuralist sentiments, as opposed to ideas, one would probably find that all great structuralists sometimes raged against the more dogmatic and simple-minded forms of structuralism. See, for example, Lotman (1977, 32), probably attacking both the vulgar Marxist criticism as much as a dogmatic structuralism: ‘Hardly anyone today would dispute the fact that a society’s way of life determines the face of art. But does the repetition of this truism really compensate for our inability to explain how a text by Dostoevskij differs from the one by Tolstoj? And why identical conditions give rise to different works of art? ‘Why, then, from a structuralist point of view, must a work be studied as a synchronically closed structure, and why is an immanent analysis of the text the natural result? Do not structuralists thereby ignore the non-aesthetic meaning in a work?’
What Bakhtin also shares with Barthes is the idea that literature can never fully represent the complexity of the world, and they both studied the ways in which literature nevertheless tries to do it. Bakhtin, however, was more tolerant towards the multitude of attempts that at least shed a light onto a particular aspect of the world (whether through the chronotope of an adventure novel or the much more complex historical chronotope of a novel by Tolstoy), while Barthes focused more on the illusion of the real behind the ‘reality effect’, and on its hidden conventionality. Nevertheless, the idea that a society structures reality through language, and that literature is an important contributor to a society’s view of itself and the world, is, as we shall see in more detail in the next chapter, shared by both.

The structuralisms of Barthes, and especially Bakhtin, are far from being typical examples of the high structuralism of the 1960s France and its scientific dream. They are deeply ethically and socially engaged with the strong sense that things are worth studying only if they can tell us something about the forces that shape our world and our position in it. What I have already said about Barthes’ structuralism also applies to Bakhtin: the main issue for them both is less about finding out what things are, and more about finding what they mean for us, of what importance they are to us as human beings (Barthes, 1964a, 1332). Barthes makes the point that structuralism has a great deal to reveal to us about our humanity, for one of its most important aspects is the manner in which we give meaning to things.

It would seem, however, that Bakhtin’s primary interest in the character’s position within the chronotope is completely different from Barthes’s assertion that a character is just an agent within a ‘sphere of action’. For Bakhtin, the worlds created by novels do not exist for their own sake, or for the sake of plot development; they are clearly there to be populated by literary characters (human beings), because it is only human beings that can ever really interest us (Bakhtin, 1996a, 107). According to Bakhtin, we live in an anthropocentric world, and we always ask that our own picture to be reflected back at us; we demand that the image shown bears some relation to that unfinished, puzzling, real historical world in which we live and to our role in it. And good literature plays the role of the Ocean in Lem’s Solaris: it creates images that recreate our deepest fears, guilt, passions and longings, it confronts us with the world in which we live and which we sometimes refuse to see.

And although Barthes did not believe that literary characters can reveal much about our humanity, he still believed in the need to examine our position in the world
and to approach the historical and social relations in which we find ourselves with a sense of responsibility. To some extent, this was a result of Sartre’s influence on Barthes, but it was also something that Barthes retained as a principle throughout his life. The sense of historical and social responsibility is another concern that Barthes and Bakhtin shared; and the question of what one says and writes formed a large part of it.
Chapter 2: Silencing and Voicing Ideologies

An interest in ideology (broadly defined as a view of the world) and the way in which language expresses the speaker’s ideological position runs like a thread through the works of Barthes and Bakhtin.

They were both deeply concerned with the way mythological and authoritative thought and word stifles the true life and possibilities of a culture and its language, which they both linked with cultural and social diversity, contradiction, and conflict. Barthes wrote extensively about the dominance of the French bourgeois ideology, its grip on everyday life and the use of the French language, and the difficulty of escaping that grip and writing literature which would be free from or subversive towards myth. Both Barthes and Bakhtin placed the creation of the superior or most desirable form of verbal creation (for Bakhtin, the novel, for Barthes, écriture) at the point where a culture loses its mythical sense of unity, with a new voice appearing or simply insisting on being heard. For Bakhtin, the shattering of the mythological thought and word is always the starting point for the birth or the rebirth of the novel as a genre; whereas Barthes saw the revolution of 1848, and the appearance of the new, proletarian voice and consciousness, as the turning point in French culture, after which the (bourgeois) writer could no longer assume that they spoke for, and from the position of, universal humanity.

They both also saw an urgent need to find the appropriate methodology for studying verbal diversity, which would not be purely descriptive in a linguistic sense, but would be linked to the study of the society and culture of which that diversity is a part.

The thought of my two subjects does not always meet or even share a common ground, but even where their ideas seem very different, the differences enable us to see different sides of the same problem: how we see the world and in what terms we express our vision; and also, how literature makes use of different ideologies and their linguistic expression.
Barthes's most popular, accessible and widely read work was originally written as a series of articles for Les Lettres nouvelles between 1954 and 1956, and published by Seuil in 1957 under the title Mythologies. This book is probably one of the main reasons why Scholes speaks of Barthes as ‘certainly the most sociologically oriented of the literary structuralists’ (Scholes, 1974, 149), and why Calvet sees Barthes's work as an exemplary politically oriented version of semiology (Calvet, 1973).

The essays are small analyses of French bourgeois ideology as it manifests itself in newspaper articles, advertising, beliefs and objects in everyday life. The variety of phenomena in which Barthes convincingly illustrated the presence and the mechanism of French bourgeois myth could only lead him to one conclusion: myth is everywhere, there is hardly any element of language and culture which is not influenced, distorted and even created by it. Barthes argues that the French bourgeoisie, as a ruling class and a class that defines French society, has imposed itself and its own values and 'mythology' on every aspect of life, from eating to marriage to travel writing.

However, what is peculiar about this omnipresence of bourgeois ideology is that its bourgeois origins are not felt by those who are consumers of bourgeois myth. Barthes claims that the bourgeoisie can be defined by its tendency to lose its name, to become anonymous on an ideological level: it is clearly present where the economy is concerned (capitalism is openly professed), it starts to disappear where politics are concerned (Barthes claims that the French bourgeoisie politically hides itself behind the idea of 'nation'), and when it comes to ideology bourgeois man likes to see himself as the Universal, Eternal Man, and his own beliefs as eternal and universal values and truths (Barthes, 1957, 703-5).

Barthes stresses several times that bourgeois myths are historical entities, products of historical circumstances, as much as the elements of life and culture around which they are created. But what characterises bourgeois myth is precisely its tendency to strip everything of its historicity, and to see it in those lofty terms of Eternity, Universality and Essence. Through myth, things lose their memory of their own origins and changes that they have undergone. This concept of myth is a clear reflection of Lévi-Strauss’s distinction between a historian’s and a politician's evocation of the French Revolution:
... que fait l'historien quand il évoque la Révolution française? Il se réfère à une suite d'événements passés, dont les conséquences lointaines se font sans doute encore sentir à travers toute une série, non-réversible, d'événements intermédiaires. Mais, pour l'homme politique et pour ceux qui l'écoutent, la Révolution française est une réalité d'un autre ordre; séquence d'événements passés, mais aussi schème doué d'une efficacité permanente, permettant d'interpréter la structure sociale de la France actuelle, les antagonismes qui s'y manifestent et d'entrevoir les linéaments de l'évolution future.
(Lévi-Strauss, 1958, 231)

In Lévi-Strauss’s interpretation, the French Revolution by becoming myth does not stop being a historical event, but it, more significantly, becomes a blueprint of France as such. Its historicity is pushed into background in order to accommodate present political interests which are hidden behind the Revolution as a model of the way things are.

According to Barthes, bourgeois ideology installs itself into every sphere of life, and the essays in *Mythologies* illustrate this persuasively. As Scholes puts it, Barthes ‘finds meanings that are cultural, collective, almost involuntary’ where the subject in the bourgeois society is concerned (Scholes, 1974, 162). Eve Tavor Bannet has noted (1989, 54) that, the way Barthes describes the picture of the black soldier saluting the French flag (immediately recognisable as a symbol of French Imperiality), the flag is not actually in the picture itself; Barthes just assumes that it is there. The alarming aspect of this is that the consumer of the myth (the role Barthes plays in recognising the meaning of the photograph as that of ‘French imperialism’ and how lovely it is we are all in it together) not only immediately recognises the meaning of the photograph, but the assumed meaning projects onto the mythical form that which is not actually there.

Thody has probably given us the most unforgiving (the other word for it would be ‘intolerant’) critique of *Mythologies*. His main argument is that:

... there was an element of fair comment in the frequent remark that Barthes himself was guilty of inventing the greatest myth of the lot. He had, after all, ascribed the most alienating features of modern mass communications to a nefarious but ill-defined conspiracy entitled the bourgeoisie and had never paid his readers the compliment of

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49 See also: Moriarty, 1991, 26.
saying who the bourgeoisie actually were, where they got their money from, and where
the supposed plethora of idées reçues was actually to be found. (Thody, 1977, 50)

The instinctive reaction to this would be to say that to demand the proof for the
existence of the bourgeoisie more than a century after Marx clearly indicates an
elementary political deafness. Leak (1994, 32), however, restrains himself from this
knee-jerk reaction, and notes that although ‘the suggestion that Barthes should have
supplied the names and addresses of the conspirators is irresistibly ludicrous, Thody
nevertheless does have half a point’. This is being truly generous, as Thody throughout
his book refuses to recognise that, if nothing else, it certainly proved the overwhelming
existence of bourgeois values and myths in French society. Leak’s criticism is a lot
more subtle, as it asks what kind of bourgeoisie Barthes had in mind: petty bourgeoisie,
or the ‘grand’ bourgeoisie, or both? For Barthes sometimes presents the ‘grand’
bourgeoisie as the ideological oppressor of everyone else, including the petty
bourgeoisie (who confuse their own interests with the interests of the ‘grand’
bourgeoisie), but sometimes the petty bourgeoisie are presented as a far more politically
dangerous (and almost grotesque) side of the bourgeois class (Leak, 1994, 32-38).

Another criticism which needs to be addressed here comes from Michael
Gardiner, who claims that

Barthes himself makes no apologies about the fact that he is exclusively concerned with
the analysis of the internal organisation of cultural texts. As such, the premise of
semiology is that there is no need to refer to socio-historical context to comprehend
myth, insofar as what is of crucial importance is not so much what texts mean as how
they mean. (Gardiner, 1992, 149)

This could not be less true of Mythologies; one need only cite the essay ‘Saponides et
détergents’, which ends on the note that behind the ‘epic battle’ between Persil and
Omo lie the interests of a single company which produces them both (Barthes, 1957,
586). After all, the whole point of Barthes’s essays in this volume is to unmask the myth
by showing the political and social reality behind it. Leak stresses that ‘Barthes means
something quite specific by ‘le politique’; it refers to the deepest (and most hidden)
level of social reality: the relations of production, and resulting power structures, which
form the base of any given society’ (Leak, 1994, 29).
The Semiology of ‘Le Mythe, aujourd’hui’

‘Le Mythe, aujourd’hui’ is the theoretical postscript added to the essays, and it is generally seen as the first example of Barthes’s use of Saussure’s and Hjelmslev’s ideas, which he is believed to have discovered in 1956 (Dosse, 1998, I, 74-76), the point which Barthes himself made in the famous interview with Jean Thibaudieu (1971b, 1315). And, yet, Calvet in his biography of Barthes quotes Greimas as saying that Barthes discovered Saussure between 1949 and 1950, while he was working on his book on Michelet (Calvet, 1990, 124). This would also mean that Barthes had read Saussure before finishing his book Le Degré zéro de l’écriture (which was published in 1953), and this would imply that the terms ‘langue’ and ‘parole’ together with ‘écriture’ and ‘style’, in Le Degré zéro de l’écriture do not function just as a set of private terms, but as a reworking of Saussure’s terminology. I shall, however, discuss this earlier work later and return for the moment to Mythologies and ‘Le mythe, aujourd’hui’ in particular.

A possible argument for using the year 1956 as the year of the ‘discovery of Saussure’ would be the impression that Barthes’s awareness of Saussurean terminology was very fresh and recent when he wrote ‘Le Mythe, aujourd’hui’. This freshness is reflected in the apparent terminological confusion contained in the titles of the first two paragraphs of the essay: ‘Le mythe est une parole’, says the first; ‘le mythe comme système sémiologique’ is the definition proposed by the second (Barthes, 1957, 683-85). The opening sentences are full of contradictory statements which would make any good Saussurean weep.50 Without any explanation for this terminological capriciousness, Barthes flips between the idea that myth is ‘speech’, ‘message’, and the idea that it is ‘a system of communication’, ‘mode of signification’ and ‘form’. As the difference between message and code is one of the most important and the most clear theoretical distinctions Saussurean linguistics makes, it is difficult to tell why Barthes made such an elementary mistake in merging the two in his definition of myth. This confusion (or apparent confusion) is probably one of the most problematic aspects of Mythologies, as well as the most revealing.

50 As did Georges Mounin, 1970.
And it is not one which has been left without comment. Although Andrew Leak in his 1994 monograph *Mythologies* (which deals exclusively with that text) fails to mention it, Steffen Nordhal Lund and Louis-Jean Calvet do raise the issue. However, they both simply attribute the confusion to the very freshness of Barthes's knowledge and to the bad assimilation of his Saussurean lesson (Lund, 1981, 39; Calvet, 1973, 67), which may also explain why so many other authors ignore the issue: Barthes simply got it wrong at the beginning of his structuralist adventure, so it would be better and more polite not to mention it. Thus, Umberto Eco and Isabella Pezzini (1982) praise Barthes for showing the way for a general semiology which would go beyond linguistics, but fail to mention that he was at that stage so badly acquainted with the basic terminology of the discipline whose boundaries he was expanding. Similarly, on the topic of *Mythologies*, Hawkes claims that Barthes was 'one of Saussure's most powerful interpreters in the matter of semiotics', without any mention of the misunderstanding present in that interpretation (Hawkes, 1977, 130).

Michael Moriarty, on the other hand, suggests that the combination of the terms 'system of communication' and 'message' in the definition of myth is only 'superficially contradictory, but in practice perfectly clear: a myth is not just any message, but a message produced by a certain signifying mechanism' (Moriarty, 1991, 22). He has also suggested to me in a private conversation that the confusion might be due to the function of the French definite article, which could mean either 'a myth' or 'myth in general'. So it would make sense to say that a myth is a message produced by the system of communication which is myth in general. However, I shall opt for the troublesome reading that insists on the presence of the confusion, for I believe that such a *lectio difficilior* could yield some more interesting results.

The third definition Barthes offers brings us a step closer to the solution of the puzzle: here, Barthes defines myth as a 'second[ary] semiological system' (Barthes, 1957, 687); it is a language built upon a natural language, using its signs as its signifiers. According to Barthes, in the words of natural language myth sees nothing but its own primary material; thus once they enter into this second semiological system, the signs of natural language become its *form*. In a manner identical to the structure of the sign of natural language, the *form* is linked to a *concept* (the term Barthes uses for the second system's signified), and together they form myth's *signification* (that is, myth's own sign).
This model, as Leak (1994, 18-19) points out, is an elaboration of Hjelmslev’s distinction between denotation and connotation. At the end of his *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, Hjelmslev envisages a ‘connotative semiotics’, which rests on the observation that certain ‘sign classes are expression for the connotators as content’ (Hjelmslev, 1961, 118); ‘not for nothing’, adds Hjelmslev, ‘does the national language stand as “symbol” for the nation, the local dialect as “symbol” for the region, etc’ (1961, 119).

At the same time, Barthes’s concept of a second semiological system is remarkably similar to Soviet semioticians’ slightly later concept of secondary modelling systems. As we have seen, Lotman in *The Structure of the Artistic Text* defines secondary modelling systems in pretty much the same way that Barthes defines his second semiological system, and explicitly includes myth amongst them. According to Lotman (1977, 9), secondary modelling systems not only use natural language as their primary material (as their signifiers), but are constructed on the model of language. Apart from being an interesting conceptual coincidence in French semiology and Soviet semiotics, Lotman’s use of this concept in relation to literature can help us understand why Barthes used those first two, at a first glance contradictory, definitions of myth.

As we have seen, according to Lotman, every language is not just a sign system used in communication, but also a modelling system: it models reality in a particular way. Thus, the language of chemistry models the world in a different way to the language of physics, and differently again from the language of sociology. In a way, the relationship of these more or less specialised languages (or, to be more precise, of their users) to the reality they model is a pragmatic one: if I want to describe the world in a particular way, I choose the language that is best suited to my purpose. And if my purpose is to describe the way our world is made up of atoms and molecules, there would be little purpose in my choosing the languages of astrophysics or sociology, as the language of chemistry is best suited to the task. The role of natural languages (as opposed to the artificial languages of science) is rather different (as the Soviet semiotician V. V. Ivanov pointed out), in that the natural language possesses a certain

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51 A rather amusing account of how the term ‘secondary modelling systems’ was coined is quoted in Emerson, 1997, 41.

52 For, as far as I am aware, the Soviet group arrived at the concept of secondary modelling systems independently from Barthes. It is also interesting that they made much greater use of that concept than French semioticians did; perhaps this was the result of the Soviets’ greater readiness to work in with each
semantic fluidity and complexity which makes it possible for one and the same word to be used in different contexts, or, as Ivanov puts it, 'in which a sign or word functions as the family name for an entire complex of heterogeneous objects' (Ivanov, 1988, 29). In most languages, words with complex meanings coexist together with the words of more strictly defined meanings in everyday, poetic and scientific languages.

The result of this semantic complexity and fluidity is natural language’s ability to 'describe the entire diversity of human experience'. Capable of dealing with any subject matter, natural language (as Ivanov puts it) 'remains the fundamental interpretation for all the formalised languages constructed upon it' (Ibid.). In other words, formalised languages (such as, for example, scientific languages), constructed upon natural language and deriving their semantics from it, are in no way divorced from natural language, but represent its continuation and, although constantly developing, can ultimately be translated back into natural language.

To go back to Lotman, literature, as well as other secondary modelling systems like religion and myth, uses natural language (and often even artificial languages, like the scientific ones) as its primary material. And just as with natural and artificial languages, in literature it is possible to differentiate between message and code, between literary language and individual utterances in that language (between, for example, the language of European Romanticism and individual Romantic works). However, whereas in relation to natural language and artificial languages the differentiation can be fairly consistently maintained throughout, in literary language this is not quite so. In the conceptual context of Lotman's and most other Soviet semioticians' ideas, the clear separation between langue and parole in relation to natural and artificial languages is easy to understand. As natural language is capable of describing 'the entire diversity of human experience', there is no friction between the world (as experienced by human beings, which is the only world known to us) and that particular modelling system. As for artificial languages, their pragmatic 'take it or leave it' relationship to the world they model again makes that relationship fairly unproblematic. In both cases, language is a transparent modelling system; what is said in that language creates its own meaning. This is not so for secondary modelling systems. As Lotman points out, 'when a writer chooses a certain genre, style or artistic school, he is also choosing the language in

other on joint projects and write joint papers, so that once a useful term would be put into circulation, they would all start using it almost immediately.
which he intends to address his reader' (Lotman, 1977, 18). The choice of a language is at the same time the choice of a particular model of the world, and determines the general categories within which the message (the literary text itself) will be formulated. Thus the choice of the language already carries meaning; as a matter of fact, as Lotman puts it, ‘the most important information is that which arises when a type of artistic language is selected’ (Ibid.). This is a very similar point to the one Barthes made in Le Degré zéro de l'écriture; we shall return to this point later.

Although Lotman here talks about this phenomenon of langue and parole collapsing into one as a distinctive feature of literary texts (verbal works of art), it would probably be true to say that the same applies to all secondary modelling systems. If one takes the example of religion as one of the secondary modelling systems, it is quite obvious that the choice of a particular religious language will to a large extent determine the characteristics of the world described by or referred to by any message created in that particular language.

As the same can be said of myth and ideology, this brings us back to Barthes and his use of the terms ‘speech’ and ‘semiological systems’ in his first two definitions of myth which at first glance seemed to do such great violence to Saussurean distinction between langue and parole. The third definition of myth as a secondary semiological system, if considered through the conceptual framework of Soviet semiotics, puts this apparent terminological confusion into an entirely different light. Where secondary semiological (or secondary modelling) systems are concerned, the choice of the system (language) will determine in its most general outlines the content of the world portrayed in that language and, with it, the content of the message uttered in it. Thus it becomes possible to collapse the notions of semiological system (language) and speech within a single definition of myth: myth as a semiological system not only makes it syntactically possible to create meaning (the way primary, natural language does), but also carries meaning itself. The very choice of a particular language of myth (say, the use of words like ‘bogus asylum-seekers’ for whom ‘Britain is a soft touch’) is already a message in itself (so that, in this case, the words: ‘we want to keep them out, although that goes against the International Declaration Of Human Rights’, need not be said).

If we look at the concept of natural language as understood by Barthes, the distinction between the way natural language (which he simply calls langue as opposed to mythe) and second semiological systems create meaning will become even clearer.
According to Barthes, the arbitrariness of language’s signs means that the signifier on its own is ‘empty’, that is, empty of meaning; the sign, on the other hand, is full, that is, it has a meaning (Barthes, 1957, 686). From this it also follows that there is no friction between the world and the word: since the signifier is unmotivated by any a priori interpretation of the thing it denotes (and thus is, as Saussure said, arbitrary), meaning here is transparent, and allows us to see the thing itself and our relationship with it, and not simply our view of it. As Barthes puts it, it is precisely the arbitrariness of the sign that stands as the basis of natural language’s ‘sanity’ (Barthes, 1957, 695); natural language with its transparency does not project a world-view back onto the world itself.

It is very important to note that the world of which Barthes is talking is historical and political in a very broad sense of those two words: things that constitute it change with time and are more often than not a product of human activity and intentionality. Barthes here adopts Marx’s thesis that every object (even the most natural one) contains in itself a trace of the human activity which produced, influenced, used or rejected it (Barthes, 1957, 708). Natural language reflects this active and changing relationship between man and the world. For this Barthes uses the example of the word ‘tree’ as used by a woodcutter: for a woodcutter the word ‘tree’ is not an image, but the meaning of his action (709). But if I am not a woodcutter, for me a ‘tree’ is nothing but a fixed image, an instrument of my language (709-10); it in no way reflects my active role in the world, but only my view of it, in which ‘trees’ play a certain part (for example, as something that represents pure Nature, or as a symbol of bravery before the elements, or as a symbol of rootedness in one’s environment).

And this is precisely what happens with myth, that secondary semiological system.

In myth, according to Barthes, words are stripped of their historical and political meaning, leaving nothing but a fixed, de-historicised and de-politicised image behind. If in natural language the signifier is empty of meaning, once a sign from a natural language enters myth as its form, it is emptied of its own historical, political meaning in order to ‘serve’ myth’s concept as its signifier. But unlike language’s signifier, which is arbitrary and unmotivated, myth’s form is chosen precisely because its relationship to the concept is to some extent motivated. ‘To some extent’ are operative words here, precisely because myth takes from the sign’s meaning only what suits its concept, and abandons the rest. What is specific about myth as a second semiological system is that it
does not ‘kill off’ the meaning a sign has in natural language, but just puts it at a
distance, making it possible for it to be recalled at any time, except that this never (or
hardly ever) happens. According to Barthes, it is in myth’s interest to keep the sign’s
primary meaning alive, because its own life depends on it; at the same time it is also in
myth’s interest to keep that meaning hidden, out of view, because it is only then that it
can be fully successful (Barthes, 1957, 689-90).

Genette notes how morally engaged Barthes as a semiologist is, how eager he is
to uncover the unalienable meaning of things with which natural language left to itself is
still in touch. But he also notes that material intimacy, access to the ‘essence of things’
is seen as a ‘lost paradise’ (Genette, 1966, 201-4). Genette does not say this, but there is
a good deal of romanticising of natural language at play here. As Leak puts it:

The (semiological) theory of myth is itself balanced precariously atop an unexploded
myth: the myth of object-language, or denotation as a ‘natural state of language’. (Leak,
1994, 70)

In connection with this, and with particular reference to the wood-cutter’s ‘pure’ use of
the word ‘tree’, Leak also suggests that Barthes shares a striking similarity with Sartre,
insofar as ‘the latter also harboured an inferiority complex towards the proletariat: the
worker was felt to enjoy direct access to the stuff of reality, and this lent him a solidity,
a real-ness to which the intellectual, who was always working at one remove from
reality, could not hope to accede’ (Leak, 1994, 69).

There are a few additional points that need to be made here.

Firstly, there is the notion, inherited from Saussure, that, in natural language, the
relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary (Saussure, 1995, 67-8).
But is it? Although Saussure says that there is no internal connection between the idea
‘sister’ and the French or English sequence of sounds which acts as its signal (67), he
also says that the ‘two elements are intimately linked and each triggers the other’ (66).
Benveniste took issue with this obvious contradiction by saying that ‘the argument is
falsified by an unconscious and surreptitious recourse to a third term which was not
included in the initial definition. This third term is the thing itself, the reality’
(Benveniste, 1971, 44). According to Benveniste, the arbitrariness of the sign exists
‘only under the impasive regard of Sirius or for the person who limits himself to
observing from the outside the bond established between an objective reality and human behaviour and condemns himself thus to seeing nothing in it but contingency’ (Ibid.). Benveniste stresses that the link between the signifier and the signified is far from being arbitrary; on the contrary, it is necessary (45). As he puts it ‘the mind does not contain empty forms, concepts without names’; the two are, as Saussure himself said, intimately connected (Ibid.). According to Benveniste, the only arbitrary relationship we can talk about where the linguistic sign is concerned is that between the sign and, as he puts it, the element of reality to which it is applied; but even then, we would only be pointing out the real problem and leaving it aside for the time being, because this is ‘indeed the metaphysical problem of the agreement between the mind and the world transposed into linguistic terms’, as yet unsolvable by linguistics itself (46).

Barthes, who in later years wrote with great respect about Benveniste (see Barthes, 1974b and 1976), may not have read him when he was writing Mythologies. It was only from 1964 that he started referring to him (1964b); he praised him (1974b, 30) for showing us that ‘le language ne se distingue jamais d’une socialité’, which is similar to the kind of praise that has been given to Barthes himself, even by such reluctant ‘admirers’ as Michael Gardiner, who says that ‘Barthes’s recognition of the specifically political implications of the ‘power to signify’ is probably the crucial insight that structuralism has brought to a critical theory of ideology’ (Gardiner, 1992, 148). But even if Barthes had not noted Benveniste’s critique of the notion of the sign’s arbitrariness, his wholesale acceptance of Saussure still remains somewhat problematic. Besides, it seems to me that even after reading Benveniste Barthes remained convinced of the validity of the notion of arbitrariness, although Barthes (1966c, 63-64) notes the importance of Benveniste’s article on the arbitrariness of signs. In Critique et vérité, while arguing that it is not the frequency with which an element of a literary work appears, but its position in the overall structure which makes it significant, Barthes repeats the argument which is linked to the notion of arbitrariness, namely that a word signifies through its difference with other words. Although the opposing term to ‘difference’ here is not ‘referentiality’ but ‘repetition’, Barthes illustrates the claim with the statement that in French the word ‘baobab’ has neither more nor less meaning than the word ‘ami’ (1966a, 45).53 This, however, is so obviously wrong (and wrong it would be, I imagine, for most languages) that I find it difficult to believe that Barthes really

53 I do wonder whether he was thinking of Le petit prince when he chose those two words as his example.
meant it. The word ‘friend’ certainly possesses more cultural, social and emotional meaning than the word ‘baobab’, and they cannot be all put aside under the heading ‘connotation’, much less could it be said that a native speaker would feel that the link between the sound pattern and the meaning was arbitrary and based on pure difference.

Ivanov’s idea that natural language can be applied to the full diversity of human experience not by the arbitrariness of its sign but by the dynamism and fluidity of its semantics provides us with an important modification of Barthes’s theory as laid out in ‘Le mythe, aujourd’hui’, so that we can say that, in natural language, the living context of the speech act modifies the meaning of the words used to suit the context and the speaker’s intention, but the underlying potential for meaning still remains flexible enough to be used to a different effect in another context and with different intentions. This, as we have seen, is also the view of the ‘practical’ use of language that Barthes puts forward in Critique et vérité. Myth, on the other hand, locks the meaning of a word or a phrase into an ideological position from which the semantic complexity cannot be recalled. In other words, myth petrifies language.

Bakhtin, Myth, the Epic and the Authoritative Word

In ‘Discourse in the Novel’ Bakhtin defines mythological thought and belief in magic as characterised by the ‘absolute fusion of word with concrete ideological meaning’ (Bakhtin, 1996a, 369). Whereas Barthes observed the phenomenon of mythological thinking in the contemporary French society, Bakhtin claimed that the ‘absolute hegemony of myth over language as well as the hegemony of language over perception and conceptualisation of reality are of course located in the prehistorical (and therefore necessarily hypothetical) past of language consciousness’ (Ibid.). Although it is clear that Bakhtin uses the term ‘mythology’ in its classical sense, to refer to tales about gods, the creation of the world and man, and so on (i.e., the mythology of, say, ancient Greece), he still stresses that, in principle, as long as the word and its ideological sense are inseparably ‘grown into’ each other, we are still dealing with mythological thought. And from there it is not difficult to see the similarity of Bakhtin’s definition of mythological thought with Barthes’s use of the term in relation to the way in which French bourgeois ideology seeps into all aspects of language and everyday life. And
although Bakhtin claims that the ‘absolute hegemony of myth over language’ died with the beginning of the historical era, he still points out that the mythological aspects of language are maintained (in the high poetic genres, for example) through their connection with a unified, canonical national language and national myth, which is precisely what Barthes studied. The remnants of mythological thought can remain present in a culture long after the absolute power of myth over language has disappeared.

The epic, for example, takes as its subject the ‘absolute past’ of the national myth; its purpose is to talk of the nation’s defining moments, its origin and glory. According to Bakhtin, there is an absolute, ‘epic’, distance between the ‘absolute past’ of the nation and the contemporary world of the epic’s singer and his listeners. Thus, the world represented by the epic is closed, complete and almost static, and any of its segments can represent the whole. The epic world is in no way linked to the complexity, conflict and sheer historical and social messiness that the listeners of the epic inevitably find themselves in. It is perfectly possible for The Iliad to take up just a short episode of the Trojan war (Achilles’ rage and its consequences) and use it to represent the whole of the war and the whole of the world in which that war was fought. And although the plot of The Iliad is likely to strike one as being somewhat randomly chosen out of the whole of the story of the Trojan war (its in medias res approach can be seen as somewhat abrupt, and its ending as rather open as far as plot is concerned), the world in which it is situated is complete and closed. Things happen in that world, but they do not alter its essence; events do not bring about change, but represent the perfection and completeness of the world in which they happen. And this world is the world of heroes, gods and demigods, the world of the past national glory. The epic world is always presented as immeasurably better than the present, contemporary world; at the same time it is absolutely removed from it, and whereas the contemporary world is open to change and exists through ideological and social dissonance and diversity, the epic world is ideologically unified, complete and static. The man in that world is, as Bakhtin puts it, deprived of any ideological initiative (1996a, 35). The epic knows just one, unified, complete, unchallenged and unchangeable view of the world, which is shared by both the author and all the heroes. Thus, when an epic man acts, he does it not out of conviction and individual ideological and psychological motivation, but because his actions are fully determined by the role he plays in the world he inhabits. Thus, a hero fights and kills and loves because that is what a hero does, and a slave slavishly serves,
because that is what a slave does, and a faithful wife is fully and absolutely faithful and there is no doubt that that is what she is. Epic man is fully transparent to himself and others, and there can be no split between his private and public person. A hero in the battlefield can never be a coward at heart, a faithful wife who patiently waits for her husband for twenty years could never secretly doubt that she could be better off marrying someone else. All of them live in the same ideological universe, and none of them have any individual ideological motivation for any of the things they do. They act in a certain way because the way they act is an expression of what they are, and not a manifestation of their personal ideological beliefs and intentions.

According to Bakhtin, all the high genres, and not just the epic, suffer from a certain blindness where ideological and verbal diversity is concerned. Tragedy, for example, does not differ much from the epic in this regard, and poetry, according to Bakhtin, can be defined through its treatment of language as a transparent medium through which can be seen the true nature of the things themselves. According to Bakhtin, in poetry words 'dive into the limitless richness and contradiction and diversity of the thing itself, into its 'virginal' and still 'unuttered' nature' (Bakhtin, 1996a, 278). This definition could not fail to remind us of the one offered by Barthes, but there is a clear difference in the role poetry plays in the theoretical systems of the two men. For Barthes, poetry's search for the inalienable meaning of things is a noble and necessary task. The fact that its blindness to ideological meanings and interpretations of things makes it an easy prey for the French bourgeois ideology which turns it into yet another bourgeois myth is only to be lamented, but it is not a basis for a criticism of poetry. Bakhtin, on the other hand, although he loved and studied poetry all his life, believed that by concentrating purely on the search for the 'virginal' and 'unuttered' nature of things, poetry necessarily does violence to the human language and its inner dialogism.

The term 'dialogism' is, of course, one of the key terms in Bakhtin's writing, and the notion of dialogue probably the key notion of his thought. As he says at the beginning of 'Discourse in Poetry and Discourse in the Novel', traditional stylistics recognises only the obstacles which things themselves put before the words which denote them, that is, the word's inability to reduce the meaning of the thing to its own meaning. There will always be aspects of the thing which are not covered by the meaning of the word which denotes it, and this signifying gap is an aspect of

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54 See also Man, 1989.
signification which Barthes recognised as one of the reasons for the creation of myth. What Bakhtin says about it, though, is that there are aspects of signification traditional stylistics failed to look at, and which are far more important: these are the obstacles which words put before each other. Between the word and the thing (the referent), according to Bakhtin, there is an ‘environment of other, alien words about the same subject’ which others have uttered about the subject, which is sometimes difficult to penetrate (1996a, 276). A living word (utterance) has to find its own way through the veritable forest of previous utterances, evaluations, interpretations; it has to take them into account, respond to them and predict possible responses to itself. Any living utterance, which comes from and addresses a particular social and historical environment, cannot fail to take part in the dialogical relations existing in that environment; all is needed is an awareness of the diversity which inevitably exists in any society, and an awareness of its contemporaneity, that is, of its changing, unstable, historical nature. It is extremely important to note Bakhtin’s use of the word ‘living’ in this context; according to him, an utterance which fails to take its own historicity (and with it, the dialogic nature of its environment) into account will always sound its own death knell.

However, although pure myth died with the prehistorical era, the epic outlived it for a great many centuries, keeping some of its tendencies alive. The same is true of any authoritative utterance which finds its sole legitimacy in the past, and in the present exists only as ‘remote’ and ‘inert’, demanding blind acceptance rather than persuading us of its validity and inner coherence (Bakhtin, 1996a, 342-3). An authoritative utterance ‘enters the artistic context as an alien body, there is no space around it to play in, contradictory emotions - it is not surrounded by an agitated and cacophonous dialogic life, and the context around it dies, words dry up’ (344). The authoritative word kills the inner dialogism of language, and we can sense that for Bakhtin this is the same as killing the diversity and the richness of life itself.

According to Bakhtin, mythological thought and the authoritative word are anachronistic and ahistorical; they deny the social and verbal diversity which unavoidably exist in any historical human society. They are embodied in dead literary genres (like the epic), they stifle the true life of a culture and avoid the questions of

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55 ‘Signification’ is used here in the sense of the ‘signifying process’, and not in the special sense of ‘the myth’s sign’ that Barthes gave it.
social contradiction, conflict and change. Bakhtin had not that much to say about myth beyond this, yet the similarity between his general observations about it, and Barthes’s much more detailed study of it, is quite striking. One reason why Bakhtin did not say more about authoritative utterances (which he illustrated with the examples of biblical language in the novel) and mythological thought may lie in the nature of his environment; the Soviet Union, especially during Stalin’s era, was not really the place to expand on this too much. And, yet, Barthes’s comments about the political myths of the Left may shed an interesting light on an additional meaning of Bakhtin’s comments about the authoritative utterance. Barthes felt that only the political Right has the ability to create the living, all-encompassing and all-penetrating myths, whereas the myths of the Left are always limited to a few political notions and figures, which are then deprived of their historical life by the use of dogmatic phrases and formulaic epithets. These myths are, as Barthes puts it, ‘poor’ and ‘dry’; they are unable to develop and breed other myths and they always remain too literal and static; they always turn into a ‘litany’ (Barthes, 1957, 709-11). Or, as Bakhtin put it, ‘the context around it dies, words dry up’. For Barthes, the myths of the Right are able to become a part of life, distorting it and falsifying many of its aspects, but still a part of it; the myths of the Left exist outside of everyday life, they are limited and barren. If Bakhtin had some of the Soviet myths in mind as well when writing about the effect of the authoritative utterance on the artistic discourse, it seems that he would have agreed with Barthes on the essential poverty of, say, the Stalin myth. At any rate, Barthes’s comments on the Leftist myth and Bakhtin’s on the authoritative discourse are quite similar.

Where there is social diversity and conflict, the myth deals with the issues of universal human origins and destiny; where concrete historical problems should be pointed out, the myth can only contemplate the question of man’s relation to god(s) and the universe. In the essay ‘La grande famille des hommes’, Barthes wrote how the exhibition of photographs of the same title aimed to give human actions and events (such as birth, death, food preparation, work and so on) a universal, ahistorical nature, trying to convince the spectator of the world’s immobile and unchangeable nature; poverty, war and injustice are just the way things are; any desire for change would be futile (Barthes, 1957, 669-71). Both Barthes and Bakhtin saw a clear danger in this avoidance of the concrete and the historical, this turning of history into nature; both felt that our vision of the world is substantially impoverished and even falsified whenever
we gave in to the mythical thought and its denial of the particular, the social and the historical.

Barthes: Myth and How to Subvert It

As we have seen, myth, according to Barthes and to a great extent by Bakhtin, can be defined through its insistence on keeping the (historical and political) complexity of meaning at a distance, and its tendency to submit the words of natural language to the rule of its own concept. Barthes also notes that every mythical concept can take on different forms without changing its own essence: thus, the myth ‘French imperialism’ can be presented by a photograph of a black soldier in a French uniform, or by one of a white teacher standing in front of a classroom of attentive black children, or by one of a French general presenting a Senegalese cripple with a medal (Barthes, 1957, 696).

However, what interests me here is not so much the variety of guises under which bourgeois myth appears, but the possibility for revolt against them as envisaged by Barthes.

Firstly, Barthes claims that language itself does not offer much resistance to the creation of myth. In most cases language’s signs do not possess a meaning which is present in its fullness, but rather as an abstraction. A concept like that of a ‘tree’ is vague enough to allow for room for varying interpretations of it and thus even for a possible mythological one (696-700). If we recall Ivanov’s notion of natural language’s signifying complexity and fluidity which allowed for a same word to be used in different contexts, we shall also recall that Ivanov considered this to be language’s strength, rather than its weakness. A natural language which consisted of signs which carried a ‘full’ denotative meaning with them would seem not only impossible to Ivanov (since then there would have to be a word for every conceivable concept in every conceivable context, rather than a relatively limited number of ‘vague’ words which could be used in various contexts), but also undesirable. The signifying fluidity of natural language’s signs is precisely what makes it possible for natural language to describe that entire diversity of human experience, even when it comes to previously unknown situations and concepts. If those signs possessed a denotative fullness of
meaning which did not allow for any connotative meanings, then language would become a very rigid structure, possibly highly unsuited for the human brain. Obviously, the bad news in all this for Barthes is that language’s vulnerability in relation to myth seems to belong to language’s very structure and way of functioning. Since all signs in natural language are ‘vague’ (according to Barthes) or ‘fluid and complex’ (according to Ivanov), the possibility of a mythological interpretation will always be there.

But is this such a bad thing? Are all myths really so constricting and oppressive as Barthes claims? Paul Ricoeur, according to Gardiner, ‘strongly censures Marxism for assuming that ideology is a purely negative phenomenon – that it is defined solely in terms of the legitimating or obfuscating function it performs for the ruling class’ (Gardiner, 1992, 124). He quotes Ricoeur saying that ideology is linked to ‘the necessity for a social group to give itself an image of itself, to represent and to realise itself, in the theatrical sense of the word’. Thus, Gardiner concludes, ‘ideology is a form of “social memory”’ (Ibid.). However, Gardiner also notes that the way ideology functions can bring about negative results:

Ricoeur suggests that ideology functions as a simplifying and schematic code or grid which provides an explanatory framework for understanding social existence and human history, and which sacrifices intellectual rigour and coherence in the interests of social efficacy. This schematisation – which Ricoeur refers to as the doxic character of ideology – facilitates its legitimising function, and it allows a group’s self-image to be idealised and manipulated in the service of political domination. (Gardiner, 1992, 125)

We can see that this is very similar to Barthes’s idea of ‘myth’ (and the term doxa comes from his later work to denote a system of commonly held opinions; or, as Coste defines it (1998, 82), ‘money, morality based on Christianity, the Right – general opinion whose values permeate everyday life’). Andy Stafford suggests that Barthes himself was aware of this, when he says that ‘the nature of human alienation and social mythology was such that he must have a dialectical love/hate relationship with these myths, what he called “dialectique d’amour”’ (Stafford, 1998, 42).

But how can myth be silenced; or at least, how could one counteract its tendency to silence social and historical meanings of words?
If we take our cue from Lotman, one possibility of doing this would be through literature, that secondary modelling system which, like Barthes's myth, takes natural language as its primary material.

As we have seen, Lotman defines a literary text as a complex hierarchical structure which operates on many levels: from the level of phonology, meter, rhythm, syntax and small textual units (like line in verse) to the levels of plot, character, organisation of time and space, and of ideas. What is specific to literature as a secondary modelling system is that 'a complex interweaving takes place' (Lotman, 1977, 21) where different elements take on different functions (say, semantic or syntagmatic) as they move through (or are observed from) different textual levels. Furthermore, Lotman (much like Tynianov or Bakhtin) does not see a literary text as existing as an isolated entity. On the contrary, a literary text, which is 'a message in the language of art, simply cannot exist apart from that language, just as it cannot exist apart from all other languages of social communication' (Lotman, 1977, 50). As Lotman says unreservedly:

[Literary text's] meaning is extremely distorted for the reader who is trying to decipher the work with the help of arbitrary, subjectively chosen codes; but it has no meaning whatsoever for the man who would like to deal with the text totally apart from all its extra-textual relations. (Ibid.)

In contrast to myth, in literature, where, as Lotman puts it, 'a sign models its content' (1977, 21), the change of every element of the literary structure would change, however slightly, the relations within that structure, and thus the meanings that form a part of it. And so, if myth has the tendency to keep the political and historical meaning of words at a distance, literature should be able to recall all those meanings and draw them back into view.

But things are not so simple, according to Barthes. Poetry in particular has a rather peculiar status in relation to myth. He defines poetry as a 'search for the unalienable meaning of things' (Barthes, 1957, 719), and sees modern poetry as trying to go beyond words in order to discover the meaning of things themselves. In its search for natural and not human meaning, poetry should be immune to the appropriating and distorting tendencies of myth, but it suffers the same fate as Barthes claims scientific languages do: its very search for the purity of meaning is turned into a myth of pure
poetry. Instead of transcending the meaning of words and approaching the meaning of things themselves, poetry, taken over by myth, simply becomes a form which signifies nothing but poetry itself (Barthes, 1957, 700-1).

At the end of 'Le mythe, aujourd'hui', Barthes said that the mythologist, through his critical relationship to myth, puts himself in the position of exclusion in relation to the society (1957, 717-19). His cynical attitude to the mythologies of the society to which he belongs detaches him from it and its everyday workings, and he finds himself condemned to a 'theoretical society' which alone is able to share in his counter-mythological project. In the bare (and barren) universe in which he finds himself, the mythologist does not even have a revolution to hope for, and any attempts to overthrow the present state of things would only arouse his suspicion that 'the truths of tomorrow would only be the lies of today in reverse' (Barthes, 1957, 718). Excluded from society by his refusal to participate in the mythological game, the mythologist cannot even claim that he belongs to the pre-ideological reality which he professes to defend, as his theoretical project is dedicated to language alone, and not to the things themselves. Barthes draws a conclusion that, faced with the overwhelming mythological interpretation of the world, one is faced with two alternatives. One can either choose to regard the world as unavoidably shaped by historical circumstances and seen through a historical interpretation, or one can choose to see it as impenetrable by and irreducible to history, and try to reach its unalienable meaning through poetry. Barthes notes that both these approaches are excessive; one is about voicing and the other is about silencing ideology; and he concludes that, as yet, he does not see a possibility of the synthesis between the two (1957, 719).

Combating Myth and *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*

It was in *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (1953) that Barthes already described the way in which traditional French literature (especially realist prose) created its own mythology. Certain conventions of writing (like the simple past tense and the third person singular, or a particular style of writing) established a text as literary; thus, writing became a myth's signifier and Literature its signification. Barthes argues that these literary conventions of Belles-Lettres offer to its (bourgeois) consumers the security of a credible fiction which is nevertheless continuously presented as false (Barthes, 1953,
At the same time, these conventions (the *passé simple* in particular) give a sense of an ordered, clear, closed world, whose events are neatly chronologically arranged: a pure bourgeois dream of world, comforting and reassuring.

Barthes's thesis is that since the revolution of 1848, in which the proletariat appeared as a class (and a voice) separate from and in conflict with the bourgeoisie, French literature found itself disjointed from the society which consumed it. Plagued by bad conscience, French writers realised that bourgeois ideology had lost its status as the ideology that expressed universal human values, and that French society had become ideologically divided. As the Novel had been the incarnation of that bourgeois ideology of universal values and Eternal Man, its myth and mythology needed to be subverted. One could no longer simply write, and expect to be perceived by all as a voice of universal humanity; writers could not believe in the transparency and innocence of their writing and choice of words any more. To write suddenly meant having to choose between different types of writing, each representing a particular morality; words could no longer be used innocently, and writers became aware that their literary choices were, as Lotman put it, a message in themselves (Barthes, 1953, 139). And so, since Flaubert French writers have been trying to destroy that myth of Literature with a capital 'L'. Modernity started when writers began consciously subverting literary conventions and, with them, the bourgeois ideology of order and universality.

For Barthes, one of the ways of dealing with one's own feeling of distrust and loathing for bourgeois myth was to create myths of a second order, as Flaubert did in his *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (Barthes, 1957, 702). In this novel, the two main characters embark upon a series of attempts to acquire knowledge of various subjects (agriculture, arboriculture, garden architecture, chemistry, anatomy, etc.); their attempts to master any of these disciplines are constantly frustrated, as their knowledge remains bookish and completely divorced from the reality which those disciplines are meant to study. As Barthes points out, the discourse of Bouvard and Pécuchet is already a myth in itself; it certainly has a meaning, but this meaning is just a form for the myth's concept, which he defines as technological insatiability, and we could call the hunger for encyclopaedic knowledge. Flaubert then used this myth as a form for the myth of his own creation, and that is the myth of Bouvard-and-Pécuchet-ism. Barthes pointed out that the strength of the myths of the second order lies in their ability to turn the myths of the first order into an observed naivety; the myth of the second order is in fact a counter-myth.
The other way of subverting myth is to create a literary language which renounces literary traditions and approaches journalistic language in its insistence on the indicative mode of writing. Barthes called this type of writing 'le degré zéro de l'écriture', and defined its effect as being one of neutralising, silencing ideology, as that kind of writing rejects all pathetic forms. It is a writing without style; it places itself 'in between cries and judgements' (Barthes, 1953, 179), while renouncing both. In essence, it is a writing which approaches silence, and as such, as Barthes claims, preserves its own innocence. Nevertheless, Barthes also warns that that type of writing can very easily become automated, imitated, created into a recognisable style of writing, and thus be turned into yet another myth (1953, 179-80). In Barthes's own words, nothing is more unfaithful than this kind of 'white writing'; we could even say that after Camus's *L'Etranger* (which inaugurated that kind of 'transparent speech'), every subsequent work written in that manner can be accused of mannerism. With this in mind, it is difficult to say why Barthes chose to name the whole book after that precarious type of counter-mythical writing, if not to underline the difficulty, the near impossibility of the anti-ideological literary project. For Barthes is fully aware that mythology (ideology) is one of the main tissues of which our world is made.

However, in the penultimate chapter of *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture*, entitled 'L'écriture et la parole', Barthes proposed another way of approaching ideology in writing. Whereas writing degree zero establishes its innocence and its responsibility of thought by renouncing every utterance of passion or judgement and remaining purely indicative, and thus stays away from both literary and spoken language, this other kind of writing bases itself on the spoken, everyday language (Barthes, 1953, 181-83). According to Barthes, French writers have mostly ignored the fact that there is more than one way of speaking French. Even at times when they included dialects, *argot* or *jargon* into their writing, these variants of the French language served merely as picturesque linguistic quotations, rather than as languages whose purpose is the expression of emotion or thought. Proust was probably the first French writer who used these different ways of speaking French not just as an amusing seasoning to his writing, but as a way of structuring his characters. Almost everything about a character can be expressed through the language he or she uses: their profession, class, fortune, even their biology. Barthes notes that by reproducing faithfully the languages spoken in a certain society, a writer also reproduces the social relations which exist in that society. Moreover, as a way of literary description, the faithful reproduction of a language
spoken in reality is for a writer ‘l'acte littéraire le plus humain’ (Barthes, 1953, 182). However, Barthes does not elaborate on this note, and the reason why this may be so should perhaps be looked for elsewhere, namely in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin.

Mikhail Bakhtin, Myth and the Novel

At the beginning of his essay ‘The Two Stylistic Lines of Development in the European Novel’, Mikhail Bakhtin claimed that the novel as a genre is the expression of ‘the Galilean perception of language [verbal consciousness], one that denies the absolutism of a single and unitary language’; it represents ‘a verbal and semantic decentering of the ideological world’ (Bakhtin, 1996a, 366-67). This is obviously immediately recognisable as one of Bakhtin’s main ideas, and he repeated it many times throughout his work, always giving it new nuances and new implications. In this essay, Bakhtin looked at the development of the European novel through the opposition of its two types, dialogic and monologic. In the introductory passages to the essay, he looked at the relationship between myth and the novel, and we have already seen what he had to say about myth. Let us now see what he said about the novel.

According to Bakhtin, the novel as a genre starts at the point when a culture loses its one and unified language, when it becomes aware of other languages and other cultures. A closed social class, aware only of its own world and of its own language, could never produce a novel; a possibility for an appearance of the novel as a genre arises when classes in a society become actively aware of each other, when the social system loses its fixed, centralised hierarchy. A nation closed upon itself, according to Bakhtin, could not write a novel either; it would need first to become aware of other nations, languages and cultures. Furthermore, in order for the novel to come into being, a culture must not just become aware that a variety of languages exists both inside and outside of its national language, but it must also become aware of the importance of this fact, it must accept that all those other languages are also vehicles for the expression of thought and feeling, that they are also bearers of another, different, view of the world. In short, the novel appears at the moment when culture loses its sense of its own language as of an absolute form of thinking, that is, when mythological consciousness loses its grip on the verbal consciousness (Bakhtin, 1996a, 367-8).
In defining the bourgeois as the man who is unable to imagine the Other, Barthes (1957, 714) attributed to him the monological consciousness that sees the whole world as one and unified, and that can hear no other voice but his own. We can see the similarity of Bakhtin’s model for the birth of the novel with Barthes’s claim that the modern novel starts at the point when the bourgeois writer, going against the consciousness of his own class, loses the faith that his voice is the voice of universal humanity, and that there is a social class within France whose interests are opposed to those of his own class.

According to Bakhtin, however, the change started to happen much sooner; together with the start of the historical era, and thus with the beginning of writing and of the possibility of preserving individual voices from a culture’s past, the grip of mythological language and system of thought over collective consciousness is considerably loosened. Until this happens, the novel cannot be written, although certain elements of the novelistic genre will exist in (from the point of view of high culture marginal) popular dialogic genres.

All in all, for Bakhtin, the novel is always the child of the ‘disintegration of stable verbal-ideological systems’ and of the strengthening of verbal and ideological plurality and diversity (1996a, 371). It is important to note that words ‘intention’ and ‘intentionality’ are present throughout Bakhtin’s writing about the language of the novelistic genres, ‘The Two Stylistic Lines of Development in the European Novel’ is no exception. We have already said that, for Bakhtin, an active and full grasp of the plurality and diversity of languages will always be more than a mere realisation that ‘other people speak differently from me/us’. If language’s polyphony is to be fully comprehended and faithfully represented, this awareness of the linguistic difference must also be an awareness of an intentional difference. The word ‘intention’ in Bakhtin’s writing tends to refer to more than just an immediate intention of the speaker of an utterance (‘why did he/she say that at that particular moment?’), but it also includes the notions of the presence of a value-system and of ideological understanding of the world that shapes that utterance. The novel is born at the moment when literature stops believing that its role is to represent things themselves, but chooses instead as its subject the play of light and shade that surrounds things, that is, the different voices with their different intentions (evaluations, interpretations, intentions in the narrower sense of the word) that shed different light on the world.
If Bakhtin’s definition of the novel is that it is ‘a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and diversity of individual voices, artistically organised’ (1996a, 262), and if it can only come into existence at times when there is a clear awareness of the inner diversity of both the social and verbal universe, then one of the high genres that is most clearly opposed to it is the epic.

The man who inhabits the novelistic universe is, according to Bakhtin, of an entirely different kind to the epic man, and the novelistic universe is completely different to the epic one. The epic world is, as we have seen, the world of the absolute past, static, complete, heroic and remote from the contemporary world of change and uncertainty. The novelistic world is precisely that contemporary world of change and uncertainty, of diversity and conflict. In the novel, time is open, relations change, characters are never static and transparent, there is a split between the public and the private sphere of life. And, what is more, there are splits in the ideological understanding of the universe portrayed, and the author and the characters often belong to entirely different ideological worlds.

Apart from being an ‘artistically organised social and verbal diversity’, the novel according to Bakhtin (1996a, 332) has as its main subject ‘the speaking person and his discourse’. Furthermore, this man is a truly social man, historically concrete and defined, and his utterance is social speech and not an ‘individual dialect’ (Ibid.). The man in the novel is always to some degree an ideologue (1996a, 333), and his words always carry with them a certain ideological understanding of the world and of his own role in it. When a novelistic man acts, he does so for some ideological reason, his action is always connected with his speech, it is an embodiment of a certain ideological position. Here we have a very persuasive alternative to narratology's main thesis that the main aspect of the narrative is the story; Bakhtin sees the function of the hero as decisive in determining what type of narrative we have in front of us. If Achilles kills Hector, he does it because he is a Greek hero, and as such he is meant to kill as many Trojan heroes as possible — this is an epic. But if Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov kills an old woman, he does so because he believes in a particular brand of Nietzschean philosophy which provides him with an ideological motivation and justification for his action — this is a novel.

The novel, according to Bakhtin, is the only literary genre which allows us to look at the ideological and verbal diversity of the language(s) we speak, and, through it,
at the social diversity which makes up the changing, uncertain, historical world in which we live. Talking about the presence of the authoritative word in the novel, Bakhtin claimed that it can never exist as an organic part of the novelistic discourse. All the attempts at painting an official and authoritative picture of virtue and justice in a novel will always fail (without citing concrete texts, Bakhtin offered Gogol’s and Dostoevsky’s texts as an example of this); any inclusion of an authoritative utterance in a novel will only show up that utterance as remote, static and inert, nothing but a dead quotation (for example, the quotations from the Gospels in Tolstoy’s ‘Resurrection’) (Bakhtin, 1996a, 344).

And thus, far from wishing to prevent language from superimposing ideological interpretations onto the world (as Barthes often did), Bakhtin believed that the only way to represent a living language and to do justice to its historical nature in a literary work of art is to represent its inner polyphony and dialogism, and the many ways in which language allows us to understand and interpret the world around us. After all, according to Bakhtin, it is only through dialogue that we can ever approach anything resembling the truth; only by taking another’s point of view into account can we act as ethical beings. One can even say that, since social and ideological diversity, whether perceived or not, is an ever-present part of human society, dialogue and polyphony always exist as an integral part of human language and culture, even when they are not taken into account. When talking about the conditions in which the novel as a genre can appear (and which resemble Barthes’ account of post-1848 French writing), Bakhtin talked not so much of a material social change, but of the change in the way a society or its individual members see themselves. After all, since the historical epoch began, and with it the possibility of recording individual utterances, we know that there is more than one way of interpreting the past and the present; very few societies or cultures or social classes ever existed in an absolute isolation from others, but they often chose to ignore the fact that others existed alongside them – as Barthes persuasively argued the French bourgeoisie in 1950s France did. As soon as diversity is recognised, and with it the importance of its discovery (there is more than one way of interpreting the world, there is more than one way of talking and living), language’s inner dialogism comes to the fore; and the novel can be born.

We could argue that Barthes himself denied the plurality of French culture and society when he denied that everybody in France is under the influence of bourgeois myth, but we have seen in Leak’s critique that Barthes in fact proposed that the
bourgeoisie itself is split between the 'grand' and the petty bourgeoisie. Rylance (1994, 60-65) also puts forward a very reasonable additional criticism of Barthes's denial of a separate existence of the working class culture, and contrasts Mythologies with Richard Hoggart's The Uses of Literacy, which came out the same year. Linked to this is Andy Stafford's comment that:

There was an irony here: Mythologies is famous for its unrelenting critique of bourgeois ideology's static, tautological and essentialist view of the world. There is nothing more 'immobile', anti-historical or essentialist than to believe that the masses have actually swallowed all the myths of bourgeois society. (Stafford, 1998, 82)

At the same time, we have seen that in 'L'écriture et la parole' Barthes did at least acknowledge an existence of different types of speech in France, as well as the fact that they reflect social division in the French society. He devoted an essay to a further exploration of this idea, in an instance of almost absolute agreement with Bakhtin's later work.

'The Problem of Speech Genres' and 'La linguistique du discours'

Bakhtin's essay 'The Problem of Speech Genres' (1999a) is probably the most coherent of the essays published in Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, as the others retain more of their nature of 'private jottings', often consisting more of what seem like intimate reminders to think thoughts through than of actual ideas that have been worked out.56

In 'The Problem of Speech Genres' Bakhtin proposes the foundation of a new discipline, which would cover the ground that Saussure abandoned: namely, speech and its genres. Somewhat ironically for those who cite Bakhtin as a critic of Saussure, the essay bases its argument on Saussure's distinction between language and speech, and even reinforces that distinction with considerable militancy. Admittedly, it is also partly based on a critique of some of Saussure's ideas, namely, his notion of speech communication.

56 A good example of this can be found in Bakhtin, 1999a, 148.
As Bakhtin points out, in Saussure's 'frequently present graphic-schematic depictions of two partners in speech communication', the speaker is perceived as the active party, while the listener is merely passively replicating in his brain the thoughts of the speaker. But, Bakhtin says, although this does reflect 'certain aspects of reality', we must not take it to be the truth of speech communication, as the listener not just passively perceives and understands the speaker's words, but also actively responds to them, agreeing or disagreeing, continuing the speakers' argumentation, applying it to other material, and so on (Bakhtin, 1999a, 68). Furthermore, 'sooner or later, what is heard and actively understood will find its response in the subsequent speech or behaviour of the listener' (69). And the speaker is aware of this, as he or she tailors his or her speech to the possible and predicted reactions of the listener and their 'actively responsive understanding'. The speaker is also responding in their own right to the words of those who spoke before them; as Bakhtin puts it, 'any speaker is himself a respondent to a greater or lesser degree. He is not, after all, the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe' (Ibid.).

But what the speaker also brings into their utterance, and this is something that the listener is also aware of, are the various speech genres forged by all those who spoke before. Although each speech situation is to a larger or lesser extent individual and particular, negotiated between the speaker and the listener involved, in most cases the speech genre(s) deployed are well established and sometimes even quite rigid (like military orders, for example). Unlike Saussure, who saw speech as a purely individual and subjective application of the rules of the language, Bakhtin claims that speech, too, is codified, divided into genres with their own rules and norms, which are often as mandatory as the rules of the language itself (80-81).

'Quite understandably', says Bakhtin, the diverse areas of human activity command the use of different forms of language, which are 'just as diverse as are the areas of human activity' (60).

Language is realised in the form of individual concrete utterances (oral or written) by participants in the various areas of human activity. These utterances reflect the specific conditions and goals of each such area not only through their content (thematic) and linguistic style, that is, the selection of the lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources of the language, but above all through their compositional structure. (Ibid.)
According to Bakhtin, those three aspects – content, style and composition – are ‘inseparably linked to the whole of the utterance and are equally determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication’. Each of the spheres ‘in which language is used develops its own relatively stable types of those utterances’. These relatively stable types of utterance are what Bakhtin calls ‘speech genres’ (Ibid.). Bakhtin places a special emphasis on the extreme heterogeneity of speech genres, which reflect the heterogeneity of human activities; as the latter are potentially boundless, so are the former. However, it would be fair to say that Bakhtin overuses the idea of boundlessness and inexhaustibility, as it is fairly clear from the rest of the essay that, although many and complexly interrelated, speech genres at any particular point in history are, as he put it earlier, relatively stable:

Even in the most free, the most unconstrained conversation, we cast our speech in definite generic forms, sometimes rigid and trite ones, sometimes more flexible, plastic and creative ones (everyday communication also has creative genres at its disposal). (Bakhtin, 1999a, 78)

Furthermore, Bakhtin argues that we learn their rules of combination and application at the same time and in similar ways that we learn our native language:

We are given these speech genres in almost the same way that we are given our native language, which we master fluently long before we begin to study grammar. We know our native language – its lexical composition and grammatical structure – not from dictionaries and grammars but from concrete utterances that we hear and that we ourselves reproduce in live speech communication with people around us. We assimilate forms of language only in forms of utterances and in conjunction with these forms. (Ibid.)

However, although connected, the forms of language and generic forms of speech are, according to Bakhtin, essentially different, in that the forms of language are, just as Saussure argued, ‘stable and compulsory (normative) for the speaker’, while generic forms are ‘much more flexible, plastic and free’. Once again, one should not overestimate the freedom and flexibility of speech genres, since in many of the everyday genres (like greetings and so on) the speaker often has little choice and this
choice is sometimes limited only to different styles (Bakhtin suggests the examples of high, official, respectful, intimate, familiar, and other styles). In other genres, say the literary ones, there is far more flexibility and room for individual variations. But the distinction between the different genres does not end for Bakhtin with varying degrees of flexibility; early on in the essay, he divides the genres between primary (simple) and secondary (complex) ones, in a manner resembling Lotman’s distinction between primary and secondary languages (Lotman, 1977, 7). Bakhtin lists ‘novels, dramas, all kinds of scientific research, major genres of commentary, and so forth’ as examples of secondary speech genres and he defines them as follows:

During the process of their formation, they [secondary speech genres] absorb and digest various primary (simple) genres that have taken form in unmediated speech communication. These primary genres are altered and assume a special character when they enter into complex ones. They lose their immediate relation to actual reality and to the real utterances of others. (Bakhtin, 1999a, 62)

To go back to the difference between language forms and speech genres, it is important to stress that Bakhtin says at the very beginning that the existence of different generic forms ‘in no way disaffirms the national unity of language’ (60). However, the generic forms are of a different order from language forms and Bakhtin illustrates this with an example of those who ‘have an excellent command of a language’, but nevertheless ‘often feel quite helpless in certain spheres of communication precisely because they do not have a practical command of the generic forms used in the given spheres’:

Frequently a person who has an excellent command of speech in some areas of cultural communication, who is able to read a scholarly paper or engage in a scholarly discussion, who speaks very well on social questions, is silent or very awkward in social conversation. Here it is not a matter of an impoverished vocabulary or of style, taken abstractly: this is entirely a matter of the inability to command a repertoire of genres of social conversation, the lack of sufficient supply of those ideas about the whole of the utterance that help cast one’s speech quickly and naturally in certain compositional and stylistic forms, the inability to grasp a word promptly, to begin and end correctly (composition is very uncomplicated in those genres). (80)
So what exactly is the difference between the generic forms and the language forms? The main difference is that a language is a self-contained formal system (pretty much as Saussure defined it), while generic forms, and the utterance as their smallest unit, refer to a particular content and speech situation, assume a certain specific context in which they are to be used, they are applied to a particular reality and they evoke a response (Bakhtin, 1999a, 74, 84). The language units do not do any of this.

There is also a difference in the internal organisation of utterance as the significative unit of speech communication as opposed to the significative language units:

The sentence as a language unit is grammatical in nature. It has grammatical boundaries and grammatical completedness and unity... When the sentence figures as a whole utterance, it is as though it has been placed in a frame made of quite a different material... One exchanges utterances that are constructed from language units: words phrases, and sentences. And an utterance can be constructed both from one sentence and from one word... but this does not transform a language unit into a unit of speech communication. (74-75)

The utterance, although it can consist of one word or of one or more sentences, is internally organised as a unified whole in a very distinctive way, and its outer boundaries are marked by the change of speakers. According to Bakhtin, there are three aspects which determine the 'finalised wholeness' of an utterance, and those are: the semantic exhaustiveness of the theme, the speaker’s plan or speech will, and typical compositional and generic forms of finalisation, all of which are not just a part of the speaker’s consciousness of his own utterance, but are also present in the mind of the listener, enabling him or her to respond. Bakhtin warns over and over again that we should not confuse the utterance (the smallest significative unit of speech) with the grammatical concept of the sentence. ‘The first and foremost’ characteristic of the utterance (as opposed to the sentence) is, according to Bakhtin, ‘the possibility of responding to it’ (76). The grammatical sentence on its own, without a reality to which it would refer and a context of a whole utterance to which it would belong, is ‘devoid of expressiveness’ (85), and ‘lacks the capability of determining the directly active responsive position of the speaker’.
The utterance, on the other hand, is used by the speaker to respond to the speech situation, it expresses a certain intention and emotion, its is directed towards the listener and responds in advance to their active understanding and possible reaction. Speech genres, says Bakhtin, are impersonal, and so are the words’ generic expressions; nevertheless, ‘words can enter our speech from other’s individual utterances, thereby retaining to a greater or lesser degree the tones and echoes of individual utterances’ (88).

As we have seen, in the notes made in 1970-71, Bakhtin considered that ‘various kinds and degrees of otherness of the other’s word and various forms of relations to it (stylisation, parody, polemics and so forth) as well as various methods of expunging it from speech life’ belong to ‘the area of metalinguistics’ (Bakhtin, 1999a, 133). Barthes, by a strange coincidence, in 1970 published a short article entitled ‘La linguistique du discours’ in which he proposed that various speech genres (he lists folklore, literature and written or spoken discourse of mass communication) should be studied by what he calls a linguistics of discours or translinguistics or, preferably, metalinguistics (1970c, 968).

Barthes explains that the object of linguistics is a ‘finality of pure communication’ (I imagine that by this Barthes is referring to that speech schema criticised by Bakhtin), but that discourse also possesses other functions, for example, persuasion or distraction, the aesthetic function, and so on, which are codified by society, and which need to be studied by a different discipline from linguistics. His definition of the object of translinguistics is as follows:

Toute étendue finie de la parole, unifiée du point du vue du contenu, émise et structurée à des fins de communication secondaires, culturalisée par des facteurs autres que ceux de la langue. (Barthes, 1970c, 969)

Following Benveniste’s assertion in ‘Levels in Linguistic Analysis’ (1971, 101-12) that linguistics ends on the level of the sentence, Barthes suggests that translinguistics will take us beyond the sentence (Barthes, 1970c, 969).

One of the main object of translinguistics, according to Barthes, would be to structurally situate the utterance in its context, and to enable analysis of the relationship between the two, by identifying the integrative levels within the utterance. Barthes
suggests that such a study might change the traditional distinction between genres (1970c, 971). The context of the utterance is, as Barthes puts it, of extra-linguistic and intra-semiological nature, and translanguages should, just like the old rhetoric, start by identifying at least some of the discursive situations. Furthermore, the study of context and the search for the principles of integration bring us closer to identifying the point at which the system of discours begins to be articulated 'sur la praxis sociale et historique'. Barthes finishes by concluding that:

Une sémiotique respectueuse du principe d'intégration a toute chance de coopérer efficacement avec des disciplines extra-sémiologiques, comme l'histoire, la psychologie ou l'esthétique. (972)

We can see that the idea is very similar to Bakhtin's. We have encountered in both of them the idea that different social languages organise the world in different ways, and that they represent the ideological position of the speaker. We have also seen that both of them place the creation of the most honest and desirable form of writing at the time when a society becomes aware of the Other, and of the Other's voice. And it is also very fitting that all this talk of verbal stratification within a society should bring us to our next topic: intertextuality and dialogism.
Chapter 3: Intertextuality vs. Polyphony, Heteroglossia and Dialogism

Velasques spoke and said: ‘I have tried in vain to concentrate all my attention on the gypsy chief’s words but I am unable to discover any coherence whatsoever in them. I do not know who is speaking and who is listening. Sometimes Marques de Val Florida is telling the story of his life to his daughter, sometimes it is she who is relating it to the gypsy chief, who in turn is repeating it to us. It is a veritable labyrinth. I had always thought that novels and other works of that kind should be written in several columns like chronological tables’.

Jan Potocki, The Manuscript Found in Saragossa

Julia Kristeva: a Case of Clever Repackaging?

Soon after arriving from her native Bulgaria to Paris at the end of 1965, Julia Kristeva became a star, a new muse of French structuralist thought. In his short article from 1970 entitled ‘L’étrangère’, Roland Barthes stressed as one of her great achievements the introduction of the notion that the science of languages is a necessarily dialogic endeavour, thinking of itself as simultaneously science and writing, analysing itself and its own critical procedures as it analyses different types of languages (1970b). Linked to this was the monumental event of Kristeva’s introduction of Mikhail Bakhtin’s thought and critical terminology into French structuralist discourse; after all, the very term dialogic belongs to the Bakhtinian legacy. Barthes was present when that happened, as Kristeva first presented Bakhtin’s ideas in his seminar in 1966, and, as François Dosse points out in his History of Structuralism, ‘one listener who was particularly seduced by Kristeva’s presentation was none other than Roland Barthes himself’ (Dosse, 1998, II, 54). This presentation was later published as a paper in Critique, and then included in Kristeva’s book Sémiotiké: Recherches pour une sémanalyse under the title ‘Le mot, le dialogue et le roman’. According to Dosse, Kristeva chose to present Bakhtin, because she ‘had immediately understood structuralism’s historical limitations and intended to palliate these shortcomings with Bakhtin, and lend “dynamism to structuralism”’ (Dosse, 1998, 55). And, as Dosse shows, the French structuralist scene was ripe for that

kind of shake-up; what Kristeva carefully tried to avoid, however, was the reintroduction of another dirty word, 'the second element that structuralism had repressed': the subject. As Dosse rightly remarks:

The dialogue between texts that she considered fundamental could serve to address the subject,... reintroduce it as a part of the theme of intersubjectivity, much in the manner of Benveniste. But in 1966, things had not yet evolved that far and Kristeva avoided the issue of the subject, preferring to use a new notion that was immediately successful: intertextuality. (Ibid.)

Or, as Kristeva herself put it in an interview with Dosse: 'It was at that point that I created the gadget called intertextuality' (Ibid.). The new term was introduced to replace Bakhtin's own notion of dialogism, and the conceptual change which accompanied this terminological change is probably one of the great intellectual repackaging and marketing schemes in recent history. It served the double purpose of helping Kristeva establish herself as a voice to be reckoned with in the French structuralist circles, as well as introducing those same circles to the world of Bakhtinian thought.

The term intertextuality itself soon caught on not only as a useful terminological tool in structuralist and post-structuralist thought, but also as a term in the newly born Western European Bakhtinian scholarship (or, to be more precise, in the discourse of those literary theorists who acquainted themselves with Bakhtin's thought). At the time, and for some years afterwards, the full implications of how Kristeva's reading of Bakhtin conditioned the Western European reception of Bakhtin, as well as the course of Western European literary theory, were not fully grasped, and 'intertextuality' as a term was sometimes embraced somewhat uncritically. Tzvetan Todorov in his book *Mikhail Bakhtine: le principe dialogique* even suggested that Bakhtin's own term dialogism, which he found too imprecise to be helpful, be replaced by Kristeva's term 'intertextuality' as a the most general and inclusive term for the relations between different utterances, leaving the term dialogism to refer to the actual verbal exchange between two interlocutors, and to Bakhtin's conception of human personality (Todorov, 1981, 95). 58

58 It needs to be said that Todorov's presentation of Bakhtin's thought is on the whole much more faithful to Bakhtin than to Kristeva's notion of intertextuality.
Although his suggestion has not been fully accepted, one often finds the terms dialogism and intertextuality presented as synonymous. For example, Judith Still and Michael Worton, editors of a collection of essays published under the title *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, in their ‘Introduction’ present Bakhtin’s ideas very much through Kristeva’s reading of him, and for them their main term exists as ‘dialogism/intertextuality’ (1990, 17). Although they stress that Kristeva ‘privileges the term ‘text’ in order to remove any apparent bias in Bakhtin toward the spoken word’ (1990, 16), from which one could conclude that, perhaps, the ‘text’ in ‘intertextuality’ is meant to serve the same purpose, they never assess the full implications of this terminological merging of two perhaps slightly different concepts.

Robert Stam (1988, 132) cites Bakhtin as ‘one of the source thinkers of the contemporary discussion of ‘intertextuality’’, which was as a term ‘introduced into critical discourse as Julia Kristeva’s translation of Bakhtin’s conception of the ‘dialogic’; the choice of words here would suggest that Kristeva simply changed Bakhtin’s word but that the concept remained the same.

I propose here to examine the notions behind Bakhtin’s terms ‘dialogism’, ‘heteroglossia’ and ‘polyphony’ and Kristeva’s term ‘intertextuality’ and to assess not just the faithfulness of the latter to at least the first of the former, but also to examine the ‘usefulness’ of the term ‘intertextuality’ in literary studies. I also believe that there is an entire world of methodological assumptions and possibilities contained in the distinctions between the Bakhtinian and Kristevan terminology, and this needs to be examined as well. It is quite convenient that a comparison between ‘pre-Kristevan’ and ‘post-Kristevan’ Barthes will be very useful for this purpose.

**What Is Meant by Intertextuality?**

If we look at some of the dictionaries of literary terms, which, I believe, can be most telling indicators of terminological use and misuse, we find that, for example, Gerald Prince’s *A Dictionary of Narratology* defines intertextuality as ‘the relation(s) obtaining between a given text and other texts which it cites, rewrites, absorbs, prolongs, or generally transforms and in terms of which it is intelligible’, adding that ‘the notion of intertextuality was formulated and developed by Kristeva (inspired by Bakhtin)’ (Prince, 1991, 46). This dictionary also has ‘dialogic narrative’ as one of its entries,
describing it as 'a narrative characterised by the interaction of several voices, consciousnesses, or world views, none of which unifies or is superior to (has more authority than) the others', equating it thus with polyphony (1991, 19). 59 'Dialogic narrative' is opposed to 'monologic narrative' (which forms a separate entry in the dictionary) and both are, naturally, attributed to Bakhtin; however, the extent to which Kristeva's notion of 'intertextuality' was inspired by Bakhtin is not explained. So, although Prince's small but useful dictionary did not set out to explain these distinctions, one cannot avoid feeling that if it does not create confusion by merging Kristeva's and Bakhtin's concepts together, it does nothing to dispel any existing presuppositions. After all, a simple reference from the definition of Kristeva's notion of 'intertextuality' to Bakhtin's 'dialogic narrative' would clearly show that her rendering of Bakhtin's term changed its meaning quite considerably. Not creating confusion is not, however, something that Laurie Henry's *The Fiction Dictionary* refrains from doing, as it defines intertextuality as 'a term variously attributed to French critics Julia Kristeva and Mikhail Bakhtin, used widely by critics in the last twenty years to refer to the presence of aspects of one or more texts within some other work' (Henry, 1995, 139). Apart from conveying the impression that Bakhtin was French, it clearly presents intertextuality as his own term (although one is not sure how to read the comment about it being 'variously attributed' to Kristeva and Bakhtin: is there a debate about sources going on that we are not aware of?).

Fortunately, Katie Wales' excellent *Dictionary of Stylistics* treats separately those three of Bakhtin's main terms which are often seen as more or less synonymous (i.e. dialogue, heteroglossia and polyphony), linking them to Kristeva's intertextuality and very clearly explaining the differences between them. Wales has a clear sense that there is a great deal of confusion surrounding the use of these terms, and she openly addresses this problem. Concerning the terms 'dialogue', 'dialogic', and 'dialogization' she explains:

59 Unfortunately, Prince is not quite right in equating dialogism with polyphony; as a matter of fact, his definition of dialogic narrative is closer to Bakhtin's concept of polyphony, than to his concept of dialogism, although the notion of polyphony implies the notion of dialogism. Dialogism is the much broader term of the two, describing the way language, human relations, search for the truth and ethical considerations function (see Wales' definition of the dialogic principle on page 5 of this chapter). Polyphony, on the other hand, according to Morson and Emerson (1990, 232) 'has to do with the position of the author in a text'; far from being an attribute of all novels (as is often assumed), for Bakhtin
What has come to be known as the **dialogic principle** informs much of Bakhtin's philosophy of language. Every utterance, every sentence (and hence even monologue) is oriented towards an anticipated implied response, is in 'dialogue' with utterances that have already been made, and also interacts with the social situation around it. In the novel, a special kind of dialogization is its main characteristic: the interrelation of social styles and voices (characters and narrator, for instance). (Wales, 1989, 122-33)

Here Wales refers her reader to 'heteroglossia', 'intertextuality' and 'polyphony'. Heteroglossia is equally clearly defined as follows:

A translation of Bakhtin's coinage raznorechie in the 1930s, heteroglossia (Gk 'different tongue') refers to the internal differentiation or stratification of language. There is the interaction of different varieties: social and regional dialects; the jargon of different occupational and social groups; the conjunction of archaic and innovatory tendencies, etc. Bakhtin emphasises that there are no 'neutral' words or tones in language, and that language itself is not single-voiced.

For Bakhtin, part of the particular fascination of the novel as a genre compared with poetry is the ready incorporation of heteroglossia as a principle of its structure. The alien voices of different social groups are all present, as well as different sub-genres, and the voices of the narrator and the different characters. The discourse of the novel is essentially heterogeneous and interactive, and manifestations of this polyphony include the double voice of free indirect speech, coloured narrative and character zone. (Wales, 1989, 218)

All the emphasised words in this paragraph are references to further related entries in the dictionary, half of which are Bakhtin’s own terms, which makes this quite an impressive coverage of Bakhtin’s terminology. As for 'polyphony', Wales says:

Polyphony is particularly associated with the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and his writings on Dostoevsky translated into English in 1973 (1st published 1929). Bakhtin argues that novels like Dostoevsky’s challenge the traditional novel with its authoritarian authorial voice (i.e. monologic) by permitting the points of view and the ideologies and voices of the characters to have free play.

'Dostoevsky was the first polyphonic writer, and although there have presumably been others, the phenomenon is still relatively rare'.
Polyphony is sometimes used as a synonym for dialogic (q.v.), another of Bakhtin’s key terms (see Bakhtin 1981); but the latter is best used to cover a more complex notion involving the sense not only of a dialectic but also of language engaging with anticipated responses. Polyphony would therefore refer simply to the potential plurality of idiolectal or sociolectal voices and consciousness so characteristic of the novel as genre. (Wales, 1989, 364)

Apart from the final claim that polyphony is characteristic of all novels (see footnote 3), the rest of Wales’ treatment of Bakhtin’s terminology is a rhapsody of precision; furthermore, it manages in these few short paragraphs quoted to give the reader a glimpse of the richness of Bakhtin’s thought, something that sometimes even the specialist Bakhtinian scholarship fails to do.60 The sentence: ‘Every utterance, every sentence (and hence even monologue) is oriented towards an anticipated implied response, is in “dialogue” with utterances that have already been made, and also interacts with the social situation around it’ succeeds in conveying Bakhtin’s concept of what Simon Dentith called ‘the Janus face of the speaking subject, immersed in a multiple past, speaking a language bearing ineradicable and pervasive traces of that past, yet turned towards the future, towards an interlocutor whose response cannot be guaranteed’ (Dentith, 1995, 86), while at the same time giving a clear indication that the context in which Bakhtin’s dialogue takes place is socially and historically specific.

But what of ‘intertextuality’? Wales says that it ‘was introduced first into French criticism in the late 1960s by Kristeva (see 1969) in her discussion and elaboration of the ideas of Bakhtin, especially his general dialogical principle’ (Wales, 1989, 259), and she defines it as follows:

Basically, it can be defined as utterances/texts in relation to other utterances/texts. So even within a single text there can be, as it were, a continual ‘dialogue’ between the text given and other texts/utterances that exist outside it, literary and non-literary: either

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60 At least where Bakhtin’s own texts are concerned, as these are often reduced to one or two basic principles which are then supposed to inform the whole of his work (see for example the role of Bakhtin’s ethics in Clark and Holquist, 1984). On the other hand, a mechanical and misleading diversity and ‘richness’ is often imposed on him, by adding Medvedev’s and Voloshinov’s texts to his name (Clark and Holquist again), and thus enabling the critic to write, for example, that ‘there are, it should be pointed out, many Bakhtins; there is Bakhtin the revolutionary, Bakhtin the Marxist, Bakhtin the anti-Stalinist, Bakhtin the populist, and Bakhtin the crypto-Christian’, without offering any clear proof for any of the above, but turning Bakhtin into
within that same period of composition, or in previous centuries. Kristeva argues, in fact, that no text is 'free' of other texts. (Ibid.)

It seems to me that Wales presents 'intertextuality' as a much vaguer term than either Bakhtin's dialogue, heteroglossia or polyphony: it applies to all kinds of relations between texts, whether past or present, without defining these relationships in any greater detail. What is clear is the notion that most aspects of Bakhtinian dialogism, heteroglossia and polyphony are gone: there is no underlying differentiation in the language itself, no relationship between the narrator and the characters, no clear social and historical context, no mention of ideologies and points of view. Prince (1991) seems to add further to the sense of vagueness that 'intertextuality' as a term seems to breed, as adds to its basic definition a comment that 'in its most general and radical acceptation (Barthes, Kristeva), the term designates the relations between any text (in the broad sense of signifying matter) and the sum of knowledge, the potentially infinite network of codes and signifying practices that allows it to have meaning' (Prince, 1991, 46).

What Kristeva Claimed and What Bakhtin Really Said

But is this accusation of vagueness fair on Kristeva, and, perhaps for the purposes of this work more importantly, on Barthes? Let us now have a closer look at Kristeva's famous essay 'Le mot, le dialogue et le roman' from the point of view of Bakhtinian scholarship, rather than as an 'autonomous' piece of literary theory; considering that this was the text which introduced Bakhtin to the West, and which for many has served as a personal introduction to his theory, it is important to assess how faithful it is to Bakhtin's own ideas.

Firstly, it is important to note that Kristeva's presentation of Bakhtin's ideas was based on two of his most important works: the book on Dostoevsky and the book on Rabelais. Kristeva mentions in her first footnote to 'Le mot, le dialogue et le roman' that Bakhtin was at that point working on his book on speech genres. To what extent she was at that point familiar with the essays which were later published in Voprosy
literatury i estetiki (in 1975) is difficult to tell, but she probably had at least some idea of what was contained in them, at least judging by her references to Bakhtin’s differentiation between the novel and the epic. Nevertheless, even if she had no access to any of these essays, the books on Dostoevsky and Rabelais would have given her a very clear idea of most of Bakhtin’s main concepts, such as dialogism, polyphony, ambivalence and carnival. As the latter two belong to the book on Rabelais, I shall mostly leave them aside, and concentrate specifically on how Kristeva defined Bakhtin’s dialogue and polyphony.

In the opening paragraphs of ‘Le mot, le dialogue et le roman’, Kristeva puts Bakhtin in the context of Russian Formalism and the later Structuralist development of that school, with the claim that he was one of the first to replace a static structural analysis of texts with a more dynamic model ‘où la structure littéraire n’est pas, mais où elle s’élabora par rapport à une autre structure’ (Kristeva, 1969, 83). In this model the literary word, as the smallest analytical unit, is not a point of fixed meaning, but the cross-roads of ‘textual surfaces’, a dialogue of different ‘écritures’: that of the writer, the addressee (or the character) and of cultural context, past or present (Kristeva, 1969, 82-83).

According to Kristeva, by establishing the word as the smallest unit of literary structure Bakhtin places texts within history and society, which are themselves seen as texts which the writer ‘reads’ and within which he places himself by ‘rewriting’ them in his texts. Thus, the diachronic transforms itself into the synchronic, and this, according to Kristeva, means that the ‘linear history’ appears as an abstraction. The only way a writer can participate in history is by transgressing this abstraction by the act of simultaneous reading and writing, that is, by creating a signifying structure which is a function of and an opposition to another structure. Thus, the poetic word transgresses the logic of the codified discourse, and can only realise itself on the margins of the official culture, which is why the carnival is so important for Bakhtin (Ibid.).

The above paragraph is an almost word-for-word paraphrase of Kristeva’s exposition of her main thesis about the significance of Bakhtin’s theories for contemporary structuralist thought. There are several points that become obvious at once: the first one is the privileging of the word ‘text’, which, as we have already seen, was noted by Michael Worton and Judith Still as a strategy for removing ‘any apparent

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61 ‘Epic and Novel’ appeared in the 1975 collection, but was written in 1941.
bias in Bakhtin towards the spoken word'. But it also serves a much larger purpose, as writers, readers, cultural contexts, history and society, all appear as 'texts' and 'textual surfaces', but without any clear definition of what in this context the word 'text' might mean; as Dosse remarked, Kristeva also carefully avoids the word 'subject'. As Clayton and Rothstein note (1991, 18), Kristeva 'transforms Bakhtin's concepts by causing them to be read in conjunction with ideas about textuality that were emerging in France in the mid-sixties'. According to them, 'this textualisation of Bakhtin changes his ideas - changes them just enough to allow the new concept of intertextuality to emerge'. More precisely, a Derridian notion of 'writing' 'supplies a dimension that was not present in Bakhtin originally, the dimension of indeterminacy, of différence, of dissemination' (Clayton and Rothstein, 1991, 19). In addition to this, they emphasise that 'Kristeva's conception of intertextuality opens several lacunae' not present in Bakhtin, the most important being 'a vagueness about the relation of the social to the literary text' (Clayton and Rothstein, 1991, 20).

As for the reintroduction of the notion of history into the French structuralist context (which, as we have seen, was one of her main motivations in talking about Bakhtin), it seems to me that this is conceptually a very limited notion of history: again, it appears only as a form of 'textuality', and the only way in which writer can participate in it is by transgressing the abstraction of linear history by an act of écriture-lecture. In any case, her claim that she is here paraphrasing Bakhtin does not have much validity; as far as I am aware, Bakhtin never said anything about history or society being nothing but 'textual surfaces', nor about the writer as only being able to participate in history by an act of reading-as-writing (or vice versa). For Bakhtin, language represents contradictions and conflicts in a society, but that does not mean that society itself is turned into a text. Clayton and Rothstein justly note (1991, 20) that 'Bakhtin's emphasis on the historical uniqueness of the context of every utterance distances his terms from the endlessly expanding context of intertextuality. In Kristeva's usage, the intersection of textual surfaces in a literary word can never be circumscribed, is open to endless dissemination.'

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62 For a more detailed exposition of the link between Kristeva's and Derrida's ideas, see also Rajan, 1991.

63 Rajan (1991, 66) says that 'the absence of a reader [in Kristeva's theory] makes it difficult to construct that bridge between textuality and history that seems the goal of Kristeva's theory'. I still think that the problem is much more in Kristeva's concept of history itself as 'textuality'.
Apart from that, Kristeva’s claim that by positing the status of the word as the smallest structural unit, Bakhtin turned the diachronic into the synchronic, is not only logically flimsy, but also bears no resemblance to what Bakhtin really had to say about the relation between writing and history. Bakhtin did, however, claim that the word is the smallest unit to which a dialogical analysis can be applied, and for him the word is not an isolated point in the verbal universe, but a cross-section of different social languages and their uses, each of them bearing a different shade of meaning, intention and accentuation to that word:

The way in which the word conceptualises its object is a complex act – all objects, open to dispute and overlain as they are with qualifications, are from one side highlighted while from the other side dimmed by heteroglot social opinion, by an alien word about them. And into this complex play of light and shadow the word enters - it becomes saturated with this play, and must determine within it the boundaries of its own semantic and stylistic contours. The way in which the word conceives its object is complicated by a dialogic interaction within the object between various aspects of its socio-verbal intelligibility. (Bakhtin, 1996a, 277)

Thus, with her differentiation between the word as a point with a fixed meaning and as a crossroads of different ‘textual surfaces’, Kristeva is partly right, or not right enough, for she disregards the social aspect of Bakhtin’s theory. Although she seems to claim from time to time that society and history provide us with at least some of the ‘textual surfaces’, without a rather radical understanding of what the word ‘text’ here might mean, that claim seems far from Bakhtin’s own repeated insistence that every word and every utterance in a language bears with it the echoes of other words, other meanings that word might have in a different ideological, historical, social and intentional context. For Bakhtin, words can be a powerful social force, and they are certainly a powerful reflection of the conflicts and differences in the society to whose language they belong:

At any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between different epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. (Bakhtin 1996a, 291)
In a way, literature has a privileged position amongst social languages, because it (or to be more precise, the novel, and more precisely still, the polyphonic novel) is the only verbal genre capable of representing fully the differentiations, conflicts, voices and the inherent dialogism of language, which the other speech genres tend, for practical purposes, to ignore.

Kristeva, on the other hand, rather misrepresents this extremely complex picture by giving as examples of Bakhtin's concept of dialogism in language the relationship between the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic (which she calls 'systematic') axes of language, as well as the relationship between langue and parole (Kristeva, 1969, 87-88). It might well be that it could be interesting and important, as Kristeva claims, to study the relationship between 'syntagmatic' and 'systematic' dialogic relations as a basis for 'ambivalence' in the novel, but that is nevertheless a completely different theoretical project from the one Bakhtin himself had in mind. It is also difficult to imagine how one could conceive of dialogic relations between the langue and the parole, and between the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic axes of language, unless a completely new definition of the word 'dialogue' is proposed, one that would not contain any reference to the actual verbal exchange between two interlocutors.64

Furthermore, Kristeva's claim that by defining the literary text as a 'mosaic of quotations', as an 'absorption and transformation of another text' Bakhtin replaced the concept of 'intersubjectivity' with the concept of 'intertextuality' (Kristeva, 1969, 85), is again somewhat misrepresenting matters. Even if we just stick to the textual (i.e., written) side of the exchange (leaving other types of language use aside), it needs to be said that, firstly, for Bakhtin, a literary text is not a mere mosaic of quotations, not even an absorption and transformation of another text or texts; it seems to me that both of these descriptions of relations between texts imply a certain passivity. If literary process is one of dialogue, than every new text can only be an active response to other texts, and an anticipation of texts yet to come.

Also, it can hardly be argued that it was Bakhtin who invented 'intertextuality', since the problem of relations between texts was one of the main to occupy the Russian Formalists since the mid-1920s. According to Boris Eikhenbaum, as 'the Formalists' original endeavour to pin down some particular constructional device and trace its unity

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64 In drawing attention to 'Bakhtin's need to describe dialogue in the language of encounter', Hirschkop noted (1998, 186) that it indicated 'some recognition of the fact that the good stuff one gets from dialogue, the political and social payoff, depends upon the "presence" of multiple speakers'.
through voluminous material had given way to an endeavour to qualify further the
generalised idea, to grasp the concrete function of the device in each given instance', the
'concept of functional value gradually moved out to the forefront and overshadowed our
original concept of device'(Eikhenaum, 1971b, 29-30). For example, Tynianov
discussed the contexts in which a work needs to be looked at for its function to become
clear: other works by the same author, other works from the same literary period, other
works of the same genre. All these interrelations will not only help a critic understand a
function of an element, but can also make the registration of its ‘tactical’ effacement
possible (like the effacement of a specific meter or plot structure) (Tynianov, 1971b).
Furthermore, moving away from purely literary relations, Boris Eikhenbaum talked
about the importance of our knowledge about the ‘literary environment’ in which a text
was produced and perceived for our understanding of that text, but argued that ‘the
relations between the facts of the literary order and facts extrinsic to it cannot simply be
causal relations but can only be relations of correspondence, interaction, dependency, or
conditionality’ (Eikhenbaum, 1971a, 61).

Quite the contrary of what Kristeva claims, Bakhtin’s true contribution to the
already existing theories of ‘intertextuality’ concerns what we could call
‘intersubjectivity’, should we really insist on replacing Bakhtin’s own term ‘dialogism’
with another term.

Hearing Voices: What Else Bakhtin Said

After all, it was Bakhtin who devoted much of his work to the study of how different
voices function in a literary text (and primarily in the novel). For example, in the
‘Heteroglossia in the Novel’ section of his essay ‘Discourse in the Novel’, Bakhtin
(1996a) talked not just of different social languages which make up the novelistic verbal
diversity, but also of different voices within the narrative texture and of the way they
relate to one another:

The language used by characters in the novel, how they speak, is verbally and
semantically autonomous; each character’s speech possesses its own belief system,
since each is the speech of another in another’s language; thus it may also refract
authorial intentions and consequently may to a certain degree constitute a second
language for the author. (Bakhtin, 1996a, 315)
He particularly stressed the importance of 'double-voiced' constructions, where one voice takes on the speech and the language of another (as contained in, for example, the relationship between the author and the narrator, or the narrator and the character) (Bakhtin, 1996a, 313-14). According to Bakhtin, in such cases it is important to note the two different intentional levels which operate within the construction; if one fails to do so, one is also likely to fail to understand the basic underlying structure of the literary work, not to speak of the work itself. 65

But even if we take into account that Kristeva probably had not read the essay mentioned above, we still cannot ignore the fact that one of the two Bakhtin’s works she based her essay on was Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics, in which Bakhtin postulates that Dostoevsky’s great achievement is the creation of the polyphonic novel, a form whose ‘dominant’ is the self-aware and self-knowing hero (Bakhtin, 1979, 58, 68). Considering that the polyphonic novel, according to Bakhtin, brought about a revolution in the novelistic form, with its own structuring artistic logic (as opposed to bringing in new content), and that he used the notion of the ‘dominant’, which belongs to mature Formalism, it can certainly be claimed that Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics engages in a (rather amicable) dialogue with the Formalists (Jakobson, 1996, 41-46). The new element in this dialogue is precisely Bakhtin’s notion of the self-aware hero, who is not presented to us ‘as he is’, in his finished essence (as are Tolstoy’s heroes, regardless of their complexity), but in the dynamism of his self-knowledge and self-awareness and in his dialogue with other consciousnesses and their knowledge of others and of themselves. As Bakhtin claims, there is nothing that Dostoevsky the author would know about the character that the character would not be aware of himself. Dostoevsky’s characters are not, as Bakhtin says, presented to us as finished visual images, but as ‘pure voices’, expressing their own vision of the world and of themselves (Bakhtin, 1979, 62). Furthermore, each of these characters is an ideologue, driven on by some idea; however, as Bakhtin stresses several times, the ideas that Dostoevsky uses in his novels are not invented by Dostoevsky himself, but were very much present in the political, religious and philosophical debates of his time. Bakhtin (1979, 103) says of Dostoevsky that he was able to ‘listen to his epoch as to a great dialogue’, he never

65 As would, for example, a student who failed to notice that Milan Kundera’s novel ‘The Joke’ was told by four different narrators, each of whom had a different status and a different relationship to the (covert) authorial voice.
invented' any of the ideas expressed by his characters, but he always brought them into his novels from the social reality around him. Each of the ideas in Dostoevsky’s novels, according to Bakhtin, was fully socially and ideologically relevant, and for many of them there exist clear prototypes in the public polemics, philosophical and religious tracts and newspaper articles of his day (Bakhtin, 1979, 103-4). Thus, it is not the ideas themselves which are interesting and new in Dostoevsky’s novels, but the way they are incorporated into the new polyphonic novelistic form. Dostoevsky, according to Bakhtin, never presented ideas in the monologic form in which their journalistic or philosophical prototypes appeared; he never saw them as ‘subjective individual-psychological formations with a ‘permanent place of residence’ in a person’s head’:

No, the idea is interindividual and intersubjective, its sphere cannot be the individual consciousness, but dialogical relations between different consciousnesses. The idea is a living event, which performs on the point of the dialogical meeting of two or more consciousnesses. In this sense the idea is similar to the word... Like the word, the idea wants to be heard, understood and ‘answered’ by other voices from other positions. Like the word, the idea is in its nature dialogic, and the monologue appears only as the necessary form of its expression. (Bakhtin, 1979, 100)

Thus, a character in a Dostoevsky novel is hardly ever able to present his (or her) ideas without having an immediate response from other characters; the only negative example that I can think of is the religious tract by Father Zosima in The Karamazov Brothers, which is presented to us in its full length and original state as written by Father Zosima himself; but even that is a response to Ivan Karamazov’s story about the Great Inquisitor and the suffering of children. Raskolnikov’s article about the justified crime, however, we get to know first through Porfiry Petrovi_h’s (intentionally provocative) rendering of it, and only then from Raskolnikov himself, but in a dialogue in which several characters react to and comment on Raskolnikov’s ideas (Bakhtin, 1979, 99-100).

Furthermore, ideas are presented in Dostoevsky’s novels not just in their dialogic relationship with each other, but as fully merged with the characters which have ‘adopted’ them. We have already said that Bakhtin claims that every one of Dostoevsky’s characters is an ideologue, and the full significance of this is not just that they believe in a certain idea or set of ideas, but that their every thought or action is
determined by that idea or set of ideas. The idea a character believes in cannot be detached from their personality, as we can do quite easily with Tolstoy’s characters; Pierre Bezukhov, for example: a jolly nice chap, but prone to believe in and do all sorts of nonsense; his true goodness always shows through, though. Dostoevsky’s Raskolnikov, on the other hand, kills because he believes in a rather radical form of Nietzscheanism; Sonia follows him to Siberia not just because she loves him, but also because she believes in a rather radical form of Christianity. Dostoevsky’s heroes live, kill, love and die for the idea they believe in, and the result of this is the polyphonic novel, populated by characters-ideologues, who all participate equally in the great dialogue that is the Dostoevsky novel, with Dostoevsky’s own authorial voice being just one of the equal participants in the dialogue. Far from claiming that the author in the novel becomes ‘un anonymat, une absence, un blanc, pour permettre à la structure d’exister comme telle’(Kristeva, 1969, 95), Bakhtin simply demands from the novelistic author not to submit his characters’ voices to his own (for which he severely criticises Tolstoy) but to allow his characters an equal say about themselves and the world they inhabit. Dostoevsky’s great achievement, in Bakhtin’s view, is not that he turned himself into an ‘absence’ in his novels, but that he allowed the artist to win over the publicist in him (Bakhtin, 1979, 106); however, we shall look more closely at the ‘author problem’ in chapter 4 of this thesis.

If we compare Bakhtin’s extremely complex and vibrant theory of dialogism, heteroglossia and polyphony to Kristeva’s vague and unclear notion of ‘intertextuality’ as the absorption and transformation of texts by texts, somehow the latter does not seem to do much justice to the former, unless we are prepared to radically redefine the meaning of the word ‘text’ to include speech, intersubjectivity and a much clearer sense of historical and social languages.66 As a term which has been offered as an alternative to Bakhtin’s own, intertextuality falls rather short of its promise. As Celia Britton says, ‘the idea of a dialogic text depends upon an extension of the meaning of ‘dialogue’’, and she identifies three stages of this extension (Britton, 1974, 55).67 The first is that of the most common notion of dialogue, where ‘each of the ‘voices’ taking part belongs to

66 Laurent Jenny notes that Kristeva enlarged the notion of ‘text’ to the point where it refers to literary works, oral use of language, and social or unconscious symbolic systems (Jenny, 1976, 261). He is right in the sense that it is only thus enlarged that Kristeva’s use of the term ‘text’ makes sense; I do not think, however, that she herself gives it explicitly this broad definition. Even if she did, it would still remain true that history and society cannot be fully reduced to it.
67 I am grateful to Karine Zbinden for pointing this paper out to me.
someone present and is the expression of his point of view’. The more abstract ‘use of the term’ conceives of ‘these points of view’ as, ‘so to speak, disembodied: each voice is assignable to a particular reference point which is no longer a person, but a fairly coherent set of principles, interests and attitudes’. In the final stage, ‘the dialogue consists solely of the interplay of various unattached voices, perceptibly different, yet whose various distinctive features do not add up to a particular body of opinion – but, instead, to a rather more diffuse original context’ (Britton, 1974, 56).

Britton notes that Bakhtin’s notion of the dialogic text ‘contains all three of these levels of dialogue’ (Ibid.). Kristeva’s reading of him takes just the third meaning into account, diffusing further the notion of context. Instead of ‘levels’ of dialogism, we are left with ‘textual surfaces’. Kristeva’s rendition of Bakhtin’s theory strips it of its third dimension, not allowing for the vertical consideration of levels in which dialogism manifests itself. Her attempt to ‘market’ Bakhtin to French intellectual circles was compromised by her willingness to ‘shape’ his thought to accommodate their interest in textuality and reluctance to talk of intersubjectivity or history.

In a sense, I believe that Kristeva was more interested in trying to ‘fit in’ than truly to subvert the current trends in French thought. That at least, is the cynical view; Susan Stanford Friedman gives a more generous interpretation of events by saying that ‘feminist critics might readily recognise the gender inflection of Kristeva’s self-authorising strategy, one she uses often: to propose her own theories, she presents a “reading” of some (male) precursor or fellow writer, a re-reading in which her attribution of ideas to a male master screens the introduction of her own ideas... Intertextuality was paradoxically born under the guise of influence’ (Friedman, 1991, 147). Although I have nothing against productive misreading, I believe that the ‘strategy’ employed in Kristeva’s essay on Bakhtin not only does not produce a very useful version of Bakhtin’s thought but also does not do much for feminism. A woman who appears not to be able to logically follow and accurately present somebody else’s argument cannot be doing very much for the reputation of the rest of us. To stealthily present one’s own ideas under the guise of somebody else’s is not a feminist strategy, it is just simple misrepresentation.
Kristeva’s Uses of Intertextuality

Kristeva developed the term ‘intertextuality’ in more detail in Le texte du roman (1970), where, as Leon S. Roudiez points out in his ‘Introduction’ to Desire in Language (1980), she performed ‘an analysis of the birth of the novel in late medieval times’, using Bakhtin’s notion of ‘genre’, and seeing ‘what we call the novel as a narrative texture, woven together with strands borrowed from other verbal practices such as carnivalesque writing, courtly lyrics, hawker’s cries, and scholastic treatises. She also showed... how this texture is intertwined with something akin to what Michel Foucault has called episteme, for which she coined the neologism “ideologeme”’ (Roudiez, 1980, 2). This is all quite Bakhtinian. However, although in ‘Discourse in the Novel’ Bakhtin talks of different types of stylised spoken or written types of narration and speech as being part of the novelistic discourse (Bakhtin, 1996a, 262), it is easy to see that the project of showing how a late medieval novel is ‘woven together’ from different late medieval verbal practices is closer to what Bakhtin did in Rabelais and His World than to his concept of polyphony in the book on Dostoevsky. This could also partly explain the vision of the anonymous writer in the concept of ‘intertextuality’, since Bakhtin sees the voice in the carnivalesque text as collective voice of the ‘people’, with Rabelais as merely a medium (admittedly, the best and most representative medium) through which this voice finds expression. Kristeva herself says something similar, when she explains that she chose the texts of Antoine de la Sale to illustrate her point not for the importance of the author or for the texts’ aesthetic value but ‘par leur anonymat, ou si l’on veut par leur ‘insignifiance’ que ces écrits méritent notre attention comme lieu d’un changement structural’ (Kristeva, 1970, 20). For Kristeva, however, the birth of the novel in late medieval times is not linked to the collective voice of the people, but to what she calls ‘the cult of the book’ (1970, 146). The novel came into existence as a sort of ‘book of books’ (1970, 149), where the best known books of the times would be confronted, where a dialogue between them would be staged, or where they would be neutralised (1970, 147).

68 Morson and Emerson refer also to an article by Kristeva entitled ‘The Ruin of a Poetics’ (1970), which is Kristeva’s introduction to the French translation of the Dostoevsky book. It basic arguments are quite similar to those in ‘Le mot, le dialogue et le roman’, so I am leaving it aside (Morson and Emerson, 1990, 4).
'Ideologeme', on the other hand, as Kristeva herself points out (1970, 12-13), and as Toril Moi acknowledges (Kristeva, 1986, 62), is actually Medvedev's term from *The Formal Method*. I find it difficult to pinpoint exactly what Medvedev means by 'ideologeme', because he never defines it very clearly. It is generally used as a term relating to the intersection between the ideological horizon and the literary work as a whole, but the example he uses to illustrate what he means by it does not help fully in its clarification. The term itself would suggest that it refers to the smallest element of the text which links it to an ideology or which expresses an ideological position (whether a character's or author's own). However, Medvedev's example refers to Bazarov in Turgenev's novel *Fathers and Sons* as an 'ideologeme of a raznochints'. Bazarov, along with all other novelistic characters, is 'not at all a social type in the strict sense, but is only the ideological refraction of a given social type' 'in the social consciousness of a definite social group' to which Turgenev belonged (Medvedev, 1978, 21). The problem with this example is that Bazarov is a character with a well defined ideology of his own, and one would think that he could be thought of as a bundle of different ideologemes before we could conceive of him as being an illustrative ideologeme of Turgenev's social class.

I do not necessarily find Kristeva's definition of ideologeme that much clearer. She uses the same definition of the 'ideologeme' in 'The Bounded Text' ('Le texte clos') as in *Le texte du roman* (Kristeva, 1969, 52-81; 1970, 12-13; 1980, 36-59), and says that it as 'the intersection of a given textual arrangement (a semiotic practice) with the utterances (sequences) that it either assimilates into its own space or to which it refers in the space of exterior texts (semiotic practices)' and as 'that intertextual function read as 'materialised' at the different structural levels of each text, and which stretches along the entire length of its trajectory, giving it its historical and social co-ordinates' (Kristeva, 1980, 36). Just a few sentences later, she uses the phrase 'text as ideologeme' (1980, 37), which does not help matters either. Are 'semiotic practices' texts or textual arrangements; and are ideologemes 'intertextual functions', 'intersections' or texts themselves? The use of all of these terms remains unclear and vague, and Roudiez does not make it any clearer by saying of 'intertextuality' that it 'has been generally misunderstood' and defines it as having nothing to do with 'matters of influence by one writer upon another, or with the sources of a literary work', but

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70 See also Medvedev, 1978, 17, 21-25. For Bakhtin's use of the term see Bakhtin, 1996a, 333.
involving ‘the components of a textual system such as the novel’ (Roudiez, 1980, 15). In *Revolution in Poetic Language* Kristeva herself remarked on the ‘danger’ of using the term ‘intertextuality’ to refer to influences and sources rather than to the ‘transposition of one (or several) sign system(s) into another’, and replaced it with the term ‘transposition’ (Kristeva, 1984, 59-60).

It seems to me that the term remains vague even after all these attempts at clarification. As Clayton and Rothstein amusingly put it, ‘the face of ‘intertextuality’, as a new master term, is less a simple, single, and precise image, a bronze head by Rodin, than something shattered, a portrait bust by an avid exponent of analytic cubism too poor to afford a good chisel’ (Clayton and Rothstein, 1991, 11).

Simon Dentith (1995) makes a similar point. It is interesting that most of the chapter ‘Bakhtin and Contemporary Criticism’ in his book is dedicated to Kristeva’s understanding of Bakhtin, and Dentith is very clear about pointing out the importance of Kristeva’s influence where the reception of Bakhtin in the West was concerned and the weak spots of her understanding of Bakhtin, as well as insisting on what amounts to the greater usefulness and wisdom of Bakhtin’s own theoretical model. His first point is that Kristeva’s interest ‘remains a predominantly epistemological one, concerned to show the impossibility of the “truth speaking” authorial voice escaping the same deconstructive considerations which afflict all language’. Bakhtin’s focus, on the other hand, ‘is at once ethical and social, in which the objection to the monologic “discursive hierarchy” is that it represents a politically unacceptable arrogation of authority’. Furthermore, Dentith suggests that ‘the alternative, the valued other, is very different also’.

For the Bakhtin of the Dostoevsky book, the alternative to monologism is of course polyphony, which does not mean a simple celebration of the other’s word but a responsible engagement with it – though of course with no attempt to arrogate the final word. Even the Bakhtin of the book on Rabelais, who might be thought to be nearest to endorsing a ‘revolution of the word’, celebrates the upturnings and discrownings of carnival not in the name of some abstract Oedipal principle but because of their popular character and their historically prepared particularity. (Dentith, 1995, 94)

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71 Jonathan Culler argues that Kristeva’s practical use of ‘intertextuality’ moves away from the notion’s anonymous, general nature, and leads her instead into a hunt for particular, identifiable sources (1981, 106-7).
I believe that Dentith is absolutely right in stressing the importance of active ethical and social concerns in Bakhtin, as opposed to the more abstractedly epistemological interests of Kristeva. Although she does emphasise the subversiveness of the 'polyphonic novel' (and she lists the novels of Kafka, Joyce and Bataille as the modern exponents of the polyphonic novel, and rather confusingly Sade as one of the older ones - surely not!), it is not clear where that subversiveness would lie, as the Bakhtinian model of interpersonal relations and active social languages does not appear in her version of his theory. She even goes as far as to talk of the Socratic dialogue as of the 'annihilation de la personne', with the explanation that 'les sujets de discours sont des non-personnes, des anonymats, cachés par le discours qui les constitue', with the discourse revolving around the shared, dialogical search for the truth (Kristeva, 1969, 102). However, Kristeva simply cannot have it both ways, as Bakhtin's concept of polyphony insists precisely on the fact that it allows individual characters their own voice and their own point of view, which does not square very well with the concept of anonymous speech of a non-person. Britton rightly asks 'whether there is much left of Bakhtin’s theory once one has eliminated the suspect psychologism', considering that he 'defines characters exclusively in terms of their consciousness' (Britton, 1974, 58). When Bakhtin says in the book on Dostoevsky that we do not see the Dostoevsky hero, but that we hear him and that he exists in his words (Bakhtin 1979, 62), this does not mean that that hero is 'hidden' by his words, but that he is revealed in them and through his own self-awareness which they express. Polyphony is there to give freedom to the character and his voice, and not to annihilate the subject; at any rate, how would a dialogue ever be possible between non-persons and 'anonymats'?

As Dentith says, Kristeva’s notion of intertextuality can be ‘pulled in two opposite directions’, one of which is ‘towards ‘source study’’, either with the supposition of equality between texts or with the idea that there is ‘some relationship of competition’ ‘between any text and some ‘precursor’ text’. As he puts it, ‘there is nothing wrong with this kind of criticism except that it does not go nearly far enough’. On the other hand, in the opposite direction lies the notion of ‘textuality’. This seeks to do away with our common-sense ideas of authors and texts, and replace them with a sense of the underlying productiveness of writing itself; from the perspective of ‘textuality’ any
actual text is merely a particular density among a myriad codes and discourses, whose origins cannot be traced and which stretch to the horizon in all directions. (Dentith, 1995, 94-95)

As Dentith says, Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia is radically different from these two alternatives (I quote at length, but Dentith’s point is as clear and as concise as it could possible be):

It [heteroglossia] radically transforms the question of sources, making them a matter not just of individual influences or borrowing, but of the socially located languages that each and every text manages in its own particular way. And the social location of heteroglossia equally undoes the unstoppable indeterminacy of ‘textuality’. This is in part because... Bakhtin is prepared to retain a notion of reference, of the text’s relation to the world around it, which must, at the very least, act as a kind of anchor for any utterance, giving it some location in time and space. More importantly, however, Bakhtin, by means of the notion of heteroglossia, locates the utterance in the to and fro of active social forces, pulling back and forth in competition with each other and expressing their antagonisms in and through language. What grounds the aesthetic utterance is not finally its relation to the world beyond it, but the fact that it is always already in that world, acting in its own manner with the materials – the socially marked languages – appropriate to it. (Dentith 1995, 95)

Dentith sees in Kristeva’s reading of Bakhtin a tendency ‘to take one possible emphasis from Bakhtin and draw its implications provocatively’ (Ibid.). By denying any theoretical importance to the notions of the subject and of any real social and historical grounding of the literary text (such, that is, which would not turn history and society into that rather vague notion of ‘textuality’), Kristeva ‘draws upon what is genuinely there in Bakhtin but develops it in directions which are uncongenial to his thinking – or at least, towards a terminus which is negative rather than positive’ (Dentith, 1995, 96-97). By depersonalising the utterance and by denying history and society the active role they have in Bakhtin’s thought, Kristeva turns a theory of verbal responsibility, dialogue and equality between utterances into ‘a hall of mirrors’, ‘a vertiginous sense of

72 We can also recognise in this Edward Said’s claim that the literary text is always in and of the world; see, for example, the title chapter in The World, the Text, and the Critic (London: Vintage, 1991).
unstoppable regress', in which 'the word is never your own word, but always in part the word of another, for whom in turn the word is never their own' (Dentith, 1995, 96).

So, to return to an earlier point, why does Kristeva privilege the word 'text' over Bakhtin's own choice of words, and why do Worton and Still talk about the 'apparent bias in Bakhtin towards the spoken word', presuming it in advance to be something theoretically fruitless and, one feels, almost embarrassing, without assessing its role (if it exists in the first place) in Bakhtin's theory? Why this Derridian bias towards the written word, even if it brings with it a distortion of a literary theory which comes from another context and operates with a different set of conceptual tools and 'binary oppositions'? As far as I can tell, the opposition between the written and the spoken word does not play any significant role in Bakhtin's theory, so any bias towards either of these in the context of that theory would not make much sense. A very important distinction Bakhtin does make, and which could by an inattentive reader be confused with the spoken word - written word distinction, is the distinction between every-day rhetorical transmission of the words of the other (in court, newspapers or in political debate - which could then be both spoken and written), and their artistic-novelistic representation. According to Bakhtin, rhetorical genres often represent the words of the other (for example, a political opponent or accused in court) dialogically, presenting them, answering to them and commenting on them (Bakhtin, 1996a, 353). Furthermore, as Bakhtin observes, a large part of our every-day conversations consists of talking about other people's words, in reporting on what other people had said and in answering to and commenting on their words (1996a, 338). We seem to be perpetually obsessed with what other people are saying, but in reporting on their words we tend to present them as the words of just that one individual who uttered them, as characteristic for that individual. In every-day discourse, a speaker (or writer) reports on the words of another individual, framing them in his or her own discursive context which colours the words of the other to a greater or lesser degree with the speaker's own interpretation and intention. But regardless of the dialogism of such 'discursive practice', the emphasis is on the individual utterance of an individual, and not on the retaining of the background noise of the language's diversity and internal dialogism.

In the artistic representation of other people's words (and here Bakhtin thinks primarily of the novel), however, the emphasis is precisely on leaving that powerful mass of social languages making itself heard in the background of each individual utterance. In the novelistic genres, the possibility of another voice, another intention and
ideological position is constantly present and set against the actual voice and its discourse. Language's internal dialogism and the social-historical diversity of languages past and present, changing and coming into being, this is the picture the novel paints (Bakhtin 1996a, 418-22). According to Bakhtin, 'the man who speaks and his words' are the subject of verbal and artistic representation in the novel; that man is always a real social man, historically concrete and specified, and his discourse is a 'social language', and not an 'individual dialect' (1996a, 332-33). We can add to this Bakhtin's insistence that the character in the novel (and not just Dostoevsky's novel) is always to a certain degree an ideologue, his language is a 'specific opinion taking on a social significance'. And even when a character in the novel does not talk much and acts a lot more, his actions are always connected with social discourse, they always originate from a certain ideological position (Ibid.).

Again, the picture that emerges from Bakhtin's various writings on the voices and the languages represented in the novel is a very complex one: the character is an ideologue, his or her actions are fully motivated by the ideas he or she believes in; these ideas are not something which is mechanically grafted onto the character, but are (dialectically) taken up by the whole of their 'personality'; his or her words and ideas enter into dialogical relations with the words and ideas of other characters and those of the author, and, as a result, the character is, much like the human subject, always open to change and never truly finalised; furthermore, behind this interpersonal and intersubjective dialogue, the broader cultural and social dialogue of different social languages takes place and the perpetual buzzing of the human beehive (constantly reporting and interpreting each other's words) can be constantly heard in the background; and all of this enters into a dialogue with the reader, future and present, and with their own dialogic relationship of the heteroglossia in which they live, and their own personal, social and historic point of view with which they approach both life and the literary text before them. It is because of all this, claims Bakhtin, that of all literary genres the novel is the least likely to become a contentless verbal game of aesthetic forms (Bakhtin, 1996a, 333).73

73 Here we have an example of an obvious call for criticism that Bakhtin's texts, illuminating and insightful as they are, sometimes provoke with their categorical theoretical projections. An example of a novel that could be called 'a verbal game of aesthetiscised form' is Miodrag Pavic's Khazar Dictionary, written in that typical baroque, and yet remarkably monotonous, style that is Pavic's trademark, and practically devoid of any social concerns or historical concreteness (although one could claim, if one particularly wanted to, that certain historical awareness can be found on the novel's metaphorical level).
But what is the reason for Kristeva to change Bakhtin’s theory and insights almost beyond recognition, by removing their underlying assumptions of intersubjectivity, social and ethical concerns, verbal and historical responsibilities? Although at the point when she was writing about Bakhtin Kristeva had only recently arrived from the Eastern Bloc and was thus culturally closer to Bakhtin than to her then new French structuralist colleagues, it seems that she was able to absorb the intellectual atmosphere of the 1960s Paris with a remarkable speed, and to know just how to market Bakhtin in such circumstances. And I believe that Dentith is, once again, justified in remarking:

Kristeva’s use of Bakhtin to develop the notion of intertextuality thus provides the occasion for some instructive contrasts between the attitudes of the Russian intellectual and those of his counterparts in the West – or at least Paris in the late 1960s. For the contrast is not so much one of scholarly method or conclusions, as of the whole philosophical, even political attitudes which inform those methods and conclusion. For Kristeva and Barthes, textuality and intertextuality provide opportunities for a peculiar notion of liberation, in which the deadening certainties of bourgeois culture, tying books to authors, words to their singular meanings, subjects to their unitary subjectivities, can be at least momentarily lifted, in favour of the joyful deferments of sense made possible by the endless switching of one code to another... (But for Bakhtin), the unfinishedness which acts as a value in his writing is ultimately historical; it is a window onto the future. The historical process is never finished or completed, and as a result he does not need to imagine a version of liberation which takes you out of the historical process altogether. (Dentith, 1995, 97-98)

Dentith’s conclusion agrees to a large extent with my point about the difference between the French and the Eastern European structuralisms, in that, culturally, Eastern Europeans have a much stronger belief in the vital importance of literature for the life of a nation (even to the point where certain aspects of the national literature inspire and motivate nationalistic movements and tendencies), and, perhaps less alarmingly, for one’s own definition as a human being in a certain historical period. Clearly expressed in Shklovskii’s idea of ostranenie (defamiliarisation), as the method for ‘making the stone stony’, is the belief that literature (and art in general) are there not to take us out
of our world and out of our own skin, but to intensify and clarify the perception and experience of the world and of life itself. This belief is implicitly present in Bakhtin’s own notion of the artistic use of language, which releases us from the practical necessity of speaking in a monological manner, and opens our eyes and ears to the underlying dialogism of language, and with it the diversity and complexity of the world in which we live and of our own lives.

However, although I agree with Dentith’s general statement and with his critique of Kristeva’s use (or distortion) of Bakhtin, I find it more difficult to agree completely with his inclusion of Barthes’ name in this context. Nevertheless, Dentith rightly claims that ‘Kristeva has been very influential, not least on Roland Barthes, whose S/Z is undoubtedly the single most extended, and virtuoso, attempt to locate a piece of writing in the multiple codes that make it up’. The problem is, however, that S/Z is just one of many works written by Barthes that tackle ‘Bakhtinian’ problems, written both before and after Kristeva’s introduction of Bakhtin in France; besides, I believe that even in S/Z Barthes comes closer to the original Bakhtin that to Kristeva’s reading of him.

Connotation and Infinitude in S/Z

As S/Z is one of Barthes’s best known works, its basic premises are quite familiar even to those who have not read the book itself, for it is here that Barthes makes the famous distinction between the lisible (classic realist) and the scriptible (avant-garde) text, and performs the ground-breaking analysis of ‘Sarrasine’, a rather strange and atypical Balzac story.

S/Z begins with a critique of the ambition of the ‘first analysts of narratives’ (presumably, including himself) to view all the stories of the world in a single narrative structure, and so it is often seen as a turning point of Barthes’s thought, a move from structuralism to poststructuralism. However, it needs to be noted that ‘poststructuralism’ was not the term Barthes himself used; the classification of S/Z as post-structuralist came later and the term itself belongs more to Anglo-American theoretical framework. Barthes himself defined the analysis in S/Z as ‘textual’, as opposed to ‘structural’, and several critics have noted the influence of Kristeva’s notion of semanalysis and Derrida’s writing on Barthes’s work in the new phase. Annette Lavers discusses the significance of Derrida and Kristeva’s ‘new theory of signification’ (Lavers, 1982, 169-
75). Claude Coste, too, sees Barthes's move away from 'hard structuralism' and its study of 'immobile figures' towards the opening and the polysemy of textual analysis as connected to the work of Kristeva, and situates it around the year 1968, linking it with 'The Death of the Author' (Coste, 1998, 13). Steven Ungar notes (1983, xii) that 'S/Z and The Pleasure of the Text were read as denials of the formalist project Barthes had promoted in the name of structural analysis during the previous decade', and he argues that 'when Barthes returns to the study of narrative in S/Z some two to three years after the 'Introduction', his notion of structural analysis will have evolved to accommodate a non-scientific approach that asserts the mobile structuration of meaning in the text' (1983, 41).

However, as Jonathan Culler points out, the break with the structuralist model is not as radical as is often claimed, since many of the basic structuralist assumptions still inform the theory behind the analysis of 'Sarrasine' (Culler, 1990, 87-90). Talking of the opening paragraphs of S/Z, George Wasserman notes (1981, 79) that Barthes still defines literary structure as 'a general model that reflects the common features of a specific class of individual texts', and says that for Barthes the real task now becomes the analysis of the ways in which a text differs from itself, these differences being created in the reader's perception through repeated reading.74 Lavers notes that 'to a layman, a work like S/Z still looks forbiddingly 'structuralist' and sufficiently remote from traditional ways of tackling a text to make the break imperceptible'(Lavers, 1982, 26), but she argues for a different kind of continuity from the one which links S/Z to structuralism:

It is a mistake to view the themes of this period as entirely new, not, however, on the grounds of a structuralist hegemony but, on the contrary, because the third period often involves a return to some of Barthes's basic attitudes, visible in his first phase before the great scientific dream took complete hold. (Lavers, 1982, 27)

Moreover, Lavers maintains that 'Barthes never really was a structuralist in the field of literary analysis. In deprecating those who account for all the world's stories by a single structure,... he did not include himself among them’ (Lavers, 1982, 175). This view would be quite difficult to maintain, and Lavers immediately contradicts herself by

74 Wasserman also says that this critical theory of rereading is 'an essentially revolutionary activity' – surely not.
saying that 'he had made a major contribution to the elaboration of a machinery for the study of those larger units of discourse which are obviously relevant to literature', and that by the time he came to write S/Z, 'his reputation as a semiologist-in-chief was so well established that those who had interpreted S/Z as part of the same attempt were quite mystified by an apparently sudden conversion to something he called 'textual analysis', a practice said to be the exact opposite of structural analysis' (Ibid.). The difference between the textual and structural analysis is defined by Lavers as follows:

Where structural analysis hoped to extract a universal scheme for narrative from such a corpus, textual analysis seeks to 'infinitize' a single text by treating each of its elements as a point of departure for an infinite 'drift' of meanings. (Lavers, 1982, 177)

Still, she notes that 'in practice this distinction is not so clear-cut', as 'structural analyses often bear on a single text' referring to the different meanings produced by the text (Ibid.).

Even Michael Moriarty, who claims that Barthes's reading in S/Z departs substantially from the assumptions and methodology of structuralism', nevertheless says that 'the text is still conceived as structured' and that 'meaning is not intrinsic to individual elements, but is still a function of correlation: this fundamental structuralist assumption is preserved'(Moriarty, 1991, 120).

Moriarty sees Barthes's departure from the structuralist theory and methodology in that, firstly, the text and its meaning are not seen as completely autonomous, but are a product of correlations with elements both within and outside of the text itself; secondly, these correlations are determined by the 'codes' of the text, which themselves are not closed structures, but 'perspectives opened up by the text'; and thirdly, in abandoning the idea of the integration of different textual levels into a single unity of structure (Ibid.). In the context of French structuralism, all of these points are perfectly justified, and S/Z can indeed be seen as a departure from the structuralist model. However, seen from the Russian and Eastern European side of affairs, the three points are part of the mainstream structuralist project. In the 1920s, Jakobson and Tynianov claimed that the study of the literary text in isolation from the literary and broader cultural (even social) 'series' is an 'impossibility', and can only lead to a miscomprehension of the structure of the literary text. Iurii Lotman later repeated this observation, by saying that 'the entire sum of historically determined artistic codes
which make a text meaningful is related to the sphere of extra-textual relations’ (Lotman, 1977, 50). In Bakhtin’s theory, none of the social languages are ever ‘finalised’, as they are constantly turned not just to the past but also towards the future, and thus always open to change. And as for the levels of the literary text which, according to Barthes of the ‘Introduction à l’analyse structurale des récits’, only contribute to the creation of meaning in a literary text through ‘their capacity to be integrated into a higher level’ (Moriarty, 1991, 120), this concept takes on a completely different meaning in Lotman’s theory of the literary text’s hierarchy and its different levels. According to Lotman, the very complexity of the literary text’s structure (and with it the possibility of diverse interpretations) is founded on the elements’ ability to take on different functions depending on the level at which they are being perceived, and to create diverse configurations of meaning, depending on which of the levels are taken into account (Lotman, 1977, 20-25). After all, Lotman claimed that ‘differences in the interpretation of works of art are common and, despite general opinion, do not arise from attendant and easily obviated causes, but rather are organic to art’ (Lotman, 1977, 24).

Thus, if seen from the point of view of late Russian Formalism and Soviet Semiotics, S/Z is almost a model of structuralist analysis. At the same time, as we have seen in Chapter 1, all the assumptions about the text’s ability to produce multiple secondary meanings are already there in Barthes’s ‘high structuralist’ phase (say, in Sur Racine), and are even hinted at at the end of ‘Introduction à l’analyse structurale des récits’.

The five codes Barthes uses to reveal the structuring forces in ‘Sarrasine’ are a neat mixture of both literary and extra-literary codes, cultural and social ones. These are not, however, according to Barthes, the same codes which would be relevant for all literary texts, and the list proposed need not be exhaustive: these are simply the codes which are seen as appropriate for the analysis of this particular text (Barthes, 1970d, 567-68).

Two of the codes can be seen as belonging to a more conventional narratology (by Western standards), as they refer to the construction of the plot and its presentation in the text. The *hermeneutic* code is made up of the textual elements which constitute and solve an enigma (which in ‘Sarrasine’ is: who is the old man?, or elsewhere: who killed all those people on the Orient Express?), while the *proairetic* code is, as Moriarty puts it, ‘the code of actions, organised into sequences (kidnapping, assassinations), by
the logic of reading (the déja-lu) as much as by the logic of life (the déja-fait)’ (Moriarty, 1991, 122).

The semic code is ‘that of the connotative signified’, ‘of the concept evoked by a given sign’ (Moriarty, 1991, 121); it enables the reader to recognise the references to, for example, social status or gender (for example, in the opening sentence of Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment, Raskolnikov is first seen leaving ‘his little room at the top of the house in Carpenter Lane’ – the small room at the top of a house in St. Petersburg denoting (or connoting) poverty, even misery, as small rooms on tops of houses in Paris often do in Balzac as well). The cultural or referential code consists of references to popular wisdom or (often vulgarised) science (popular psychology for example); the statements such as ‘Women are weak and faint often, while men are strong and never faint’ would belong to the cultural code. The symbolic code operates the processes of ‘transformation and substitution’ (Moriarty, 1991, 121; Barthes, 1970d, 567), which create symbolic relations between the elements; this code is responsible, for example, for establishing the antithesis between the garden and the salon as the symbols of death and life in the opening paragraphs of ‘Sarrasine’ (Barthes, 1970d, 568).

These codes, as we can see, are not all purely literary in a traditional sense (the cultural code, for example, comes from a larger cultural space than literature itself), although Barthes himself talks of the code as being ‘une perspective de citations, un mirage de structures’, ‘renvoyant à ce qui a été écrit, c’est-à-dire au Livre (de la culture, de la vie, de la vie comme culture), il fait du texte le prospectus de ce Livre’ (Barthes 1970d, 568). However, especially in the light of what Bakhtin had to say about these matters, I believe that it is better and more productive to assume that the word ‘Livre’ here is to be taken metaphorically (the capital letter would, at any rate, point to that), in the same way that it is sometimes said that ‘the whole world is a stage’, rather than insist on the literality of having to take into account only what has previously been written. After all, there have been and there are still many societies whose cultural existence depends on the oral tradition, and yet their own cultural code, although maybe different in content, functions and influences their verbal art in ways not completely dissimilar from those of literate societies.

Furthermore, as Clayton says, Barthes often gives the impression that he refuses the notion of referentiality outside of the ‘intertextual network’ (Clayton, 1991, 52), it is difficult to see how his notion of the code as something based on the ‘dèjà lu, vu, fait, vécu’ can be sublimated under the notion of ‘textuality’ alone. Wasserman asserts that
‘our sense of the real is strongly literary, and we expect this literary version of the real to be reinforced…. In other words, the world has become a sort of a book for us, and every subsequent attempt to refer to the world is in fact a reference to the books that have already coalesced around it’ (Wasserman, 1981, 83). But who are ‘we’, and is the world really a book for us? Our sense of the real may be mediated through the culture to which we belong and the language which we speak, but it would be an exaggeration to claim that it is literature alone which guides us; what about films, television, political discourse, cultural framework in a larger sense? When Clayton and Rothstein claim that, according to Barthes, ‘Balzacian realism is effective … because of its continuous reference to anonymous textual codes that are always already read’ (Clayton and Rothstein, 22), I believe that they take too seriously something that Barthes must have meant metaphorically, or otherwise he was wrong. If you replace ‘textual codes’ with ‘cultural codes’ and put the ‘read’ in ‘already read’ in quotation marks, the sentence, and the notion expressed in it, start making more sense. Robert Scholes present things in a more useful way when he says that ‘for Barthes, there is no such thing as a pure context. All contexts come… already coded, shaped, and organised by language, and often shaped in patently silly ways. The great error of the ‘realist’ in literature or in criticism is to assume that he is in touch with some ultimate context, while in reality he is simply transcribing a code’ (Scholes, 1974, 150). Scholes adds that ‘Barthes, going to the cultural codes explicitly, finds meanings that are cultural, collective, almost involuntary as far as the reader is concerned’(Scholes, 1974, 162). Literature and ‘textuality’ are just one of the aspects of culture and society, not the unique sites of their existence.

Together, the five codes establish the plurality of ‘Sarrasine’, and Barthes insists that there is no hierarchy between them (S/Z, 23). However, as Lavers says, one still gets the impression that ‘the symbolic code is more equal than the others’ (Lavers, 1982, 201). It is the symbolic code which determines the great ‘themes’ of the work: life and death, sex, gender, castration.

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75 Wassermann links this to Kristeva’s notion of ‘intertextuality’ as a mosaic of citations, and puts an equal sign between her concept of the text and Barthes’s concept of the code (84-5).

76 Philip Thody (1977, 116) objects that Barthes does not even seem to consider the main implication of his own remark that ‘the meaning of a text can be nothing but the plurality of its systems, its infinite (circular) transcribability’: that to provide only five codes for an infinitely meaningful text is a shade miserly. He seems to miss the point that ‘Sarrasine’ is not an example of the scriptible, but of a simply plural text.
The plurality of 'Sarrasine', according to Barthes, is of a limited kind, based and dependent on connotation, on the closure of the Western culture and its signifying system; classic realist texts (the lisible, of which 'Sarrasine' is an atypical example) operate within that closure, although their (limited) plurality can vary (Barthes, 1970d, 559-60). It is through the act of interpretation which does not 'make sense' of a text, but determines the extent of its plurality, that the 'readable' texts can be further differentiated (Barthes, 1970d, 558-9). This limited plurality is not what Barthes finds desirable, however, as he posits as his value the absolutely plural, scriptible text, that which would be based on the infinite play of the world and on the infinitude of languages themselves. The 'would' here is crucial, as such a text is still to be written:

Le scriptible, c'est le romanesque sans le roman, la poésie sans le poème, l'essai sans la dissertation, l'écriture sans le style, la production sans le produit, la structuration sans la structure. Mais les textes lisibles? Ce sont des produits (et non des productions), ils forment la masse énorme de notre littérature. (Ibid.)

The description of the scriptible text is to a large extent a kind of a Utopian literary manifesto: this is what we do not yet have, but wish would one day be created, and we shall strive towards it; that much is clear. As Wasserman (1981, 81) puts it, 'the writerly, then, like the zero-degree of 'writing', is an unrealisable ideal, experienced in reading only fleetingly or perhaps accidentally'. It rests on Derrida's notion of infinitude, which Barthes mentioned in 'L'analyse structurale du récit' (1970a). According to Barthes, Derrida posits that all writing refers to and springs from other writing without the final signified, and thus signs can be multiplied indefinitely (Barthes, 1970a, 856).77 This is similar to Bakhtin's late assertion about 'semantic depths, which are as bottomless as the depths of matter', and about the 'infinite diversity of interpretations, images, figurative semantic combinations, materials and their interpretations' (Bakhtin 1999a, 140), except that Bakhtin's assertion lacks the implication of non-referentiality contained in Barthes's Derridian notion. However, Bakhtin still retains a strong sense that the cultural and social context, even in their open-endedness, matter very much for all kinds of discourse, including literary texts. For both Bakhtin and Lotman, the time and place in which the literary text is written

77 See also: Derrida, 1970.
and read provide specific contexts for interpretation and analysis. And although these contexts and interpretations can change quite radically throughout human history, ‘infinitude’ is there more as a metaphor for the vastness of the logosphere, than as a concrete principle which should guide literary analysis.

Lavers rightly notes that ‘what is most striking in S/Z is the ‘structuration’ part, since literary studies had until then always stressed the structure’ (Lavers, 1982, 199). And yet she asks: ‘Can a structuration not produce a structure?’ (Lavers, 1982, 201) The problem lies in the question of how truly equal and un-hierarchical the codes are, and she notes that ‘the way in which he deals with [the codes]... shows a progression from the two codes in which the arrow of time cannot be stopped or reversed – the code of actions and that of riddles – towards those which deal with truth about the world and the person, leaving no question that the symbolic code is more equal than the others’ (Ibid.). Bearing in mind that ‘Sarrasine’ is not a scriptible text, but a text which has been submitted to a textual analysis designed to bring out its signifying plurality, the reading of it we get is still centred around the great themes offered by the symbolic code: life and death, sex and gender, art, and castration. In insisting on the equality of the codes, Barthes tries to emulate the two-dimensional nature (or shallowness) of Kristeva’s notion of ‘textual surfaces’, but the fact that the codes nevertheless arrange themselves in a hierarchical manner adds the third dimension to his theory; speaking only half-metaphorically, it gives it a depth.

What could be seen as genuinely new in S/Z is precisely the fact that it does not look at the intertextuality of the Balzac story on a purely literary basis, but takes into account all those unconscious, collective assumptions we bring into the reading of a literary text. How do we recognise social status? How do we see women? How do we follow a story? In this questioning of what we take for granted, Barthes, as Lavers has noted, goes back to his old interests and ‘basic attitudes’. S/Z can be seen as the continuation of Barthes’s exploration of the assumptions that guide the daily lives of the French in Mythologies to literary studies.

Regardless of how we decide to solve the problem of the scriptible and its usefulness or validity as a theoretical notion, it is the insights and the subtlety of the literary analysis in S/Z that really matter from the critical point of view; the literary manifesto of the scriptible should remain what it was probably intended to be: a beautiful and inspirational dream.
Vague as Kristeva’s notion of ‘intertextuality’ was, the term itself sounded far too useful not to be employed further, and, indeed, it was soon taken up in reference to what literary scholars had been doing for quite a while: comparing texts with other texts and with their contexts (however broadly understood).

Laurent Jenny in his essay ‘La stratégie de la forme’ (1976) brought the debate back to where one of its origins lay, quoting Tynianov and his work on literary parody and literary system in general (Jenny, 1976, 261). He also connected the theme of intertextuality with Lotman’s notion of literature as a secondary language, defining it as an ‘intertextual field of reference’ (Jenny, 1976, 257). The literary work, he repeated after Tynianov, is unthinkable outside the literary system, which presupposes a literary competence on the part of the reader. Furthermore, Jenny noted that intertextuality can be implicit and explicit, i.e., due either to the usage of a shared code or of the very matter of the text (Jenny, 1976, 257). Apart from being formal, intertextuality can also be linked to the content of literary works (as in parody) (Ibid.). Nevertheless, Jenny notes that it is sometimes difficult to tell whether a text’s intertextual relations with another text are direct or indirect (i.e. mediated through a shared code), because, as Lotman puts it, in the secondary language of literature the notions of message and code are interchangeable, and sometimes the choice of the code is the most important part of the message. Thus, the analyst has to be careful when it comes to establishing links between texts - two texts might not be directly ‘related’ but could simply be sharing the same code (Jenny, 1976, 279). Jenny also maintains, contrary to Kristeva, that the proper study of intertextuality cannot neglect the study of sources (1976, 262), and that the notion of the central text or of archetypal models of literature which other texts realise, transform or transgress, and against which they are defined, is very useful in literary studies (1976, 257).

Jonathan Culler took up Jenny’s article in the ‘Presupposition and Intertextuality’ chapter of his book The Pursuit of Signs, and claimed that ‘intertextuality’ has a double focus:

78 Jonathan Culler also proposed a model of literary competence (1975, 113-30).
On the one hand, it calls our attention to the importance of prior texts, insisting that the autonomy of texts is a misleading notion and that a work has the meaning it does only because certain things have previously been written. Yet in so far as it focuses on intelligibility, on meaning, ‘intertextuality’ leads us to consider prior texts as contributions to a code which makes possible the various effects of signification. (Culler, 1981, 101-18)

The notion of intelligibility takes Culler back to Kristeva’s and Barthes’s notions of intertextuality, defining it as ‘the sum of knowledge that makes it possible for texts to have meaning’, that is ‘everything that enables one to recognise pattern and meaning in texts’ (Culler, 1981, 104). Culler notes that in comparison to ‘Barthesian space of infinite and anonymous citations’ (1981, 108), Harold Bloom’s notion of intertextuality as a relation ‘between a text and a particular precursor text, between a poet and his major predecessor’ (1981, 107) can be positively more tempting, because it is so much better defined. ‘Theories of intertextuality’, notes Culler, ‘set before us perspectives of unmasterable series, lost origins, endless horizons’ (1981, 111).

No wonder, then, that each critic has to redefine the term to suit their own purposes, often limiting the meaning that Kristeva gave it, and establishing intertextuality as the notion which helps us anchor the meaning of a text, rather than disseminate it.

Virgil Nenoranu, for example, having defined intertextuality as ‘interaction and interplay’ (1992, 3) suggests that ‘religious intertextuality provides the kind of historical and specific referentiality that literary works need in order to preserve their own autonomy and dignity’ (1992, 13-14). He claims that religion provides us with a reliable context for literature, and that comparative religion should serve as a basis for comparative literature (Ibid.).

In an essay on the problems of editing Old English, A. N. Doane uses intertextuality ‘to mean the editor’s ability to refer outside a given text as it appears in a manuscript to two intertextual resources: a primary text or ‘hypertext’ constructed from a wide variety of Old English sources as a concordance; and a secondary intertext consisting of all previous editorial conjunctures about a given text’. Thus, ‘intertextuality bestows upon the editor the ability to make selections of variant
readings’ where the actual manuscript tradition of particular texts provides no basis for such choice, where there are, in fact, no variants’ (Doane, 1991, 76).

On the other end of the spectrum, employing a broader notion of intertextuality, Susan Stewart defines as ‘intertextual’ the relationship between the domains of common sense and nonsense, specifying that it ‘varies according to situation; to members’ biographical situations, to the traditional stock of knowledge at hand, and to the ‘larger situation’, the ongoing concept of society in general’. The nature of the relationship between the domains is ‘determined by the interpretative work of members in an ongoing social process’ (Stewart, 1978, 16).

Still, there is a problem that no one who uses the term in a specific context can escape: that of the limits within which a particular intertextual net is cast. Jay Clayton notes that ‘the intertextual network is ‘open’ in a way that the relation of influence is not’. According to Clayton (1991, 50), ‘influence is unidirectional, flowing from an earlier to a later author, whereas intertextuality establishes a flexible relation among texts’. He locates the ‘direction’ of the relation in the reader, ‘shaped by individual interests and experiences’, ‘conscious and unconscious desires, literary training, religious background, nativity, familiarity with popular culture, class, gender, race, the accidents of everyday life, world-historical events – these are some of the variables that determine the connections the intertextual reader draws among texts’ (Ibid.). Some of these points of reference, as we can see, are not purely ‘textual’ but point out to the wider world of what he calls ‘external reference’. Clayton notes that ‘most theories of intertextuality… dismiss the importance of external reference… Barthes, too, denies the possibility of reference to a reality beyond the intertextual network’ (Clayton, 1991, 52). Clayton claims that ‘these visions of literature’ not only ‘stand at odds with many writers’ sense that they are responding to a world outside of textuality’, but also are ‘not susceptible to empirical verification’ (1991, 53). This brings us again to the problem of Kristeva’s initial definition: for her, everything is ‘textuality’, while Bakhtin’s notion of heteroglossia and dialogism can be said to represent extra-linguistic reality: they represent, for example, the contradictions and conflicts in a society. Bakhtin does not pretend, though, that society can thus be turned into a text, or into a linguistic or even trans-linguistic system. Intertextuality can be a useful concept, as long as it does not pretend to provide answers to all questions of how a literary text creates its meaning for us, or of how we create its meanings for it; which, I believe, is what Kristeva wants to
claim for her concept of intertextuality, by enlarging the notion of the ‘text’ to such gigantic proportions.

Still, if we are aware of its limitations, I believe that the term is of great use, either as a general term describing any type of relation between texts or as a more narrowly defined Barthesian type of ‘relationship between a text and the various languages or signifying practices of a culture and its relation to those texts which articulate for it the possibilities of that culture’ (Culler, 1981, 103).

David Cowart demonstrates this quite well when he takes on the notion and the term in his book *Literary Symbiosis: The Reconfigured Text in Twentieth-Century Writing* (1993). Although he notes that the notion of ‘intertextuality’ is not new, still, according to him, ‘contemporary writers engage in a kind of ‘epistemic dialogue with the past, meanwhile forcing readers into a recognition of the historical or diachronic differences between the voice of one literary age and another’ (Cowart, 1993, 1). He terms this contemporary form of ‘intertextuality’ ‘literary symbiosis’, defining a ‘symbiotic’ work as ‘a special type of literary work that attaches itself remora-like to its source in seemingly parasitic dependence’ (Ibid.). For Cowart, literary symbiosis is a type of ‘intertextuality’, but he nevertheless notes that Kristeva, Barthes and Genette (in his *Palimpsests*) all ‘refer by this term to the way linguistic usage – in literature or otherwise – constantly echoes prior linguistic usage’ (1993, 3).79 This type of ‘routine intertextuality’, which consists of the ‘weave implied etymologically in the word text’, according to Cowart, ‘requires a fine Barthesian instrument to be seen’ (1993, 7). Other types of relations between texts are more obvious and more robust, and Cowart suggests six basic types within his ‘symbiotic spectrum’: translation (either from language to language or from one genre to another), symbiotic texts proper (characters and actions appropriated and reshaped, epistemic dialogue, deconstruction), texts incorporating extensive parts of other texts, allusion, ordinary intertextuality, and the rather mythical self-begotten texts (Cowart, 1993, ch. 1) As we can see, Cowart uses intertextuality to refer to the broad relation that literature has with ‘prior linguistic usage’ (ordinary or routine intertextuality), while at the same time recognising that any particular type of relation between texts has to be dealt with in a more refined and specific manner. The interesting thing is that, in Cowart’s theory, intertextuality as defined by Kristeva becomes a particular type of relation that a text has with ‘prior linguistic usage’,

79 A brief discussion of Genette can be found pp. 3-5.
excluding better defined types of relations between literary texts, while at the same time retaining its 'extremely broad' (Cowart, 1993, 16) meaning, covering every type of relation in his 'symbiotic spectrum' (apart from the self-begotten text). Which brings us to an earlier point: having been born with this broadness of meaning, 'intertextuality' will have to be, as a term, constantly redefined, and, as a notion, refined and startified, with each new usage.

**Division of Languages**

And yet, not everything was 'unmasterable series, lost origins, endless horizons' for Roland Barthes, as we can see in his own version of the concept of heteroglossia. In 1973 Barthes wrote an article entitled 'La division des langages', opening it with the question: is our (that is, French) culture divided? His immediate answer was negative, on the grounds that everyone in France was (and is) capable of understanding a television programme or an article in France-Soir. What is more, everybody, apart from a small group of intellectuals, consumes these cultural products, and from that point of view France is as homogenous and 'cemented' as a 'small ethnographical society' (Barthes, 1973a, 1599).

However, Barthes immediately made a distinction: although consumption is general and collective, production is not; and although everyone understands the same cultural language, languages that they speak are different. This primarily manifests itself on the level of taste, which remains divided and varied between individuals and in the society in general: some people love classical music and some crave boulevard comedies; very often, one love starts where the other ends, and there is no 'continuum of taste' across the culture. Thus, Barthes postulates a distinction between the collective language of cultural understanding and consumption, and the language of active cultural participation, or the language of desire (Ibid.). According to Barthes, it is the language of desire which remains irreducibly and inescapably divided, posing a problem of scientific description and artistic representation of this division.

Where artistic representation is concerned, Barthes says that the novel, at least since it became realist, has certainly found it necessary to represent different collective
languages of different social groups. However, most realist prose represents these languages as if in a frame, closed, and more often than not as spoken only by secondary characters, whereas the main heroes would continue to speak an atemporal, transparent and neutral language which would serve as a signal for their universal humanity (Barthes, 1973a, 1600). Barthes quotes Balzac’s novels as perfect examples of this type of verbal mimesis: whenever Balzac represents social languages he presents them as a piece of social folklore, as verbal caricatures. However, Barthes suggests that there is another, more interesting type of social-verbal mimesis in Balzac’s texts, and that is the representation of the codes of popular opinion (the cultural code of S/Z) which are often present even in Balzac’s authorial comments to his narratives, as well as in the voices of his characters, although Balzac himself rarely seems to be aware of the true ideological nature of those comments (Ibid.). Flaubert, according to Barthes, cannot be charged with suspicions for this kind of naivety (or, adds Barthes, vulgarity), for in his writing and in the voices of his characters are present not only the linguistic quirks of different social groups, but also the moral and ideological values that are intrinsic to those social languages. At the same time, Flaubert’s own authorial position amongst these languages and the subtle value judgements expressed by them can never clearly be determined. Flaubert never appears to place himself definitively outside of those languages, so that whenever he speaks the language of the bourgeoisie it is difficult to say from what position he is speaking: ironic, critical, distant? Barthes claims that this is precisely the point through which Flaubert so closely approaches modernity: the awareness that language is a space which has no exterior. In Proust’s writing, however, the rich and varied verbal mimesis in his novels still looks at all the languages it represents from the outside. Idiolects, languages of social groups, various types of verbal ‘contamination’ of one language by another are framed, and the authorial (or narrative) voice remains outside it. And although the division of languages is represented with a clarity which can only be envied by sociolinguistics, the description does not involve the language of the describer (Barthes, 1973a, 1601). Using a scientific metaphor taken from Einstein’s theory of relativity (which, incidentally, or perhaps not so incidentally, was used as a methodological metaphor by Bakhtin as well) (Bakhtin, 1996a, 84), Barthes says of Proust that his observer of these social languages fails to reveal his own position in the
observation, and 'the division of languages stops at the one who describes it' (Barthes, 1973a, 1601). And so, when, for example, Françoise speaks, nobody in the book responds to her words, and (here Barthes uses the term which does indeed sound suspiciously Bakhtinian) the observed language remains monologic, and these different languages are seen as little else than idiolects, and not as parts of a 'total and complex system of the production of languages' (Barthes, 1973a, 1602).

But what is the nature of this division of languages? Barthes claims that languages are divided along the class lines, and, as he puts it, the division of labour engenders the division of vocabularies. However, this division is not so much on the level of the national language (langue), which is, as we have seen, shared and understood by all as the language of mass culture, but on the level of discourse; in other words, there exists a complete lack of curiosity for the other which prevents different social classes from speaking to each other. Everybody in French society, says Barthes, sticks to their own kind and their own professional and class language with a neurotic persistency. Barthes claims that, regardless of the fact that division of languages is not just a simple reflection of the division of labour but is much more complex than that (although he does not qualify precisely in what ways), France, compared to other countries which are not necessarily more democratic, has a strong awareness of identity and 'proprietariness' in relation to language. Thus, the language of the other is often seen only as a 'jargon', a caricature, and the closed language of the other is often perceived with mocking irony, and not simply as another language (Barthes, 1973a, 1602-3).

So how should this division of languages be described scientifically?

Barthes claims that sociolinguistics has failed to realise the full importance of the division of languages, and that it continued to look at different languages purely empirically ('languages are divided so let us describe them'), rather than as a sign of deeper social divisions, and a result of historical and cultural circumstances. Linguistics itself only looks at vocabularies of different historical epochs, but is not interested in social languages. However, what is the main fault with these scientific descriptions, even when they do take into account the division of languages as a social and verbal fact, is that they are, as Barthes put it, still at their Newtonian phase, and have yet to undergo their own Einsteinian revolution. The only way forward that Barthes can see for a linguistic description of the division of languages is to take the verbal and social
position of the observer into account when describing verbal diversity (Barthes, 1973a, 1604).

The obvious question is: why should that be necessary? And Barthes’s answer is precisely that since sociolects (social languages) are spaces with no exterior, there is no way of approaching them from without. The only way for an analyst to preserve the scientificity of his approach is to declare openly the verbal and ideological space from which his own utterance and analysis comes. In other words, as an analyst will always speak in a certain sociolect and approach the division of languages from the ideological position expressed and represented by that sociolect, he must not assume a false position of disinterestedness and pretend that the language he speaks is a metalanguage. And this, according to Barthes, means that an analysis will always have to start with a political and ideological evaluation of the social languages under consideration. A (necessarily false) assumption of non-differentiation and equality between different social languages would only disguise the fact that there exist a conflict and a contradiction in the social body, as well as deny the ‘fracture of the knowing subject’ (‘la fracture du sujet savant’), its implication in that conflict and contradiction (Barthes, 1973a, 1605).

Thus, as Barthes stresses, no scientific description of social languages can start without a founding political evaluation. The political evaluation Barthes himself proposes divides social languages into two groups: the languages in or inside of power (or in the shade of power) and the languages outside of or without power. Following Aristotle’s division of logical proofs between those that are interior to an art and those that are exterior to it, Barthes refers to the languages inside of power as encratic (encratique) and those outside of power as acratic (acratique).

As we have seen in Barthes’s analysis of the French bourgeois ideology (whose language is undoubtedly an encratic one) in Mythologies, the discourse in power rarely manifests itself directly and obviously; as Barthes notes, only a tyrant will openly declare: ‘the King orders that...’. The example Barthes uses of this is the power of the law, which is mediated through a whole juridical culture, whose ratio is accepted by almost everybody (Ibid.). And we have seen in Mythologies that the ruling ideology and its language can very easily and imperceptibly seep into all aspects of everyday life, even when they seem to have nothing to do with politics and ideology (like children’s toys, for example – Barthes showed that they are often designed to turn children into good little bourgeois consumers with fixed perceptions of social and gender roles).
On the other hand, the acratic discourse does not necessarily have to declare itself against power, or have anything to do with a political or ideological critique of the social order; it is sometimes enough that it goes against the commonly accepted views or current opinions. Using Aristotle’s terminology again, Barthes suggest that his term doxa (general opinion or belief, as opposed to truth) should be redefined as ‘a cultural (or discursive) mediation through which power (or non-power) speaks’ (Barthes, 1973a, 1606). The inclusion of non-power here seems confusing, until we remind ourselves of the one of main points put forward in *Mythologies*: that the power of bourgeois ideology rests precisely in its ability to penetrate into everyday life and speech, and enter the language of those who are essentially alien to and remote from the true sources of bourgeois power. As Barthes put it, the great triumph of bourgeois ideology comes at the point when a typist on a meagre salary recognises herself (Barthes does not say: her own dreams or aspirations, but herself) in a lavish bourgeois wedding (Barthes, 1957, 704): when the difference between one’s actual social standing and one’s beliefs and allegiances is not perceived as an absurdity and a contradiction, but as an expression of eternal human nature, which is, naturally, a bourgeois one (lavish weddings being a part of that human nature).

In this context, Barthes offers his second definition of the encratic discourse, as one which conforms itself to doxa (to the culture and the system of belief belonging to the ruling ideology), while the acratic discourse is redefined through its opposition to it (and thus becomes, in Barthes’s terms, para-doxal) (Barthes, 1973a, 1606). Thus one can say about, for example, psychoanalytic discourse, which is not in any way directly related to the critique of power or bourgeois ideology (at least, Barthes adds, in France), that it is an acratic discourse, precisely because it goes against what the doxa has to say about ‘human nature’ (Barthes, 1973a, 1605). And it is here that Barthes stresses again the ‘osmotic’ nature of doxa, the omni-presence of the ruling ideology which was one of the main topics of *Mythologies*: doxa is a diffused discourse, present in all social rituals and common beliefs, in the whole of the ‘socio-symbolic sphere’ (Barthes, 1973a, 1606). What is more, it refuses to admit to its own ideological nature, but instead presents itself as Nature, as common sense, universality, clarity, and an opposition to a systemic understanding (and, naturally, ‘impoverishing’) of the world offered by such (acratic, paradoxal) discourses as psychoanalysis, structuralism or Marxism. Further still, doxa is a ‘full’ discourse, it contains no room for another, for anything that does not belong to it; thus its ideological and verbal body has a tendency to pervade all
aspects of life, language, and society, leaving no room for anything foreign or opposed to it. It is an 'unmarked' discourse, present everywhere yet difficult to pin down. To paraphrase a comment Barthes made in his essay ‘Grammaire africaine’(1957, 647-51) (‘pour le gens de droite, la Politique, c’est la Gauche : eux, c’est la France’), according to the logic of doxa, it is the others who are ideological, doxa herself is nothing but a voice of Nature and common sense.

Barthes claims that it is the acratic discourse which is easier and more interesting to study, as these languages find themselves outside of doxa, rejected by it under the name of jargons; encratic discourse itself, on the other hand, is predictable, and in analysing it one can almost know in advance what one will find. The challenge of acratic discourses, however, lies in the fact that they ordinarily belong to the very intellectuals who would undertake that kind of ideological analysis, to structuralists, Marxists, psychoanalysts and social scientists themselves; and thus the need to include the observer in the observation acutely presents itself. Doxa, the discourse in power, never undertakes that kind of introspective analysis of its own workings (and, if we follow its own logic, why would it?); but for acratic discourse’s analysis of acratic discourse, the necessity for an Einsteinian revolution is obvious.

But what is the relationship between doxa and paradoxos, between encratic and acratic languages? Going back to Aristotle again, Barthes says that for him the art of rhetoric was about persuasion; in the times which cultivated it, discourse would openly display its power, and an encratic discourse could openly declare itself as its intention was to persuade or to win over, and not to present itself as the Voice of Nature. Once doxa starts to pretend that its own language is perfectly transparent and ‘natural’, the study of its rhetoric becomes implicitly forbidden or ‘forgotten’: for, how can one study the rhetorical functioning of something which is not trying to persuade anybody, but is, plain and simple, the voice of reason and nature? (Barthes, 1973a, 1607).

However, instead of the rhetoric of persuasion, says Barthes, modern discourses in democratic societies, both acratic and encratic, function according to the logic of intimidation. Sociolects offer a sense of security and belonging to those who speak them; to adopt a sociolect means at the same time to be adopted by a social group which speaks it; those who do not speak the same language are rejected and intimidated. There is, however, a difference between encratic and acratic discourses in the methods of intimidation. Encratic discourses, with their sprawling omnipresence, tend to oppress others; acratic discourses, on the other hand, with their subjection to the discourse in
power, use the methods of open confrontation and force – they can do nothing but rebel and openly intimidate the other. Barthes claims that this difference stems, yet again, from the relationship these two types of discourse have with systematic thought: enkratic discourse prefers to befog its own systemic nature, allegedly putting ‘lived experience’ (as it, ‘unthinkingly’, sees and defines it) before any kind of system; acratic discourse, on the other hand, bases its ‘violence’ on an openly declared system of thought. Thus the relationship between these two discursive systems (for, to stress it once again, there is no doubt in Barthes’s mind that doxa, for all its protestations, is as much of an ideological system as is, for example, Marxism) can be defined through the opposition of the hidden and the patent (Ibid.). Doxa, omnipresent yet invisible, quietly oppresses; paradoxoa, pushed out to the margins, openly and aggressively declares its opposition and rejection of it.

No wonder, then, that, according to Barthes, there is no dialogue among the different sociolects and social groups in the French society. However, as Barthes put it in another paper of the same year (1973b), it is not so much the division of languages that is the problem. According to Barthes, division itself is the function of language’s natural tendency to produce synonyms: once there is more than one way of saying pretty much the same thing (allowing for the slight differences in the nuances of meaning which can always be detected amongst synonyms), these different ways will be used in different contexts, with different intentions and/or by different social groups. We have already seen that Bakhtin also believed that the division of languages in a society is something of a ‘natural phenomenon’, albeit not as the result of synonymy but as a perfectly logical consequence of the divisions in the society itself, not just into different social, ideological, religious and ethnic groups, but also simply between different individuals with different life-experiences and world-views. This for Bakhtin does not pose any other problem than the problem of the full realisation of this unavoidable fact and its adequate artistic representation; Barthes, on the other hand, claimed that the division of languages in the French society had taken a nasty turn towards conflict, and that simple difference had become a war of languages (hence the title of the paper, ‘La guerre des languages’). Furthermore, Barthes claims that each of the acratic discourses intimidates not just those who do not belong to it, but also those who do, by committing

82 However, Andrew Brown argues that, if there is to be a state of war between languages, they must communicate ‘as enemies locked in conflict’ (1992, 212).
them to use certain standard phrases and stereotypes, systemic figures and types of representation.

It is worth noting that several critics have noted that there is a problem in Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, precisely in that he does not recognise the acuteness of the social conflict which lies or may lie behind the stratification of different social languages.

Aaron Fogel, in his 1989 essay ‘Coerced Speech and the Oedipus Dialogue Complex’, says that ‘revelatory and intimate I-Thou conversation, of the kind the greatest characters in Austen, Eliot, Lawrence, and Forster reach toward, does usually occur between those who belong to a high, even an ideal, spiritual class, who can master difficult rules... They are the ‘winners’ in the conversational scene: an elite of sympathetic imagination, who can even overcome the flaws and limits in conventional ideas of “sympathy”.’ Below them is the ‘natural’ speech of ‘ordinary people’. And yet, notes Fogel, ‘novelistic dialogue... doesn’t begin and end with free, natural lower-class speech and freely achieved upper-class mutual sympathy. Most real speech between classes is probably not conversational’ (Fogel, 1989, 174-5). Fogel uses Conrad’s novels to illustrate the coercive nature of dialogue that Bakhtin seems to ignore. The ‘coercive disproportion’ which is, according to Fogel, in the nature of most, if not all, dialogue, is termed the ‘Oedipus dialogue complex’, referring to Oedipus ‘as the coercive interrogator or speech-forcer whose interrogations reveal his own guilt and bring about his own punishment’ (Fogel, 1989, 180). Fogel notes that ‘Bakhtin tried to revive the New Testament Greek term anacrisis for the scene of making the other speak. For him it referred to the whole field of devices, mostly subtle, for getting the other to talk... but the dictionaries remind us that in its origins it refers more often to examination by extreme physical torture’ (Fogel, 1989, 188).

Michael André Bernstein, in his 1989 essay ‘The Poetics of Ressentiment’ also notes ‘how abstract and idealized Bakhtin’s notion of a full dialogue really is, and how unlikely its chances are of ever being realized anywhere except – and even that merely rarely – in the specialized discourse of the work of art’ (Bernstein, 1989, 200).

Barthes’s own theory of the division and the war of languages can also be seen as an interesting critique of Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, quite apart from being an interesting theory in itself.

If we take all of this into account, it is no wonder that Barthes found it so tempting to propose a type of writing which would take him (and us) out of such a
dreary situation, where all utterance is nothing but either oppression or intimidation of the other. The Utopian scriptible is not, however, the only such model proposed by Barthes.

At the end of ‘La guerre des languages’ Barthes proposes a rather Bakhtinian project for opposing the war of languages:

Seule l’écriture, en effet, peut assurer le caractère fictionnel des parlers les plus sérieux, voire les plus violents, les replacer dans leur distance théâtrale; je puis, par exemple, emprunter le parler psychanalytique dans sa richesse et son étendue, mais en user in petto comme d’un langage romanesque.

D’autre part, seule l’écriture peut mêler les parlers (le psychanalytique, le marxiste, le structuraliste, par exemple), constituer ce qu’on appelle une hétérologie du savoir, donner au langage une dimension carnavalesque. (Barthes, 1973b, 1612-3)83

It seems that Barthes simply did not believe that the different social groups in France can ever be made to talk to each other in good faith. And, yet, I am not so sure that Bakhtin was really that guilty of ignoring the conflicts in his own culture and society; he stressed often enough that in most cases we do not take into account the point of view of the other in our speech. He simply saw the novel (or more precisely, Dostoevsky’s novels) as one of those rare sites where real conversation is possible. What is quite opposed to this Bakhtinian vision in Barthes is his final remark that it is only the écriture which is capable of presenting itself as atopical, without an identifiable source or origin, that can subvert or oppose the war of languages. For Barthes, the atopia of écriture is what enables desire to circulate freely, without fear of domination. What this also implies, however, is that no lines of responsibility can be traced through the text; the engagement with the different social languages remains ‘merely’ playful, and its very freedom and lack of discursive commitment (which was – commitment, that is - fully displayed, according to Bakhtin, by Dostoevsky’s characters) prevents the text from offering the possibility of true dialogue between different social groups and languages. It still seems to me that it is only Bakhtin’s notion of novelistic dialogism which would be the true alternative to the abysmal situation perceived by Barthes.

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83 It is worth noting that hétérologie is the word Tzvetan Todorov used as his translation of Bakhtin’s term ‘raznorechie’ (diversity of types of discourse) (Todorov, 1981, 88-89).
After all, in Le degré zéro de l’écriture (1953), Barthes opposed the concept of ‘écriture’ to those of ‘speech’ (parole) and style. He defined speech as a ‘horizontal structure’, whose ‘secrets are on the same line as its words’. Speech is fully open, destined to an immediate consumption. Style, on the other hand, is vertical, it comes from the depths of the personal history, intimate memory and biology of an individual (Barthes, 1953, 146). Behind both lies the language as a horizon and a limit of what is possible, and in it the writer finds the ‘familiarity of History’ (Barthes, 1953, 147). If Greimas is right and Barthes had read Saussure while writing Le degré zéro, then this is a re-working of Saussurean terminology, with an introduction of the notion of style as the purely subjective form of speech, as opposed to speech proper, which is purely practical. However, even if Greimas got his dates wrong, Lavers (1982, 50) points out that one need not have read Saussure to be familiar with it, as Merleau-Ponty cites it, without reference to Saussure, in his Phenomenology of Perception (1945), to which Barthes alludes in Le degré zéro.

Écriture itself is defined as ‘an act of historical solidarity’, a ‘relation between the creation and the society’, a ‘literary language transformed by its social destination’, a ‘form caught in its human intention and thus linked to the great crises of History’ (Barthes, 1953, 147). Moreover, écriture is defined as a necessary compromise between freedom and historical memory, and a compromise between general and literary history. According to Barthes, literary forms cannot shake off their past functions simply at command, and words have an ability to mysteriously retain the memory of their past meanings, regardless of the present usage.

It seems to me that this early concept of what écriture might do and mean, with its notion of historical responsibility and the need for negotiation between freedom and constraint, is much closer to Bakhtin than Barthes’s post-Kristevan work. And that, in the context of this work which to a large extent aims to read Barthes through Bakhtinian eyes, is a great pity; had Bakhtin’s work been brought into the context of French structuralism in a more radical and uncompromising way (that is, without wanting to court the less productive strands of French structuralism), the influence on Barthes perhaps could have been more interesting and fruitful.

There are, however, certain aspects of the Barthes – Bakhtin relationship which have been opened in this discussion but have not been developed fully, and the question
of the role of the author seems to me to be one of the main ones. It is a problem, however, which deserves a separate discussion, and a chapter of its own.
Chapter 4: The Role of the Author

The Return of the Author

Barthes and Bakhtin both wrote about the role of the author – or the lack of it – in the creation, perception, and functioning of the literary text. Standing on their own, their ideas on authorship can be seen as rather different, but what unites them in this thesis is their role in the discussion about the practice of literature as a weaving of different voices and social languages. The basic background questions to this discussion are: What is an author and how does he or she participate (if at all) in an intertextual, or dialogic, or polyphonic text? Does the author exist (if at all) as an individual voice in the text or as a structuring force? Is the private person at all relevant to our understanding of the figure of the author we find in the text? Do we need the figure of the author in the text and would it matter if there was none? Is the author a part of the structure of the text (and if yes, how?) or just an agent in its creation (and if yes, to what an extent?)?

At first, the answer to these questions seems very simple where Barthes and Bakhtin are concerned: Barthes announced the death of the author (so that's the end of that discussion), while Bakhtin thought that the author participated to a certain extent but was at his best when least heard and seen (this would be a beginner's definition of 'polyphony'). My aim is to show that things are not that simple, and that the different guises under which the notion of the 'author' appears in the work of Barthes and Bakhtin reveal the underlying issues of the nature of the structure of the literary work and the role of ideology in it, and Barthes's and Bakhtin's various approaches to these issues.

As a little preface to the discussion, it needs to be mentioned that in some of the recent discussions of authorship, inspired by Barthes's controversial manifesto 'The Death of the Author' as well as by the critical reactions to it, the ideas (or, sometimes, the instincts) of some of the 'anti-authorial' theorists are examined for the traces of the 'auteurism' they attack (Burke, 1992, 20, 52-53). Sean Burke, for example, criticises the uncritical and over-enthusiastic reception of Barthes's 'The Death of the Author', arguing that the essay (as well as other, similar arguments by Foucault, Derrida and de
Man) can in no way be read as a straight-forward ‘proof’ that the ‘Author’ was ‘dead’ and irrelevant (Burke, 1992, 16-8). Furthermore, Burke argues that not even the critics who took up the notion of the death of the author with enthusiasm fully believed in it. He cites the scandal caused by the discovery of Paul de Man’s youthful articles for the Belgian collaborationist newspaper *Le Soir* as his main example (Burke, 1992, 1-7). After the articles were discovered, Burke argues, suddenly, the question of authorship, one which ‘critical theory thought to have dispensed with’ (Burke, 1992, 1), was brought back centre-stage. What is more, it was raised about an author like de Man, who, as Burke puts it, had throughout his career ‘denied that the writer’s life in any way bore upon the interpretation of his or her work’, and insisted that ‘an author’s personality and life history disappear irretrievably in the textual machine’ (Burke, 1992, 2). Burke notes that ‘not surprisingly, since his *Le Soir* articles have come to light, many commentators have seen factors beyond those of textual epistemology urging this flight from the self’ (Ibid.). He adds:

De Man’s denial of biography, his ideas of autobiography as de-facement, have come to be seen not as disinterested theoretical statements, but as sinister and meticulous acts of self-protection, by which he sought to (a)void his historical self (...) The *Le Soir* articles have now put into play their own history, and the ‘retrospective self-examination’ de Man professes foreign to his nature has been practised on his behalf .(Burke, 1992, 2-3)

The articles were impossible to ignore, and even the ‘luminaries of the deconstructive movement’ had to in some way interpret de Man’s intentions when writing them, and to postulate some kind of relationship between them and de Man’s later work (whether seeing the latter as a sophisticated extension the former, or seeing the former as a ‘lamentable aberration in de Man’s thought, one which his subsequent work did its best, on an implicit level, to retract and justify’ (Burke, 1992, 3). Burke identifies six ‘loci of traditional author-centred criticism’ that reappeared through this debate:

1. *Intention*: what were the intentions of young de Man in *Le Soir* articles and how (if at all) are they different from the intentions of his later work?
2. *Author-ity*: as Burke puts it, ‘the fact that de Man became an authority within literary theory and a certain philosophy of language means that it matters what he
said, wherever and whatever, at whatever stage of adult development, and in whatever circumstances’ (Burke, 1992, 4). And, Burke adds, precisely since he was a philosopher, any link he might have had with National Socialist ideology is of greater importance than it would have been if he was a musician or a chess grandmaster.

3. **Biography:** the importance of the biographical context is brought to the foreground. How old was de Man when he wrote the articles; did he have any dependants; was he a member of the Nazi party or of any resistance groups; did he ever express any anti-Semitic notions in conversations: all of these factors, and more, are ‘privileged whether offered up in exonerative or incriminatory contexts’ (Burke, 1992, 5).

4. **Accountability:** Burke notes that the belief that ‘de Man must be held to account for what he had written [was] accepted by all parties in this controversy’. Nobody tried to argue that ‘Paul de Man’ as an author was just ‘a fiction or trace of language’ and that ‘in the reality of text ‘Paul de Man’ signs and signifies nothing’. Furthermore, the fact that many of his fellow theorists have defended him as a person, often with great passion fostered by friendship and respect, according to Burke, ‘confirms that, firstly, the signature ‘Paul de Man’ is something greatly in excess of a textual effect and secondly, his signature ties de Man ethically and existentially to the texts he has written’ (Ibid.).

5. **Oeuvre:** should the Le Soir articles be included in the de Man corpus or not? Burke notes that the fundamental concept behind the question, the notion of authorial oeuvre, was not called into question in the context of this debate.

6. **Autobiography:** with the discovery of the articles, the rest of de Man’s corpus was suddenly seen as essentially autobiographical in nature, either trying to theoretically erase the youthful writings and ‘obliterate his own history’, or as an almost confessional warning against the ‘ideological mystifications’ to which he had succumbed in his youth (Burke, 1992, 6).

Burke argues that the controversy around Paul de Man’s writings highlights ‘the return of the author as it inevitably and implicitly occurs in the practice of anti-authoritarian criticism; and the return to the author that poststructuralism in general has yet to make at the level of theory despite its failure to circumvent subjectivity at the level of its readings’ (Burke, 1992, 7).
Similarly, Susan Stanford Friedman notes (1991, 152) that there is something incongruous in the position of those, authorised by Kristeva's own remarks, who complain that the term 'intertextuality' has been abused (Leon S. Roudiez, for example). Kristeva herself, in her vision of 'intertextuality' as an 'anticolonialist resistance to the concept of hegemonic influence', 'eliminated the author as the agent' of the active negotiation between different voices. So, according to Friedman, the complaint of terminological abuse (Roudiez, 1980) not only 'reflects the wish for intellectual clarity and precision in terminology, but it also engages in a desire to maintain a fixed meaning, a signified, for intertextuality'. It insists on the faithfulness to Kristeva's authorial meaning 'in the dissemination of her concept in its original form on "both sides of the Atlantic"' (Friedman, 1991, 154). Kristeva may have expelled the author and his or her intentions from the intertextual process, but her authorial intention where the meaning of the term 'intertextuality' is concerned, according to Roudiez and Kristeva herself, is to be respected and not 'abused'. And, yet, Friedman also notes that respecting the authorial meaning is not the principle Kristeva followed in her presentation of Bakhtin's ideas. By 'suppressing the idea of influence', Kristeva's notion of intertextuality 'in effect allows Kristeva to erase the influence of her precursor [Bakhtin] to whom she is seemingly crediting the concept and from whom she borrows (masculine) authority' (Friedman, 1991, 159). Thus, the liberties Kristeva took with Bakhtin's concepts are, or would be according to Friedman, theoretically excused in the very notion of intertextuality. Which gives both Kristeva and Roudiez even less reason to complain of the liberties others have taken with Kristeva's 'intertextuality'.

Before we look at Barthes and Bakhtin, I propose a brief examination of the concepts of authorship in the past hundred or so years which seem pertinent to the ideas Barthes and Bakhtin had on the subject. After all, the 'death of the author' is not something Barthes was the first to announce; others have put forward the same or similar ideas before, although not in quite the same dramatic manner. In many cases, the argument that the author was irrelevant was, as for Barthes, a reaction against literary positivism and its near obsession with the author's psychology, life and circumstances. At the same time, other notions of what an author is and what he or she does have appeared, trying to get away from both the positivist over-stressing and the anti-positivist denial, and to find a way to incorporate the question of the author into the question of the nature of the literary text. A surprising middle-ground example I want to
look at in particular is the Russian Formalism, which offered some interesting ways of looking at the problem of the author, while still insisting on the primary importance of the literary text in literary studies; I also believe that their ideas are not that different from Bakhtin’s. So, more in the form of snapshots than as a detailed history of the problem, I shall now look at the author, his discovery and disappearance.

A Short History of a Discovery and Death

In 1923 Boris Tomashevskii, one of the most prominent Russian Formalists, in his essay ‘Literature and Biography’ asked the question: ‘do we need the poet’s biography in order to understand his work, or do we not?’ (Tomashevskii, 1971, 47). His essay, along with the whole of the Formalist movement, was to a large extent a reaction against traditional, positivist literary history, which based its analysis of literary works on the figure of the author, his biography, psychology, historical and social circumstances which surrounded him, and on his literary intentions. However, from the point of view of the contemporary literary theory, positivism can be seen almost as some kind of a mythological monster, remembered for its horrors (through the essays that described them), but by now extinct, irrelevant and unread. So irrelevant, in fact, that in Burke’s excellent anthology Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern, positivism is only mentioned once, in Barthes’s essay ‘The Death of the Author’ (Burke, 1995, 126).

Jack Stillinger, however, lets us catch a glimpse of what positivist criticism or biographical study was really like. In his book Multiple Authorship and the Myth of Solitary Genius, Stillinger briefly charts the history of biographical criticism in English literary studies, from its late-eighteenth-century start with Johnson’s Lives of the English Poets, through the Romantic period when it ‘became the principal method of writing about literature’ and the Victorian period when it became a ‘large element in the formal study of literature when English departments and curricula were instituted in colleges and universities toward the end of the nineteenth century’ (Stillinger, 1991, 6-7). According to Stillinger, at the beginning of the twentieth century ‘biography had actually replaced the works as the main focus in lectures, critical essays (“appreciations”), and even literary histories’ (Ibid.). He uses Charles Grosvenor Osgood’s at the time widely used 1935 book The Voice of England as an illustration:
Osgood's six hundred pages of agreeably readable humanisation [of the 'greater figures in English literature] recount the lives in detail and the works hardly at all: *Paradise Lost* receives just a page of descriptive commentary (beginning 'Paradise Lost is the greatest single poetic achievement in the language'); *The Rape of the Lock* is summarised in four sentences (concluding with the remark that the poem is 'an imperishable treasure of fun and wit that never stale, and of beauty that never fades') *Hamlet* and *King Lear* and Keats's odes are merely mentioned by title. (Ibid.)

As Stillinger notes, many critics reacted against this type of literary scholarship: T. S. Eliot (with his idea that 'the progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality') (1995, 76), I. A. Richards ('What concerns criticism is not the avowed or unavowed motives of the artist'; 'Whatever psycho-analysts may aver, the mental processes of the poet are not a very profitable field for investigation') (1976, 20), and of 'The Intentional Fallacy' by Wimsatt and Beardsley Wimsatt, 1954), all of whom insisted on the shift of emphasis away from the author and onto the text alone. Still, it needs to be said that T. S. Eliot, when speaking of 'depersonalisation', was referring primarily to poetic practice. While the others simply insisted, from a critic's point of view, that the question of the author's motives and intentions was, as Wimsatt and Beardsley put it, 'always illegitimate' (Stillinger, 1991, 8), T. S. Eliot's primary argument was that the poet himself erases the traces of his personality in his poetic work, and from there it can only follow that 'to divert interest from the poet to the poetry is a laudable aim: for it would only conduce to a juster estimation of actual poetry, good and bad' (Eliot, 1995, 80).

However, Sean Burke claims that T.S. Eliot's essay is a continuation of a second strand of the Romantic thinking about the author which co-existed with its glorification of the poet's personality (Burke, 1995, xxiii). This second strand is exemplified by:

Keats's idea of negative capability – an emphatic act which requires the empty-ing out of all personal concerns in poetic composition – as well as in Coleridge's insistence that 'to have a genius is to live in the universal, to know no self...'. It is also a central edict in the later German romantics such as K. W. F. Solger for whom artistic creation is requisitely objective, ironic and impersonal. (Burke, 1995, xxii)
Burke explains the coexistence of these ‘seemingly contradictory impulses — towards subjectivity on the one hand, and impersonality on the other’ as two reactions to Kant’s subjective idealism, and its extension into aesthetics by Fichte and Schelling. He claims that the translation of Kant’s notion that ‘the world we perceive is only made possible to us through the operations of a transcendental ego which imposes the a priori categories of space, time and causality upon the ultimately inaccessible objects of experience’ into the aesthetic realm ‘served to problematise the mimetic subordination of the author to nature’, while creating a ‘model of imagination as shaping and (re)creating the world in poetic language’ (Burke, 1995, xx). One response to this is the notion of strong subjectivity and the poet as genius who by the power of his imagination creates new worlds, and this is transformed into a vivid curiosity about poets’ lives and psychology.

The other response, according to Burke, comes out of the anxiety about the ‘potentially nihilistic implications of Kant’s subjective idealism, and attempts to preserve something of the Enlightenment notion of disengaged reason in an era which could no longer see truth as mimetically grounded or divinely sanctioned’ (Burke, 1995, xxii). Burke adds:

Impersonality, like disinterestedness, would seem to arise as a reflex or defence in simultaneously acknowledging the ascendance of subjectivity while guarding against its more destabilising ramifications. (Burke, 1995, xxiii)

Burke claims that ‘this very same need to defend against the subjectivist turn in modernity informs modernist reactions against personality’ (Ibid.). We shall see that the Kantian model is very important for Bakhtin’s theory of authorship, but that at the same time he manages to avoid both the obsession with the personality of the author and the denial of his importance as an agent.

The notion of literature as a ‘revelation of personality’ resulted in the type of criticism which flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century (i.e., the literary positivism of the kind illustrated by Stillinger and reacted against by I. A. Richards and the Formalists, and, later, Barthes) and which saw no contradiction in ‘uncovering an author’s personal life at the same time as lauding that author’s transcendent genius’ (Ibid.). But the strongest reactions against it (like that of Eliot) ‘reclaim the higher romantic ground in the process of declaring their anti-romanticism’. Burke concludes
that 'no less than within romanticism, the reaction against subjectivity once more shows that its terms are governed by the era of subjectivity' (Ibid.).

Considering that the denial of the importance of the author has been going on ever since the author was proclaimed to be the sole or the most important originator of the literary text, and that from the 1920s onwards some of the most influential schools of criticism have refused to give the author much attention and insisted on dealing with the literary text alone (the Russian Formalists, New Critics, as well as, in Germany, Emile Staiger, Wolfgang Kayser and Leo Spitzer) (Petrović, 1972, 56-66), it is somewhat strange that Barthes's 1968 article, announcing the death of the author, could have caused such a great storm of approvals and disapprovals. The answer probably lies in the fact that, as Stillinger wrote in 1991, 'a great deal of literary study as it is routinely carried on from day to day continues to be fundamentally biographical in approach' (Stillinger, 1991, 8). Whatever literary theory for the most part of the twentieth century may have been doing,

The preponderance of critical interpreters are still trying to recover, explain, and clarify the author's meaning in a text, and thus are engaged in biographical work; and so too are the preponderance of textual scholars, trying to recover, preserve, purify, and represent a text according to the author's intentions. Both kinds of work involve reconstruction of the life and mind of an author, and they are judged successful to a greater or lesser degree according to the amount of information that the scholar can discover about these essentially biographical matters. (Stillinger, 1991, 8-9)

Although discovering the author's meaning does not necessarily mean having to study his or her life, the positivist critic as a type appears to be eternal and indestructible, as the Yugoslav critic Svetozar Petrović wrote in 1963 (Petrović, 1972, 76). A similar observation probably lies behind a fair part of the anti-positivism in Sur Racine and Critique et vérité; and earlier on, in Mythologies, Barthes criticised and mocked the popular and media obsession with the personality of the author ('L'écrivain en vacances' and 'Romans et enfants'). 'La mort de l'auteur' is simply the highest expression of the frustrated and prolonged anti-positivist and anti-biographical sentiment. The section in which Barthes mentions positivist criticism reads as follows:
The frustration is certainly understandable. However, Sean Burke claims that the straight-forward denial of the role of the author tends to get stuck into the frame of mind which it is trying to react against. The alternative, as suggested by Burke, may lie in a development of an earlier, Medieval notion of the author, discussed in particular by Minnis (1984). Burke notes that Biblical exegesis, which saw Scripture as being divinely inspired, considered authorial intention (*intentio auctoris*) to be 'at most a concause in the texts, coming into being'. Nevertheless:

Christian exegetes developed sophisticated and intricate critical apparatuses to allow for a complex interplay and multiple determinants – including the role of the *actor* – in the constitution of the Scriptural text. Seen from this vantage, the contemporary deployment of the various declensions of 'otherness' developed within theory – the unconscious, cultural and political forces, écriture, difference, etc. – distinguishes itself from the Medieval tradition mainly through an inability or unwillingness to acknowledge the overdetermination of a textual scene which encompasses alterities and the participant role of the author. (Burke, 1995, xvii)

Taking this as the basic guiding principle of this chapter, and before we take a closer look at Barthes’s famous essay, let us examine some alternative views on the anti-authorial notion of literature within Russian Formalism itself. We have already seen that not all Formalists were ‘formalist’ in a dogmatic sense, and that they did not believe that literary texts should be studied in isolation. Here I aim to show that the author was not entirely banished from their notion of literary studies; in this respect, they also come closer to Bakhtin than it is sometimes believed.

**Tomashevskii and the Author’s Biography**

From the moment Shklovskii declared that verbal art was a combination of literary devices (and not an expression of the author’s inner soul), Formalism put forward the
idea that it is the work itself and not its origin in the writer’s life and mind which is of interest to the literary historian (Shklovskii, 1929). This decision, however, came not as a reaction against the Romantic notion of literary genius, but as a practical decision to find a firm base for a scientific study of literature, as opposed to the earlier situation in literary history which Jakobson famously described as follows:

... historians of literature act like nothing so much as policemen, who, out to arrest a certain culprit, take into custody (just in case) everything and everyone they find at the scene as well as any passers-by for good measure. The historians of literature have helped themselves to everything – environment, psychology, politics, philosophy. Instead of a science of literature, they have worked up a concoction of home-made disciplines. They seem to have forgotten that those subjects pertain to their own fields of study – to the study of philosophy, the history of culture, psychology, and so on, and that those fields of study certainly may utilise literary monuments as documents of a defective and second-class variety among other materials. (Eikhenbaum, 1971b, 8)

However, in a context where some Formalists (like Shklovsky) were more prepared to ascribe total autonomy to the literary work than others, Tomashevskii could probably be considered as one of the ‘moderates’. The main principle which guided him in offering an answer to the question of whether we need to take into account the author’s biography in order to understand the work was that ‘we must remember that creative literature exists, not for literary historians, but for readers, and we must consider how the poet’s biography operates in the reader’s consciousness’ (Tomashevskii, 1971). In the light of this, the immediate answer proposed by Tomashevskii is that the role of the author’s biography in shaping the reader’s understanding of a literary work depends on the literary-historical period: for most of European literary and cultural history the arts displayed ‘a great tendency toward anonymity’ (Tomashevskii, 1971, 47-48) which only gradually shifted towards the ‘individualisation of creativity’ and ‘an epoch which cultivated subjectivism in the artistic process’, which he places at the time of the great writers of the eighteenth century (the ‘cult figure’ of Voltaire being one of the most striking examples). Before that, claims Tomashevskii, ‘bits of gossip and anecdotes about authors did penetrate society, but these anecdotes were not combined into biographical images’ (Ibid.). The notion of the ‘biographical image’ is crucial here, as it is precisely this, and not the actual biography of the author, that, according to
Tomashevskii, plays a part in the reader’s understanding of a literary work. This ‘biographical image’ is very often fashioned by the writer himself (Rousseau and his Confessions), sometimes as a backdrop for his work (as in the case of most of the Romantic poets).

To use Tomashevskii’s example, in the case of Pushkin’s southern poems ‘the reader had to feel that he was reading, not the words of an abstract author, but those of a living person whose biographical data were at his disposal’ (Tomashevskii, 1971, 50). And in order to achieve this Pushkin had to make use of his own biography; however, as Tomashevskii puts it with a certain amount of delicacy, ‘we must assume that Pushkin poetically fostered certain facts of his life’ (Ibid.). Pushkin needed the figure of a young exile suffering from a hidden and unrequited love, ‘set against the background of Crimean nature’, as a frame for his southern poems, and he created this image both through the poems themselves and through his letters and conversations (Ibid.).

According to Tomashevskii, this biographical legend is a part of Pushkin’s literary work, it serves as a background for his poetry. Moreover, in order for a ‘biographical’ literary work to be properly understood, says Tomashevskii, it is very important that legends about authors’ lives are preserved in their original ‘canonical form’ as they are ‘a premise which the author himself took into account during the creative process’ (Tomashevskii, 1971, 51-52). The real biography is of less, if any, importance for the process of understanding of a literary work (Tomashevskii, 1971, 50-51). The writer knows that the reader will be familiar not with the actual life, either his own or that of his heroes (if he is using historical figures as his characters), but with its anecdotal representation, with the rumours and legends surrounding that life. It is the cultural representation and not historical truth that should concern a literary historian when it comes to relating a literary work to a biography; furthermore, that biographical legend must in some degree be present in the work itself in order to be relevant for its understanding.

All in all, as far as literary history is concerned, says Tomashevskii, there are writers with biographies and writers without biographies; it is only the literary biographical legend created by the author himself or taken into account by the author at the moment of creation which is of relevance for the literary historian. ‘Only such a legend is a literary fact’ (Tomashevskii, 1971, 55). ‘Documentary biographies’, that is, the real facts of a writer’s life, ‘may be considered only as external (even if necessary) reference material of an auxiliary nature’ (Ibid.).
This could be seen as a rather dubious claim, stating that the questions of writers’ education, broader historical circumstances of their life or the type of audience they had are irrelevant in literary studies. Of course, the Formalists, even though they broadened their definition of literary studies by 1928, were great believers in the primary importance of literary texts and literary facts (albeit, quite broadly defined; on this, see Eikhenbaum, 1971a). Apart from that, it seems to me that by ‘biography’ Tomashevskii means simply a ‘life story’ (or more precisely, the stuff gossip is made of), and I would not say that he sees the above questions as being a part of strictly biographical considerations.

It is interesting that Wellek and Warren in their Theory of Literature (1976) repeated many of Tomashevskii’s arguments, and it is probably very likely that they were aware of his essay on literature and biography. After all, Wellek was a member of the Prague Circle and we have seen the influence (and maybe even cross-fertilisation) the Formalists had on the Prague Circle. Wellek and Warren make the same distinction between poets with biographies and poets without them, and this distinction as carried out as being both historical (the person of the author being a fairly recent object of interest) and typological (some writers are more autobiographical than others). However, they dismiss the importance of biography even for the more autobiographical writers, and do not suggest even that anything as literary and text-oriented as a ‘biographical legend’ could ever be of any importance. In their strong defence of the intrinsic approach (in this sense this book is very much an example of New Criticism) they claim that ‘even when a work of art contains elements which can be surely identified as biographical, these elements will be so rearranged and transformed in a work that they lose all their specifically personal meaning and become simply concrete human material, integral elements of a work’ (Wellek and Warren, 1976, 78). Thus all reference to biography is dismissed as completely irrelevant; and when we remind ourselves of Tomashevskii’s stance that criticism should take into account the real role an author’s biography plays in the understanding of his work, we can only regret that, if Wellek and Warren had really read Tomashevskii’s piece, they had not learned more from it.

84 Tomashevskii is mentioned three times in this book, so they certainly knew of him.
Roman Jakobson and the Death of a Poet

In 1930, Vladimir Maiakovskii, one of the poets Tomashevskii mentioned in his essay, took his own life, and a year later an essay on him, written by Roman Jakobson, was published. Although the essay, entitled 'On a Generation That Squandered Its Poets', covers some similar ground to Tomashevskii's 'Literature and Biography', its tone is very different, and its interest in the subject of a personal rather than of a scholarly nature. It reads like a cry of despair and a confession of guilt, both emotions caused by the tragic balance sheet of those years and by the many deaths of poets:

Gumilev (1886-1921) was shot, after prolonged mental agony and in great pain; Blok (1880-1921) died, amid cruel privations and under circumstances of inhuman suffering; Khlebnikov (1885-1922) passed away; after careful planning Esenin (1895-1925) and Maiakovskii (1894-1930) killed themselves. And so it happened that during the third decade of this century, those who inspired a generation perished between the ages of thirty and forty, each of them sharing a sense of doom so vivid and sustained that it became unbearable. (Jakobson, 1991, 274-75)

As Jakobson says, a generation of great poets was thus 'squandered', amidst a mixture of idolatry and neglect, as had happened, Jakobson stresses, in Russia before. He talks of the 'feeling of sudden and profound emptiness' following those deaths, of 'an oppressive sense of an evil destiny lying heavily on Russian intellectual life' (Jakobson, 1991, 296). But he also talks of the voices of abuse and vicious gossip surrounding the life and death of Maiakovskii, as well as of the incredulity and shock which followed his suicide. Jakobson remarks with pain that both the abuse and the incredulity finally revealed that 'these men of letters have forgotten or so misunderstood All That Maiakovskii Composed'. For, as Jakobson masterfully demonstrated earlier in the essay, the idea of suicide is by no means alien to Maiakovskii's poetic thought, and is in fact one of its recurring motifs. According to Jakobson, Maiakovskii 'nurtured in his heart the unparalleled anguish of the present generation' (Jakobson, 1991, 289); 'the hopelessness of his lonely struggle with the daily routine became clearer to him at every turn' (Jakobson, 1991, 289-90). The motif of suicide as the only means of escaping the 'stagnating slime' of the everyday 'continually recurs in the work of Maiakovskii' (Jakobson, 1991, 289).
The crucial questions for Jakobson are: why was everyone so surprised at Maiakovskii’s decision to take his own life? Has everybody really misread everything that he ever wrote – or, perhaps even more alarmingly, ‘was there a general conviction that all of it was just “composed,” only invented?’ (Ibid.). He adds:

Sound literary criticism rejects any direct or immediate conclusions about the biography of a poet when these are based merely on the evidence of his works, but it does not at all follow from this that there is no connection whatsoever between the artist’s biography and his art. (Ibid.)

And Maiakovskii, according to Jakobson, understood very well the close connection between poetry and life; it was he who said that after Esenin’s suicide poem, Esenin’s death became a literary fact, one that ‘would bring to the bullet or the noose many who had been hesitating’ (Jakobson, 1991, 292).

And when he approached the writing of his own autobiography, Maiakovskii remarked that the facts of a poet’s life are interesting ‘only if they became fixed in the word’. Who would dare assert that Maiakovskii’s suicide was not fixed in the word? ‘Don’t gossip!’ Maiakovskii adjured us just before his death. Yet those who stubbornly mark out a strict boundary between the ‘purely personal’ fate of the poet and his literary biography create an atmosphere of low-grade, highly personal gossip by means of those significant silences. (Ibid.)

Thus for Jakobson it is a part of the tragedy of the poet’s life and death ‘that the people around Maiakovskii simply did not believe in his lyrical monologues’.

They took his various masquerades for the true face of the man […] They stamped and whistled at this routine Maiakovskian artistic stunt, the latest of his ‘magnificent absurdities’, but when the theatrical cranberry juice of the puppet show became real, genuine, thick blood, they were taken aback: Incredible! Inconsistent! (Ibid.)

It is perhaps difficult to reconcile these passionate words with the image of Jakobson as a man obsessed with poetic parallelisms, who perhaps ‘has made an important contribution to literary studies in drawing attention to the varieties of grammatical figures and their potential functions’, but whose ‘own analyses are’, unfortunately,
'vitiated by the belief that linguistics provides an automatic discovery procedure for poetic patterns' (Culler, 1975, 74). It is also worth noting that in this essay Jakobson criticises 'the simplistic Formalist literary credo professed by the Russian Futurists' which 'inevitably propelled their poetry toward the antithesis of Formalism – toward the cultivation of the heart's 'raw cry' and uninhibited frankness'. As he puts it:

Formalist literary theory placed the lyrical monologue in quotes and disguised the 'ego' of the lyric poet under a pseudonym. But what unbounded horror results when suddenly you see through the pseudonym, and the phantasms of art invade reality. (Jakobson, 1991, 293)

This is perhaps one of the most striking remarks of this passionate essay, and one of its few attempts at 'theorising': the realisation that the Formalist doctrine about the 'mask' of the authorial voice (here, that of the lyrical poet) led a whole literary movement to use it as an alibi for complete sincerity, in the belief that nobody will think or dare take the monologue of the 'lyrical self' for the true voice of the man behind the mask of that self. However, Jakobson does not comment further on this curious product of the inter-penetration of poetry and literary theory, as the real interests of this essay lie elsewhere, in exposing the guilt of his generation for the abuse and misunderstanding of those very same poets who gave a voice to that generation. It is with this despairing note that he ends his tribute to Maiakovskii:

As for the future, it doesn't belong to us either. In a few decades we shall be cruelly labelled as products of the past millennium. All we had were these compelling songs of the future; and suddenly these songs are no longer part of the dynamic of history, but have been transformed into historico-literary facts. When singers have been killed and their song has been dragged into a museum and pinned to the wall of the past, the generation they represent is even more desolate, orphaned, and lost – impoverished in the most real sense of the word. (Jakobson, 1991, 300)

But what are we to make of Jakobson's treatment of the role of the author as exposed in this essay, if we leave aside the anguish and the pain of the occasion which brought it about? Furthermore, what kind of light does Jakobson's lament over the dead poet shed onto Tomashevskii's essay?
Jakobson himself says that the Formalist doctrine was to disregard the real living person of the author for the sake of his (or her) authorial voice as presented in the text of their creation; and occasionally, as in the more literal version of this notion taken up, according to Jakobson, by the Russian Futurists, to disregard the author altogether and to view the literary text as fully autonomous. As Jakobson stresses, Maiakovskii himself took the view that the author’s life becomes of relevance for his work only if it is ‘fixed in the word’, the way Esenin’s suicide became a literary fact because his last poem is at the same time his suicide note; this view would not be far from Tomashevskii’s notions which we examined above. It seems to me that in the essay on Maiakovskii Jakobson is to a certain extent asking the question: ‘in trying to understand the poet as a man, do we need his poetry, or do we not?’ This reads like the reversal of Tomashevskii’s question: ‘do we need the poet’s biography in order to understand his work, or do we not?’ For Tomashevskii the question of authorship is whether the figure of the author as a person enters into or contributes to our understanding of their work; for the Jakobson of the Maiakovskii essay, the question is partly how much of the author’s work should contribute to our knowledge of them as a person. However, this knowledge is not the knowledge of a biographer or literary historian, but the knowledge of an acquaintance or friend; to express bitterness over the lack of seriousness with which Maiakovskii’s poetry was taken by those who claimed to know him intimately is not the same thing as demanding that biographers or literary historians base their accounts of poets’ lives on their literary writings alone, or to use them as an indication of the ‘journey of the soul’. As such, the question is of a personal rather than theoretical nature, and Jakobson himself explicitly states that ‘sound literary criticism rejects any direct or immediate conclusions about the biography of a poet when these are based merely on the evidence of his works’. Nevertheless, he adds, it does not follow from this that there is no connection between a writer’s biography and his literary work, it is just that we very often go about establishing that connection with the wrong kind of interest in our hearts.

Tomashevskii and Jakobson both seem to believe very strongly that it was ‘gossip’ which plagued many a Russian writer, and prevented both their readers and their acquaintances from understanding them and their poetry fully. Tomashevskii protests against biographers’ excessive curiosity about the intimate details of Pushkin’s life and claims that it very often destroys the core aspects of his literary work and of the context in which it is meant to be read (i.e. the ‘unknown woman’ in his biographical
Jakobson, too, presents the public's obsession with the gossip which surrounded Maiakovskii as one of the main reasons why his poetic 'mythology' was not taken as seriously as it should have been. What Tomashevskii seems to suggest is that in Pushkin's case, the biographical legend about unrequited love was to a large extent maintained under the poet's control, and 'gossip' only started when his biographers could not control their own curiosity. In Maiakovskii's case, gossip seemed to be much louder than his own poetry, and prevented the poetry from being carefully read.

Furthermore, for Jakobson, the problem of understanding or not understanding Maiakovskii the man through his poetry is to a large extent the question of how seriously poetry as such (and literature in general) is taken. He quotes with warmth Maiakovskii's question about the purpose and role of literature:

'Why', he asked, 'should literature occupy its own special little corner? Either it should appear in every newspaper, every day, on every page, or else it's totally useless. The kind of literature that's dished out as dessert can go to hell' (from the Reminiscences of D. Lebedev). (Jakobson, 1991, 280)

Had Maiakovskii's audience believed that poetry is not just a 'dessert' to be 'dished out at the end' and that it not something 'just "composed", only invented', maybe they would have believed in Maiakovskii's poetry more than they believed his advertising slogans. Had they not been so busy inventing and collecting gossip about him, perhaps they would have read his poetry more carefully, and taken it more seriously, regardless of whether the poet committed suicide in the end or not.

For both Tomashevskii and Jakobson, whatever the critic or the general reader needs in order to understand a writer and his literary work is there, 'fixed in the word' of the work itself and, occasionally, in the biographical legend of the writer. Still, both of them are treading a very fine line. For both, the concept of the author is very much that of the biographical person, and it is just the question of what kind of biography we are to take into account: one fostered by the writer himself and fixed in the word, or one surrounding the writer in the form of gossip and springing from an obsessive interest in their personal life. Both Tomashevskii and Jakobson embrace the former, and this to a large extent is due to their dislike of vulgarisation that 'gossip' brings with itself and from their respect for poets and their poetry. Ultimately, it can be sensed that both
believe that Pushkin’s poems would not and should not become less beautiful or Maiakovskii’s poetry less powerful if we discover that Pushkin had no particular society woman or women in mind when writing his love poems, or that Maiakovskii had no actual intention of driving a bullet through his head when he wrote about his despair. It is their poetry that matters, and the poets matter (and matter very much) because of their poetry. Even Jakobson’s mourning for Maiakovskii shows not just grief for a friend, but also (and perhaps even more) grief for a lost poetic voice which perhaps could have continued to speak for its generation with such force, and such honesty, had his poetry met with more real recognition and understanding. The generation that gossiped and undermined its poets ended up ‘squadering’ them; in the end, and by nobody’s fault but its own, it remained lost without its voice. And as for the real link between writing and biography, the issue that the early Formalists started discussing, and to a large extent dismissing, so confidently in the beginning, showed its painful side when ‘the phantasms of art invaded reality’ and when ‘the theatrical cranberry juice of the puppet show became real, genuine, thick blood’. For Jakobson at least, it became difficult to talk about the role of the author and its importance for the understanding of the work of art when real writers were dying. The only important thing for him became the need not to gossip, not to cause even more pain and anguish, not to make the situation even more unbearable.

As we can see, at least some of the Formalists were able to discuss the problem of the author with a great deal of focus and understanding, even though they were the great advocates for the primary importance of the literary text in literary studies. Tomashevskii’s and Jakobson’s view of literary-historical evolution considered the author as one of the agents acting within a tradition, and Jakobson at least considered their individuality as well as the context in which they worked as relevant for the understanding of their work. Their approach to the question of authorship offers us a more moderate, balanced viewpoint which can serve as an alternative to the more radical views of Barthes and Foucault which I intend to look at next. Jakobson and Tomashevskii, together with Sean Burke’s presentation of the Kantian notion of the author, also serve as a background for Bakhtin’s theories of the author which I shall look at later.
Fast Forward: The Death of the Author

Roland Barthes and the Death of the Author

As we have seen, Barthes was prompted into writing his essay on the death of the author by the annoyance with positivist authorial obsessions; his description of it being not that very different from that which had caused Shklovskii’s and early Jakobson’s formalist rebellion.

H. L. Hix compared Barthes’s announcement about the death of the author to Nietzsche’s ‘proclamation of the death of God’, noting that the latter is more in nature of an obituary, while the former is, in fact, a suicide note, coming as it did from somebody who was an author in his own right (Hix, 3). Burke calls this essay ‘the central point for an era of theory’, in which Barthes reached ‘the zero-degree of the impersonating tradition’ (Burke, 1995, 69).

However, Burke also argues that Barthes’s main point is somewhat different from that of the Formalists or the New Critics, who, according to him, simply reacted to biographical positivism and decided to more or less ignore the question of the author as an agent in literary creation for practical reasons. According to Burke, ‘as enounced by Barthes, Foucault and Derrida, the removal of the author is not to be seen as a strategy, a means towards an end, but as the primary claim in itself’ (Burke, 1992, 15). Burke notes that the mixture of phenomenology and structuralism which informed Barthes’s (as well as Foucault’s and Derrida’s) thought ‘produced an iconoclastic and far-ranging form of antsubjективism’, questioning of the idea that ‘man can properly possess any degree of knowledge or consciousness’. He argues further:

Barthes, Foucault and Derrida were not content with simply sidelining the authorial subject as in earlier formalisms. A phenomenological training had taught them that the subject was too powerful, too sophisticated a concept to be simply bracketed; rather subjectivity was something to be annihilated. Nor either could they be content to see the death of the subject as something applying merely to the area of literary studies. The death of the author must connect with the general death of man. (Burke, 1992, 14)

This, as we shall see, may not be entirely true of Barthes. In addition, Burke says that the anti-authorial discourse is so presented as to present the reader with a choice
between either accepting it as the unquestionable truth or ‘to turn back nostalgically upon a humanism no longer tenable within this age of theory’ (Burke, 1992, 17). The discourse of the death of the author presents an ‘all or nothing’ discourse that is difficult to approach from a different angle. Again, Barthes’s is a slightly different case, as his pronouncement on the death of the author has more of a rhetorical than an epistemological purpose. The rhetorical nature of ‘La mort de l’auteur’, its intended provocativeness, need to be kept in mind.

‘Barthes’s essay on the death of the author is one of his easiest pieces to misread’, cautions Michael Moriarty on the second page of his Roland Barthes (1991, 2). It also one of the easiest pieces to be appalled by; and with the awareness of the twentieth-century history of writers murdered, tortured and disappeared, it can become very easy to get on a moral high horse and claim that the matters of life and death of authors are not to be trifled with for the sake of some dubious sensationalism where the choice of words in a title is concerned. But let us take Moriarty’s advice and proceed slowly, with the old-fashioned belief in authorial intention, towards the possibility of discerning Barthes’s true meaning in his short essay ‘La mort de l’auteur’.

Barthes restates some of the arguments which we have seen put forward by Tomashevskii and Wellek and Warren: the author is a relatively new literary phenomenon, not much older than English empiricism, French rationalism and the discovery of the individual (1968b, 491). But, at the same time, the argument is also slightly different, as Tomashevskii was talking more of the novelty of the concept of the author as a biographical image, and not as the agent in the creation of a literary text. We have already mentioned that the author as an agent was well known to the later Medieval exegesis, and it would be difficult to deny that both Plato and Aristotle discussed the poet's role in the creation of a poetic work. Apart from reacting to literary positivism, Barthes is, as Burke argues, making a general point ‘that there never could be an author in the first place’ (Burke, 1992, 16), and noting that, at least since Mallarmé, French literature has been shifting towards the idea (expressed by Mallarmé) that in a literary text it is not the author who ‘performs’, but language itself (Barthes, 1968b, 492). It is precisely this idea on which Barthes bases his definition of écriture in ‘La mort de l’auteur’, as he defines it as the space which, once entered, makes the written word forget where it came from; ‘la voix perd son origine, l’auteur entre dans sa propre mort, l’écriture commence’ (Barthes, 1968b, 491). Barthes here makes a
reference to the role of the ‘singer of tales’ (to use Parry and Lord’s phrase) in what he calls ‘ethnographic societies’ (that is, oral cultures): there, the singer is not perceived as the creator or the author of what he sings or narrates, but as a mediator; his skill is judged not on the basis of his ‘genius’, but through his knowledge of the narrative (or poetic) code (Ibid.). And this is very close to what Barthes expects the ‘scripteur moderne’ to be able to do: enter into the space in which he will not speak as himself and from within his own person, but will let the cultural code speak through him instead. Burke notes that this is Barthes’s nod towards the Medieval notion of authorship; however, he also stresses that it serves not to re-examine the notion of authorship, but to ‘celebrate the void of the abolished humanist author’, remaining locked in the argument of auteurism as its reverse (Burke, 1995, xviii).

Firstly, it needs to be stressed that Barthes uses the term ‘author’ to refer not just to the individuals who write and publish, but much more broadly: the Author can turn out to be society, history, psyche or liberty, anything which gives the literary text a limit beyond which it must not signify. He claims that the Author (the capital ‘A’ hinting at authority which is almost divine in its rights, and even more in its demands) is often perceived as ‘the past of his own book’ (Barthes, 1968b, 493). First there was the Author (as God), and then came the word; first there was the Author (the Father) and then came the work (the son). But this is, according to Barthes, misleading, as the writer (scripteur) is ‘born at the same moment as his text’; there is no ‘before’ (i.e.: the author lived, felt and suffered) and ‘after’ (and then he wrote his book), nothing but ‘here and now’. The writer does not ‘express’ himself through his works, he simply inscribes, and the only origin of his writing is language itself. Consequently, writing is not a message but ‘un espace à dimensions multiples, où se marient et se contestent des écritures variées, dont aucune n’est originelle: le texte est un tissu de citations, issues des mille foyers de la culture’ (Barthes, 1968b, 493-94). Like Flaubert’s Bouvard and Pécuchet, the scripteur can only copy what exists already, imitate someone else’s gestures, he can only set different writings against each other and observe the results, but he can never ‘express himself’. If he attempts to do it against all odds, he should at least be aware that the ‘thing’ inside him which he would like to ‘translate’ into words is nothing but a dictionary, already composed, in which each word can only be defined through other words:
Succédant à l'Auteur, le scripteur n'a plus en lui passions, humeurs, sentiments, impressions, mais cet immense dictionnaire où il puise une écriture qui ne peut connaître aucun arrêt: la vie ne fait jamais qu'imiter le livre, et ce livre lui-même n'est qu'un tissu de signes, imitation perdue, infiniment reculée. (Barthes, 1968b, 494)

H. L. Hix picks up on Barthes's parallel between the Author and God, and, using Erich Frank's distinction between Christian and ancient Greek notions of creation, notes that Barthes's model of literary creation follows the ancient Greek model of creation according to which the world has its beginning in itself, springing up from the original matter, while the Christian model of creation implies that God created the world ex nihilo (Hix, 57-58). Although Burke also comments on the 'co-implication of the writer and divinity, one which tacitly expatiates and enlivens Barthes's essay' (Burke, 1992, 23), he also notes that the Author as God never really existed in that grandiose way. According to Burke Barthes creates the notion of the Author with a capital A at the same time as he is announcing his death. The author who 'is to his text as God, the auctor vitae, is to his world: the unitary cause, source and master to whom the chain of textual effects must be traced, and in whom they find their genesis, meaning, goal and justification' never really existed (Ibid.).

Burke also notes that it was very much in the tradition of the New Criticism, Russian Formalism and Prague Structuralism to 'distance their activities from any form of theocentric auteurism', so in that sense 'Barthes's essay might well seem aimed at a target that had long since retreated out of range' (Burke, 1992, 25). But also, the positivism Barthes is so critical about does not necessarily imply the notion of 'theocentric auteurism':

Indeed, even in terms of the French man-and-his-work criticism institutionalised by Lanson, it is still difficult to see how the author is sacralised. Certainly, positivist researches of this kind are rigidly centred upon the author, but in accordance with principles of factuality rather than those of a theology of authorship. Even if this movement is traced back to the nineteenth-century positivism of Hippolyte Taine, the author is neither the original nor the final form of analysis, but the opening to the race, the milieu, the moment – a process in which the role of the author is largely in bridging (rather than creating) text and history. (Burke, 1992, 26)
Burke suggests that Barthes’s essay ‘does not so much destroy the ‘Author-God’, but participates in its construction. He must create a king worthy of the killing’ (Ibid.). As Burke stresses one more time:

That the author can only be conceived as a manifestation of the absolute Subject, this is the root message of every authoricide. One must, at base, be deeply auteurist to call for the Death of the Author (Burke, 1992, 27)

Nevertheless, according to Barthes, the rule of the Author in literary studies was at the same time the rule of the Critic, as the one who was especially authorised to interpret literary works. Thus, if the author is dead, trying to decode a literary text is a futile business, for without the figure of the Author, there is no original and ultimate meaning which the critic must labour hard to uncover. As Barthes puts it, to give an Author to a literary text is effectively to close it. Without the Author as the final limit of its signification, the literary text is free to produce meanings ad infinitum, to weave its web of cultural citations without a signifying centre. As Barthes puts it, écriture is a space to be walked about and passed through, and not to be pierced in the attempt to reach its secret core which is the Author. By refusing to assign the ultimate meaning to a literary text, écriture ‘libère une activité que l’on pourrait appeler contre-théologique, proprement révolutionnaire, car refuser d’arrêter le sens, c’est finalement refuser Dieu et ses hypostases, la raison, la science, la loi’ (Barthes, 1968b, 494).

And the one who, according to Barthes, profits from such a state of affairs is not the author any more, but the reader. If the literary text is a multi-layered structuration of different quotations from different cultures that enter together into a dialogue, or a parody, or a conflict, then the space of their coming together is the reader, who is able to take them all in and recognise them. The ‘death of the Author’ is simply the price we have to pay for the birth of the reader (Barthes, 1968b, 495). As Moriarty put it, ‘essentially, the concern of ‘La mort de l’auteur’ is to combat the attempt to set a priori limits on interpretation: what is at stake is not just authorship, but authority’ (Moriarty, 1991, 2). The unity of a literary text, according to Barthes, is not in its origin but in its destination, and this destination is the reader. However, Barthes seems particularly careful not to say ‘reader’s consciousness’, as for him there is nothing ‘personal’ in the reader thus conceived: ‘le lecteur est un homme sans histoire, sans biographie, sans psychologie; il est seulement ce quelqu’un qui tient rassemblées dans un même champ
toutes les traces dont est constitué l’écrit’ (Barthes, 1968b, 495). However, there is something unsettling in this image of the impersonal reader without history, biography and psychology, especially as Barthes claims that it is precisely the rights and the freedom of the reader that are to be won by the death of the author. If Barthes is right in his remark that ‘classical criticism’ is wrong to proclaim itself on the side of humanism and for the rights of the reader, when the only man it ever knew was the one who wrote (Ibid.), then the reader whose rights Barthes champions is in no better position, as he is allowed to be just a ‘someone’ in whom codes and quotations can be reassembled, but without any history or identity of his own. As such, he is not any more ‘alive’ than the scripteur who comes into being only at the moment of writing and who is there only as a mediator who allows the flow of different cultural codes to pass through him.

The Author and His Work

In another short piece, entitled ‘De l’oeuvre au texte’ (1971a), Barthes proposes a conceptual distinction between the terms ‘work’ and ‘text’, which is very similar to his distinction between the lisible and the scriptible, and outlines it perhaps a bit more clearly than in S/Z. This essay also discusses the role of the author in the work and in the text.

According to Barthes, the concept of the work belongs to the old, ‘Newtonian’ tradition of literary studies (Barthes, 1971a, 1211), and the first distinction he makes is that the work can be held in the hand or found in a bookshop, that it is a concrete object (we might add, a concrete cultural object, present in the culture even when nobody reads it), while the text is a ‘methodological field’, existing only in language, and experienced only as activity and production. The text is also characterised by its crossing over of the genre boundaries; it is unclassifiable; as such, it goes against the doxa, and challenges common assumptions as to the rules of enunciation: it is always, in one way or another, paradoxal (Barthes, 1971a, 1212). Furthermore, the text is experienced in relation to the sign, whereas the work closes itself on a signified. The text opens up a play of signification, it defers the final signified, whereas the work always has the ultimate meaning which can be reached if we go deep enough into it. The text is closer to the workings of language; as Barthes puts it, it is structured, but decentred and without closure (Barthes, 1971a, 1213). The work, on the other hand, can always be closed off with the ultimate meaning. This also brings us to the point that the text is plural; not
only does it have several meanings, but it 'achieves a plurality of meaning' which is irreducible. It is conceived from different cultural languages, past and present, which pass through it; as such, it is also profoundly intertextual, but without clear references to any origins. The work, on the other hand, is 'in the process of filiation', with three strands of this process taking place: a determination of the work by the outside world, a succession of works among themselves, and an allocation of work to its author (Barthes, 1971a, 1214-15). In this context, the writer is regarded as the father and owner of his work, and his will is to be respected, his intentions uncovered. If the metaphor used for the description of the workings of the work is one of an organism (with the implications of growth and development), the text can be best described as a network. The author inscribes himself into this network, but he can only exist there as one of its aspects, and not as a unifying force and the locus of truth. The author stops being the 'father' of his work, but becomes just one of the participants in the text. His is not the final authority, and the text's meaning(s) cannot be pinned down to his intention, either professed or assumed. Furthermore, while the work is designed to be consumed by a passive reader, the text can only be experienced in an act of production, pulling down the distinction between the acts of reading and writing. And, finally, while works certainly offer pleasure to their readers, it is the passive pleasure of consumption, as the reader knows that he can never rewrite the work he is reading; the text, on the other hand, offers much more: it offers jouissance, 'pleasure without separation' (Barthes, 1971a, 1217).

The distinction between 'texts' and 'works' does not function as a way of classifying literature itself, it is more of a distinction between different tendencies which can be contained in a single text/work. In a way, it is a description of critical or analytical attitudes and experiences of reading.

The interest in breaking up the work's unity belongs to the later stage of Barthes's work. In Sur Racine Barthes discussed the way in which the work of an author can be seen as a systematic unity, both on the level of the signifier (i.e. asking the question: what is relevant for the meaning of the work; what should we take into account as the relevant, signifying aspect of it: a word, a verse, a single play or poem, a successful phrase?) and the signified (the biography of the author? his historical situation? his subconscious? the society in which he lived?) (Barthes, 1963, 1097-98). Barthes suggests that where the signifier is concerned, all of the author's works should be taken into account in order to create, following Goldmann, a coherent signifying

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system, like language, in which the significance of an element lies not in the frequency of its occurrence, but in its place within the system.

As for the signified, that is, the meaning of the work, Barthes argues that, just like any other sign, the work can generate several parallel meanings, all of which have a relevance and a truth of their own (Barthes, 1963, 1098); he even explicitly says that, regarding Racinian interpretations, he admires many of them, and does not have any quarrel with the studies he quotes (Barthes, 1963, 1103). An interpretation always has to stop and anchor its search for meaning somewhere in order to build its own coherence. However, the problem arises when an interpreter starts believing in the ‘innocence’ of his own choice of the anchoring point, and even more when that choice is led by a belief in the essentially imitative and analogic nature of art, namely, when a critic searches for concrete historical, biographical and psychological models for literary characters and situations. Barthes argues that imagination deforms, that it uses not just real-life persons, situations, images and psychological states, but also impulses, desires, resistances (Barthes, 1963, 1100-1). To study the work of an author historically, according to Barthes, means systematically to study his language, technique and collective mentality exposed and represented in his work, not the personality behind it (Barthes, 1963, 1100-3). The work should be allowed its multiple signifieds, and each interpretation should openly declare its vantage point and the critical engagement that lies behind it; the author is there only to give a unity to the work, not to provide us with its psychological, biographical, historical sources. As Barthes said in the introductory note to his Michelet, to study a writer means to give a coherence to the man, to study the structure of his existence and his obsessions; not to search for biographical or historical sources of his work (1954, 245).

We can see from this that already in *Sur Racine* Barthes believed that an author’s work can produce multiple interpretations without creating the ultimate truth about the author and his work; to repeat, even in *S/Z* he claimed that the *lisible* text is or can be plural. The author was there as an axis around which a signifying system could be recreated, but that signifying system could be different from one reading to the next.

For the Barthes of 1971, in the work the author functions as the source of unity and ‘genuine truth’, whereas in the text he can only participate as one of the elements, ‘as a guest’ or ‘another figure sewn into the rug’, never as a privileged voice which we must trust and respect. Between *Sur Racine* and ‘De l’oeuvre au texte’, the notion of the author had changed for Barthes. It had become a combination of the negative notion of
the author as a critical limitation (i.e. the personality and its environment which are the origin of the work and lie behind its truest interpretations) and the previously positive notion of the author as the language and the obsessions organised around the author’s ‘I’. The entire concept of the author had become negative; it seems as if Barthes had grown to believe that as long as we have the figure of the author there at all, the literary text will centre itself around that figure, regardless of whether we define it in purely semiotic or in positivist terms. In 1971, Barthes has lost his interest in things coherently systematic, and is coming closer to that Medieval notion of authorship Burke proposes as the real alternative to the author as the Kantian subject.

Michel Foucault and ‘What Is an Author?’

Stillinger could not restrain himself from noting that, a year after the publication of Barthes’s pronouncement on the death of the author, Foucault, ‘an author apparently alive enough to look across town and see what Barthes was doing, addressed the Société française de Philosophie’ on the ‘recent absence’ of the author. It is important to look at this essay by Foucault because he pushes Barthes’s argument further, and not as a provocative rhetorical exercise (which Barthes’s text to a large degree was), but as a serious epistemological project. I aim to show some of the problems behind the general notion of the ‘death’, or disappearance, or irrelevance of the author, in contrast to Bakhtin’s views, but also in contrast to the more moderate, ‘Medieval’ version of authorship as proposed by Burke.

One of Foucault’s main arguments in ‘What Is an Author?’ is that ‘today’s writing has freed itself from the dimension of expression’, that it has become ‘an interplay of signs arranged less according to its signified content than according to the very nature of the signifier’, and that ‘the author’s disappearance ..., since Mallarmé, has been a constantly recurring event’ (Foucault, 1979, 145). It is not any more ‘the point to manifest or exalt the act of writing, nor is it to pin a subject within language; it is rather a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears’ (Foucault, 1979, 142). We can see here what Burke points out: that Foucault

85 This is the second version of a text which was first published by Bulletin de la Société Française de Philosophie, 63, 1969.
is not just intent on sidelining the issue of authorship in literary studies, but that ‘the
death of subject must connect with a general death of man’(1992, 14).

Foucault sees ‘the death of the author’ very much as a concluded business; there
is no question of trying to revive him, but only of examining what it is that we are left
with now that he is gone. However, in his discussion on the function of the author’s
name, the impression one gets is that the author and his work still seem to be very much
alive – at first only nominally. Referring to John Searle’s analyses, Foucault points out
that the name of the author functions as all names do: more than just a pure reference, it
is ‘the equivalent of a description’(Foucault, 1979, 146). In the very name of the author
we already have a certain image (Stanley Fish would say that it is a certain
interpretation) of the author and his work, one that is handed down to us by our cultural
and scholarly tradition. Even where the real origin of a text is essentially unknown (as
with Homer’s epics), the author’s name continues to perform its classificatory function,
putting those texts together in the relationship of ‘homogeneity, filiation, authentication’
(Foucault, 1979, 148). As Burke points out (1992, 93), although Foucault begins his
essay by asking ‘What does it matter who is speaking?’ and ends with the conclusion
that it does not or should not really matter, the rest of the essay ‘provides the most
extreme example of why it does matter’.

For example, Foucault suggests that writers, who from the end of the eighteenth
century became secure in their ownership of their texts and thus started participating in
the ‘system of property that characterises our society’, ‘compensated’ for their secure
status by ‘rediscovering the old, bipolar field of discourse, systematically practising
transgression and thereby restoring danger to a writing which was now guaranteed the
benefits of ownership’ (Foucault, 1979, 149). What Foucault does not say, however, is
whether this relatively new, intentional kind of transgression carried the same risk of
sanction as before. For, if it did and does, then the distinction between the author and
the private individual of the same name is not as strong as he repeatedly claims it to be,
since punishment for transgression (and I am taking the word ‘punishment’ literally, as I
imagine Foucault intended it to be taken) cannot be carried out on the abstract entity of
the author, but only on the individual himself. Furthermore, this would also mean that
the author is personally responsible for his writing and for its transgressiveness, and
that, therefore, writing cannot be just a free game which keeps breaking its own rules
and which creates a space ‘into which the writing subject constantly disappears’. It
seems to me that Foucault here creates a similar kind of confusion to that of Julia
Kristeva in her essay ‘Le mot, le dialogue et le roman’, as both announce the disappearance of the subject of writing, and define literary discourse as a free game of signification, but at the same time declare writing to be transgressive and subversive. It seems to me that without a strong sense (which we do find in Bakhtin) of the social and ideological significance of literature, and of every word we utter, there can be no real subversiveness and transgression in a literary text. There can hardly be any real ‘danger’ for the writer if all he is doing is just playing the game of free signification and of combining different cultural codes, and if all he is transgressing are the rules of that game.

On the other hand, Genette, although not talking about transgression and punishment, nevertheless refuses to discuss the notion of the author as divorced from the private and historical individual with the same name. In Nouveau discours du récit, Genette questions the usefulness of the notion of the implied author, and says that ‘un récit de fiction est fictivement produit par son narrateur, et effectivement par son auteur (réel); entre eux, personne ne travaille, et toute espèce de performance textuelle ne peut être attribuée qu’à l’un ou à l’autre, selon le plan adopté’ (Genette, 1983, 96). He concludes by saying:

L’auteur impliqué, c’est tout ce que le texte nous donne à connaître de l’auteur, et pas plus que tout autre lecteur le poéticien ne doit le négliger. Mais si l’on veut ériger cette idée de l’auteur en ‘instance narrative’, je n’en suis plus, tenant toujours qu’il ne faut pas les multiplier sans nécessité — et celle-ci, comme telle, ne me semblant pas nécessaire. Il y a dans le récit, ou plutôt derrière ou devant lui, quelqu’un qui raconte, c’est le narrateur. Au-delà du narrateur, il y a quelqu’un qui écrit, et qui est responsable de tout son en deçà. Celui-là, grande nouvelle, c’est l’auteur (tout court), et il me semble, disait déjà Platon, que cela suffit. (Genette, 1983, 102)

Genette is addressing a practical narratological problem, rather than an epistemological one, but his argument seems more logical. The problem of authorial responsibility, however, is not really resolved in Foucault, and it would seem that the danger of literature, and its liberation, as Foucault sees it, consists of literature’s capacity to create meanings endlessly and limitlessly. For Bakhtin, on the other hand, the issue is not so abstractly epistemological, but of deeply rooted social and ethical significance. For him, literary texts, often very directly, address social, cultural and ideological issues - they
participate in the great dialogue of their time, and have the unique privilege of being able to represent that dialogue fully and faithfully.

Foucault himself, by suggesting that authors intentionally cultivate danger and transgression in their writing, makes a step towards the Bakhtinian position, but then quickly retreats back into pure epistemology, and into the claim that it is the author (or the author-function) that puts limits to the dangerous and transgressive proliferation of meaning. But the problem has already been created: a writer cannot be at the same time the originator of and the limitation to the proliferation of meaning (if that is really Foucault’s definition of transgression). Moreover, Foucault’s claim at the beginning of this essay that ‘the author’s disappearance [...] since Mallarmé, has been a constantly recurring event’, leaving the literary text to be the space of the free play of signification, creates an additional problem. Firstly, although Mallarmé’s texts may be marked by the absence of the authorial voice, his name is still within the more recent French culture attached to the phenomenon of the disappearance of the author (with both Foucault and Barthes contributing additionally to that perception), thus defining his writing and to a certain extent limiting its freedom of signification; and secondly, it is unclear where the change in the mode of writing can be situated. For a moment, it would seem that Foucault might accept that this is due to a change in writers’ literary intentions; if they could decide to bring danger back into literature, why not decide to create their own disappearance within the body of the literary text? Even if it is not the writers who originated the change, than that change could only have happened at the cultural level: Western European (or French) culture at one point (around the time of Mallarmé) decided that it did not need the authorial voice and intention any more, and decided to regard literary discourse as free of any origins which come from an individual human subject. But then how can that same culture be still so attached to the institution of authorship and so stubborn in retaining the limits of signification that that institution brings with it, and be so afraid of accepting the proliferation of meaning that it was so ready to embrace?

This problem might only serve as an illustration of how author-based our cultural and literary perception is, that even the critic who speaks out so strongly against the limitations of the institution of authorship cannot escape the thought that thinks within those limits. And Foucault to some extent admits this, by saying that ‘it would be pure romanticism... to imagine a culture in which the fictive would operate in an absolutely free state, in which fiction would be put at the disposal of everyone and
would develop without passing through something like a necessary or constraining figure' (Foucault, 1979, 159). Nevertheless, he proposes a programme which would enable us to gradually stop thinking in those terms, and maybe eventually even get rid of them altogether. He suggests that we start by asking the following questions:

What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in it where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject-functions? And behind all these questions, we would hear hardly anything but the stirring of an indifference: 'What difference does it make who is speaking?' (Foucault, 1979, 160)

And this final question is the same one with which he started his essay. And although the essay comes full circle in the rhetorical sense, as Burke has pointed out, there are still several things in it that remain unresolved. One of the most important is the idea that transgression or the possibility of transgression is 'an imperative peculiar to literature', and that writers were and perhaps still are subject to possible punishment for the transgressiveness of their writing. It seems to me that this idea opens up a gap in Foucault’s argument, which, as it stands, is very much based on the firm belief in the death of the subject and in the firm belief that modern writing can be nothing other than the infinite deferral of meaning. For, if writers can practise transgression intentionally and if they can be held accountable for it, this puts them in a very ‘Bakhtinian’ position, where they enter into a dialogue with their own society and culture. Then we could regard them as other than just authoritarian principles in what should be a free game of signification, but as active and responsible voices in the cultural dialogue. What this also means is that the power of which Foucault speaks is not writers’ alone: they may have the power to limit the signifying process of their texts, but the society has the power to accept or reject the meanings thus created, and to accept or to discipline the writers themselves.

And then it would still very much matter who is speaking.
Back to Bakhtin: The Problem of the Author in Bakhtin’s Thought

In the chapter ‘Bakhtin and Contemporary Criticism’ of his book Bakhtinian Thought: An Introductory Reader, Simon Dentith presents the authorship problem as one of the central issues around which the debate about Bakhtin’s ideas and their dialogue with contemporary criticism revolves. Setting it against structuralism and the primacy it has given to langue, rather than to parole, Dentith remarks that the debate about authorship ‘is the question of whether, in considering the history of writing, you afford primacy to large, relatively impersonal and intersubjective phenomena such as “codes” or “discourses”, or to the agents who use them’ (Dentith, 1995, 90). According to Dentith, this debate rather resembles ‘the opposition between what Voloshinov described as “abstract objectivism” and “individualistic subjectivism”’ (Ibid.), and he places Bakhtin’s own position somewhere in the middle of those two extremes, with the authorial position not lost but distributed through different languages within a single text (does this not remind us of Barthes’s position in ‘De l’oeuvre au texte’?).

‘Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity’

Although Bakhtin probably wrote his early philosophical essays between 1919 and 1924, almost all of them, bar a very short one, were published after his death. Even Michael Holquist, whose reverence for Bakhtin is quite formidable, had to admit that ‘these texts... are extremely difficult and make demands on the reader’s erudition, powers of synthesis, and sheer patience not encountered in the books that have defined Bakhtin’s achievement in the recent past’ (Holquist, 1990, ix). If we add to this that one of the texts, the long treatise entitled ‘Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity’, contains in its title three old-fashioned concepts such as ‘author’, ‘hero’ and ‘aesthetics’, the difficulty, admits Holquist, is considerable. Nevertheless, he believes that these essays are extremely important, not just because Bakhtin held on to them for most of his life (although he was ‘notoriously cavalier about his manuscripts’ (Holquist, 1990, xvii) – one of which he famously smoked during World War Two), but also because they contain ‘many, if not most, of the ideas he would spend the rest of his life exploring, revising, or even contradicting... Any opinion of Bakhtin formed on the basis of his previously published work must now be modified or discarded’ (Ibid.). We shall return to this idea in the course of our discussion on Bakhtin’s theories on the relationship
between the author and the hero, and examine to what an extent it may be considered justified; but first, a few further remarks on the style and the method of 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity'.

As Holquist hinted, the style of the text is rather dry and stilted, and, heavily backed-up as it is by Neo-Kantian notions and terminology, does require quite a lot of patience from the reader. However, the greatest difficulty lies probably in its method, which is almost purely deductive and furnished with comparatively few examples from literary texts or art-works themselves. There are hardly any examples of the brilliant 'close reading' analyses which make Bakhtin's later work such a joy to read, and the reader is for the most part left to provide his or her own examples. The theory of the relationship between the author and the hero is entirely deduced from Bakhtin's theory of human personality and of perception of that personality (heavily based, as Palmieri (1998, 47) stresses, on Kant), and, due to this, the conclusions, and occasionally premises as well, have a somewhat dogmatic ring to them. Nevertheless, Holquist is right: this stage of Bakhtin's thought is quite important for understanding his later ideas on the human subject; however, not only because it contains the seeds of the later work, but because it underlines much more clearly the great theoretical leaps accomplished by the later work.

The theory of human personality which forms the basis of Bakhtin's thinking about the relationship between the author and the hero in aesthetic activity, and at the same time represents the most interesting and exciting part of the essay, rests on two basic terms: 'I-for-myself' and 'the other'. Examined through their differences in their spatial and temporal form (i.e. how the 'I' perceives itself and the other in space and time), these two terms also carry in themselves Bakhtin's concern as to how unity and wholeness can be achieved in a work of art.

Bakhtin argues there exists an enormous difference in the human being's experience of his or her own body and their perception of the body of the other. The difference is partly one of the point of view; and that oft quoted sentence of Bakhtin's sums it up quite beautifully: 'As we gaze at each other, two different worlds are reflected in the pupils of our eyes' (Bakhtin, 1990, 23). We always have an 'excess of seeing' in relation to the other, we always see something they do not see, we always see something about them that they cannot see themselves (and, to be sure, they always see something about us that we cannot see ourselves). But, apart from that, there is also a
necessary and essential difference in the way I-for-myself experiences its own body and
the way in which it experiences the body of the other:

My own exterior is not part of the concrete, actual horizon of my seeing, except for
those rare cases when, like Narcissus, I contemplate my own reflection in the water or
in a mirror. My own exterior (that is, all of the expressive features of my body, without
exception) is experienced by me from within myself. It is only in the form of scattered
fragments, scraps, dangling on the string of my inner sensation of myself, that my own
exterior enters the field of my outer senses, and, first of all, the sense of vision. But the
data provided by these outer senses do not represent an ultimate authority even for
deciding the question of whether this body is or is not mine. That question is decided
only by my inner self-sensation. (Bakhtin, 1990, 28)

In a curiously Lacanian way, Bakhtin talks of the self’s real perception of its own body
as lacking the sense of unity and finitude, as being (visually) fragmented, whilst any
visual information it gets about its visual ‘expressedness’ does not coincide with the
self’s own feeling of its own body. If we look at ourselves in a mirror, says Bakhtin,
what we see is still just our reflection and not ourselves in terms of our outward
appearance (Bakhtin, 1990, 32). The body of the other, however, is perceived in its
unity, as a closed and finished entity, whose outward expressedness can tell us about
their inner feelings and thoughts. That is why it is only through the eyes of an artist that
we can see ourselves: ‘Our portrait […] is indeed a window into a world in which I
never live; this is truly a seeing of oneself in the other’s world through the eyes of a
pure and whole other human being’ (Bakhtin, 1990, 34).

Not just the outward appearance of the body of the self and the other is different;
the context in which they are perceived is different as well. The self sees itself as
existing in the world without boundaries and closures: it cannot see the boundaries of its
own body (and even if it does see them, it cannot relate to them as real), and it cannot
see its own environment, only its horizons. This is a very important distinction for
Bakhtin: it is the environment surrounding, explaining and causing the other to be what
he or she is that we can see, but for ourselves we can only see our horizons, places we
can go to and not necessarily the places which surround us. We perceive ourselves and
our relation to the outside world as open, unfinished and without boundaries; the other
we see as exactly the opposite: closed, finalised and enclosed within his or her environment (Bakhtin, 1990, 39).

Furthermore, the self’s inner sensation of itself, the ‘inner body’, as Bakhtin calls it, consists of a jumbled mass of desires, needs and sensations, whose outward aspect ‘is fragmentary and fails to attain independence and completeness’ (Bakhtin, 1990, 47). Once again, and without the intention to elaborate the parallel further (it is probably a subject for a separate work), I would like to point out some similarities with the ideas of Jacques Lacan, especially where it concerns the difference between the Real and the Imaginary, as the difference between the inner experience of one’s own body as fragmentary, uncontrollable and open, and its visual representation (as perceived in a mirror) as closed, unitary and finalised.

This difference in the perception of one’s own body and that of the other has as its consequence the difference in the perception of their value. According to Bakhtin, one cannot perceive one’s own value in the same way as we perceive the value of others; we cannot love ourselves in the same way we love the other. Love, says Bakhtin, can only come to us from the outside, from the recognition and acceptance of our value which ‘descends upon me from others like a gift, like grace, which is incapable of being understood and founded from within myself’ (Bakhtin, 1990, 49). And he continues:

In fact, as soon as a human being starts to experience himself from within, he at once meets with acts of recognition and love that come to him from outside – from his mother, from others who are close to him [...] Words of love and acts of genuine concern come to meet the dark chaos of my inner sensation of myself: they name, direct, satisfy, and connect it with the outside world. (Bakhtin, 1990, 49-50)

Thus, according to Bakhtin, it is love which comes from the other that ‘shapes a human being from outside throughout his life’, as well as making him aware not so much of his value but of his potential value which can only be realised by the other (Bakhtin, 1990, 51).

The temporal dimension of human personality has a similar effect on the distinction between the experience of one’s own self and of the other. As Bakhtin points out, my own birth and death do not play any part in my own experience of my self and
of my own life, they are always perceived by others. In that sense, my own life, for myself, is not self-contained, but open-ended, without temporal boundaries, and cannot be experienced as a unified whole (as can the life of the other). In terms of the experience of the inner life, Bakhtin elaborates these differences further through the distinction between the soul and the spirit:

I experience the inner life of another as his soul; within myself, I live in the spirit. The soul is an image of the totality of everything that has been actually experienced—of everything that is present-on-hand in the soul in the dimension of time; the spirit is the totality of everything that has the totality of meaning— a totality of all the forms of my life's directedness from within myself, of all my acts of proceeding from within myself. (Bakhtin, 1990, 110)

As the spirit is defined as 'directedness', and not as something 'present-on-hand', 'the spirit cannot be the bearer of plot or story-line, for the spirit is not present, it does not exist— at every given moment it is set as a task, it is yet-to-be' (Ibid.). The soul is finalised (by me, for the other), while the spirit is open, always in the process of becoming.

This, again, has implications for the value my own self can have, compared to the value of the other; as Bakhtin puts it quite beautifully, 'a gradual coming to perfection (an aesthetic category) occurs in the other; in myself, only new birth is possible' (Bakhtin, 1990, 122).

As soon as I attempt to determine my self for myself (and not for and from the other), I find my self only in that world, the world of what is yet to be achieved, outside my own temporal being-already-on-hand [...] I find only my own dispersed directedness, my unrealised desire and striving—the membra disiecta of my potential wholeness; whereas that which could assemble these membra disiecta, vivify them, and give them a form—namely, their soul, my authentic I-for-myself—that is not yet present in being, but is set as a task and is yet-to-be. (Bakhtin, 1990, 123)

Thus we arrive at the concept of human personality as radically different for the self and the other. I myself, according to Bakhtin, experience my own body as a totality of desires, needs and sensations which have no unifying force in the shell of my outer body, for I do not experience my own body as closed and enveloped in its own flesh and
the environment which surrounds it, but as spilling out into the world which is boundless and which my own body strives to embrace. Correspondingly, I experience my own life as an open-ended mixture of tasks and possibilities, as a constant demand for change, 'a life that is directed ahead of itself toward the event yet-to-come, a life that finds no rest within itself and never coincides with its given presently existing make-up' (Bakhtin, 1990, 16). The body of the other, on the other hand, as seen by me and by other others, is closed and fully representative of the soul which is contained in it, surrounded by an environment which conditions and causes him or her to be what they are, and whose life-story is clearly delineated between the two set points of his or her birth and death. If we add to this Bakhtin's concept of the author's role and activity, we shall soon arrive at the significance of such definitions of human personality for Bakhtin's early account of the creative process.

According to Bakhtin, in our everyday relationship to others, we round them off as personalities, and try to predict their future behaviour on the basis of what we know of their past and of their environment. However, this consummating activity is fragmentary and involves only those aspects of the other's person and life which are of special interest to us, but do not involve the whole of their being.

In the creative process, on the other hand, the consummating activity of the author is directed towards the whole of the other: that is how the hero is created (Bakhtin, 1990, 4-5). Moreover, Bakhtin defines the world of artistic vision as follows:

_Man_ is the organising form-and-content centre of artistic vision, and, moreover, man as a _given human being_ in his axiological present-on-hand existence in the world. The world of artistic vision is a world which is organised, ordered, and consummated – independently of what-is-yet-to-be-achieved and independently of meaning – _around_ a given human being as his axiological surroundings or environment. (Bakhtin, 1990, 187)

Thus, the spatial and temporal aspects of the world gain aesthetic significance only in their relationship to the hero. It is this relationship to the whole of the other as present-on-hand and as an 'essentially determinate entity' (Bakhtin, 1990, 140) that guarantees the unity of a work of art; as man is the subject (the only interesting and possible subject), the 'form-and-content centre of artistic vision', it is only he who can give unity to that vision and to the work itself.
The author always sees more than the hero, he has an ‘excess of seeing’ in relation to him, and it is precisely this excess that enables the author to consummate the hero (Bakhtin, 1990, 189). Although we all possess an excess of seeing in relation to the other (‘As we gaze at each other, two different worlds are reflected in the pupils of our eyes’), the author possesses an excess which is absolute in relation to the hero. He not only sees what the hero cannot see, but also all that the hero does see; whereas in everyday life I can see what the other cannot, but not all that they do see.

Thus, for the author, the hero is the form-and-content centre around which his artistic vision shapes itself. The hero is the absolute other, finalised, consummated and present-on-hand, and the author has the absolute excess of seeing in relation to him. The author is the creative spirit, and the hero is the created soul. But how does Bakhtin define the author himself?

Firstly, it is important to note that here, as well as throughout his work, Bakhtin makes a strong distinction between the person of the author and the author as creator. He also warns against ‘trusting’ author’s own interpretations of their work: ‘it is not just the heroes created who break away from the process that created them and begin to lead a life of their own in the world, but the same is equally true of their actual author-creator’ (Bakhtin, 1990, 8). The author-person changes, he (or she) may see their work differently in different stages of their life, and as for the artistic process itself, they can have no real insight into it (Bakhtin, 1990, 6).

Bakhtin stresses:

An author is the uniquely active form-giving energy that is manifested not in a psychologically conceived consciousness, but in a durably valid cultural product, and his active, productive reaction is manifested in the structures it generates – in the structure of the active vision of a hero as a definite whole, in the structure of his image, in the rhythm of disclosing him, in the structure of intonating, in the selection of meaning-bearing features. (Bakhtin, 1990, 8)

This is a definition of the author (as he manifests himself in the work) Bakhtin will return to over and over again, and one can find direct echoes of it throughout his work. It is curious, however, that Bakhtin rejects psychological analysis of the creative process from his investigation at the beginning of ‘Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity’, but then proceeds to explain the relationship between the author and the hero through a
psychology of seeing, which could well be said to form a part of the psychology of aesthetic creation. Thus the initial distinction between the author-person (a psychological entity) and author-creator (‘active form-giving energy’) gets a bit blurred by the end of the essay. Nevertheless, if we take the above quote as it stands, it is worth noting that the separation between the author as a person and author-creator, and the exclusion of the psychological conditions of the creative process from literary study, very much belong to both the Formalist and Structuralist schools of thinking.

According to Dentith, the notion of a strong authorial position assumes the existence of a unitary and finalised subject; it is precisely this idea that is criticised in Bakhtin’s writing and to which the following alternative is offered:

The author is the indispensable starting-point for Bakhtin’s considerations on writing, but he or she is not conceived in a unitary way. In later writing, this splitting of the author within the author will become a matter of the various languages competing with each other even within the apparently unitary self. Bakhtin will not abandon the author, in the manner of some versions of structuralism, but he will radically socialise the way the author needs to be conceived. (Dentith, 1995, 91)

However, it seems to me that the starting point is quite different from the later work; and that the notion of the author and his role changes with the discovery of polyphony. In his early work, Bakhtin’s idea of the author is very close to the notion of the author as creator of which Burke speaks and which Barthes criticises so much. According to Giovanni Palmieri, Bakhtin’s ‘early writings belonged to the Symbolist and romantic school of aesthetics’, with its ‘Promethean conception of a demiurge with a god-like capability of creation’(Palmieri, 1998, 45). Ruth Coates (1998, 40) also speaks of the concept of the author ‘as the divine Creator’ in Bakhtin’s ‘Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity’.

But once the notion of polyphony is introduced, things become so different that Morson and Emerson note that ‘polyphony is often criticised as a theory that posits the absence of authorial point of view’, although Bakhtin himself ‘explicitly states that the polyphonic author neither lacks nor fails to express his ideas and values’. Morson and Emerson also emphasise that Bakhtin maintains that a work without ‘an authorial position [...] is in general impossible’ and that ‘the issue here is not an absence of, but a radical change in, the author’s position’ (Morson and Emerson, 1990 232-33).
Between the notion of the author as the divine Creator or Promethean demiurge and the author that becomes so hard to find that that Bakhtin becomes suspected of being a theorist of his absence, something truly radical must have happened.

However, for Bakhtin the definition of the relationship between the author and the hero will soon be radically revised, at least as far as one writer is concerned; and here we turn to Bakhtin's book on Dostoevsky.

*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*

We have seen that in 'Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity' Bakhtin talks of the way 'I' sees the other, and of the way the author sees the hero. The whole argument is centred around the gaze which guides our perception of ourselves and of the other.

In Bakhtin's book on Dostoevsky, however, Dostoevsky is presented as the author who, instead of looking at his heroes, as all previous authors had done, started listening to them.\(^{86}\) According to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky's hero is not an 'objective image', but 'pure voice'; he is heard much more clearly than seen (Bakhtin, 1979, 62). The hero interests Dostoevsky, not as an objective part of the world and an agent in it, but as a specific point of view regarding that world. As Bakhtin puts it, it is not important for Dostoevsky how the hero appears to the world and acts in it, but how the world and his own self appear to him; the world itself gains importance only insofar as it enters into the hero's consciousness (Bakhtin, 1979, 54). Furthermore, the voice of the Dostoevsky hero is the voice of a man (or woman) fully conscious of himself (or herself) and of the opinion others have of him (or her); as such, their dominant characteristic is their self-awareness and self-knowledge. According to Bakhtin, there is nothing Dostoevsky knows about his heroes that they do not know themselves; in this respect, there is no 'excess of seeing' (or, in this case, excess of hearing) which the author possesses over the hero. Unlike Gogol's characters of poor clerks, seen purely from the outside in their pathetic little lives, unaware of their own image in the eyes of the other, Dostoevsky's anti-hero of *Notes from Underground* is represented as a reader

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\(^{86}\) I shall be using not *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo (Problems of Dostoevsky's Creative Art)* of 1929, but its revised 1963 version *Problemy poetiki Dostoevskogo (Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics)*. This has no bearing, however, on the core of the argument in the chapter on the relationship between the author and the hero.
of Gogol and full of self-consciousness and resentment of how his sort is portrayed by Gogol (Bakhtin, 1979, 55-56).

And this is precisely what Bakhtin calls ‘Dostoevsky’s Copernican Revolution’: the moment when the hero becomes ‘aware’ of the author’s consummating and unifying view of him or her, and rebels against it by expressing his own self-awareness. Of course, according to Bakhtin, the hero is still created by the author, but the mode of creation had changed. To put it in the language of ‘Author and Hero In Aesthetic Activity’, the author does not treat his heroes as souls which are to be consummated and unified by him any more, but as free spirits, with a point of view and an ‘I’ (unfinished, undetermined, never coinciding fully with itself) of their own.

In the monologic novel, the hero acts, thinks and feels within the limits of his own ‘character’; he can never stop coinciding with his own self and with the author’s design of him. Such a hero is a part of the author’s representation of the outside world; he fits into that world as the other in our eyes fits into his or her environment (Bakhtin, 1979, 60).

In the polyphonic novel, where the hero’s dominant characteristic is his self-knowledge and self-awareness, the world cannot be anything other than the world of other, equal, knowing consciousnesses. It is not any more the single, ‘objective’, authorial representation of the outside world, but a multitude of representations, belonging to the author and his characters, all of whom are equal in their right to interpret themselves, the other and the multifaceted world which they all share. Each of these different voices (whether it belongs to the author or the hero) in the polyphonic novel is an ‘I’, unfinished, open and never fully coinciding with itself, never fully a part of the physical world and of the environment in which the other sees them. He or she is never finished, but always in the process of becoming. And the rebelliousness of Dostoevsky’s heroes lies in their refusal to see themselves or the other as a ‘voiceless object’ of the other’s ‘consummating cognition’ (Bakhtin, 1979, 68).

The author’s own words about the hero in a polyphonic novel, according to Bakhtin, are not the consummating and finalising words of the monologic author, but they address the hero and treat him as fully present, listening and capable of responding. According to Bakhtin, the author’s words about the hero are words about other words; the hero is conceived as an utterance with its own voice, and thus the author’s relationship to the hero can only be dialogic. The author talks to his heroes, he does not talk of them; he treats them as equals with the right to their own point of view. Bakhtin
insists that this is the absolute position of the author in the polyphonic novel, and not one which is relative and from which the author can withdraw if he wants to make a point from the position of absolute authorial authority. The voices of the author and his heroes are and must be at all times absolutely equal (Bakhtin, 1979, 74). It is interesting that Burke (1992, 24) uses Bakhtin's 'concept of the dialogic author' as an example of a conception of authorship which is 'determinately anti-theological', because it is 'constructed precisely in opposition to the univocality of epic monologism'.

Palmieri argues that through his concept of polyphony, the author brings himself to a point of non-existence; the point which, as we have seen, Morson and Emerson deny. Nevertheless, according to Palmieri, 'the image of the author as Bakhtin intended it is no more or less than the indirect speech of another voice'; in the polyphonic the author represents himself 'dramatically as a character', and the result of it is equally dramatic:

One of the more radical consequences of the use of indirect speech is the death of the author, of the self that is represented by his or her name and as such is the legal guarantor of the work of art. The dying process begins with the progressive distancing from his own words which the author inevitably undergoes by representing himself as a character; it is a short step from here to the adoption of a pseudonym, at which point the author points the gun at his own head. When the author opts for total anonymity, he pulls the trigger. (Palmieri, 54)

There is something slightly fanciful about the rhetorical manoeuvre of this passage, and it is enough to remember, admittedly in a considerably more literal-minded way than what Palmieri had in mind, the number of authors whose pseudonyms or anonymity saved their lives to know that denying yourself the right to be the legal guarantor of your work is not the same thing as suicide.

I also believe that Morson and Emerson are right, that polyphony does not automatically mean the death of the author, and Burke makes the same point:

Bakhtin believed that this multivalent or carnivalesque countertradition – which he terms Menippean – reflects a dissolution of hierarchies and the emergence of an anti-authorian discourse. Bakhtin was not, however, led therefrom to proclaim the death of the author, but instead reconceived the idea and function of the author in accordance with the modalities and structures of the polyphonic novel. (Burke, 1992, 48)
But how is the equality of author's and characters' voices possible? After all, Bakhtin still sees the author as the creator of this multifaceted, polyphonic world – how can it then be that he can surrender so much of his consummating authority to the other voices in that world?

This is possible, according to Bakhtin, because the polyphonic novel brought about a new novelistic form, and not new content. The polyphonic novel is a form with its own structure and rules of construction. By choosing the type of hero he wants to represent, the author also chooses the inner logic according to which such a hero must be constructed. This inner logic enters into the author's intentions and executes his artistic design, but it cannot be influenced by his intentions nor perverted by them. The rules of the polyphonic novel bind the author who has chosen to write such a novel: once he decides that the freedom of self-awareness and self-knowledge is the dominant feature of his heroes, he then has to follow the structural logic of the polyphonic novel, and renounce any privileged position for his own voice. This does not mean, however, that he thus renounces his position as a creator; the author of the polyphonic novel is, in fact, doubly active: he is present as the form-giving energy which creates the polyphonic novel with its free and equal heroes, and as a voice in it.

Furthermore, Bakhtin is also far from claiming that the polyphonic novel lacks unity. As Morson and Emerson point out, for Bakhtin, 'a work without some kind of unity would simply be a flawed work' (Morson and Emerson, 1990, 233). In the case of the monologic novel, the unity is achieved through the singular, consummating and unifying authorial point of view; in the polyphonic novel, on the other hand, the unity is 'of a higher order'. It is a unity of a dialogic universe with its various and often discordant voices and points of view. To quote Morson and Emerson once again, 'there is all the difference in the world between a contradictory or ambiguous truth and a truth that requires two or more voices. The same distinction must be drawn between merely expressing the monologic truth that 'others have equal rights to the truth' and actually embodying a dialogic truth' (1990, 239). The unity of the polyphonic novel, according to Bakhtin, is the unity of a dialogic truth in a dialogic universe. And it perhaps says something about the monologic habits of our rational thought that this idea, although, to me at least, perfectly understandable on that level of my thoughts which is very close to my emotions, nevertheless cannot but sound slightly contradictory on the most abstract
level. However, as it was precisely this very abstract level of understanding that Bakhtin was most suspicious of, I suppose he would have no problem with this.

So What is an Author to Bakhtin?

We have seen that, for Bakhtin, the author is a ‘form-giving energy’ and the origin of the unity (whether monologic or polyphonic) of a work of art. Bakhtin insisted throughout his life on the distinction between the author as person and the author-creator; however, in ‘The Problem of the Text’, one of his late essays, he said that ‘this does not mean that there are no paths from the pure author to the author as person – they exist, of course, and they exist in the very core, the very depths of man. But this core can never become one of the images of the work itself’ (Bakhtin, 1999a, 110). The link, although existing, is invisible to the reader and difficult, if not impossible to grasp; besides, one can sense that Bakhtin would think it an unpardonable intrusion on the part of the reader to try to grasp something which belongs to the author alone. This could also explain why Jakobson’s essay on Maiakovskii seems to remain unresolved on the very issue of the relationship between the author as person and the author-creator: the relationship remains in the core of the man, but does not enter into the work itself, and certainly, as Jakobson told us, not into the author’s relations with other people.

We can see that, in his insistence on the distinction between the author as person and the author-creator, Bakhtin very much belongs to the (Eastern) Formalist and Structuralist tradition. This is even more accentuated in, for example, his final notes in ‘Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel’, where he says that one of the main aspects of the author’s own chronotope is his literary and cultural tradition. The author speaks from the point of view granted to him by his own unique position in his ‘unfinished contemporaneity’, but even this is defined by Bakhtin as having primarily a literary and cultural character (Bakhtin, 1996a, 254-57).

Thus Bakhtin’s view of the role of the author changes considerably throughout his life, from the concept of the author as the Creator, demiurge, or Kantian transcendental subject, to a notion that comes very close even to the French structuralist (and even post-structuralist) views. Although the author remains, as Palmieri (1998, 55) notes, exotopic throughout, Bakhtin never gets rid of the author completely, although his existence becomes more and more textual, and the notion of the voice (who is
speaking?), and, one might add, the responsibility of the voice, remains important throughout.

Palmieri gives a very good summary of the relationships within which the author is considered in Bakhtin’s work:

- a) the author’s own world;
- b) the narrative world;
- c) the reader’s world;
- d) the author’s own discourse, that is, the language of the self;
- e) alien discourse, that is, the discourse of others;
- f) himself as author and living being;
- g) himself as the creator of the work;
- h) himself as a created image;
- i) himself as the image created by the reader;
- j) the characters as interacting linguistic consciousnesses;
- k) the narrator, the narrative style and the chosen genre;
- l) his own point of view (that is, a reflected moral judgement within the text) on all of the above. (Ibid.)

Whatever form the author gives to his work (monologic or polyphonic), his work enters into a dialogue with other works and with other voices in the culture to which it belongs, as well as with other cultures. And the reader is in a similar position; far from being obliged to submit himself to the authority of the author’s voice, he is free to approach the work from his own personal, historical and cultural position and enter into a dialogue with it (Palmieri, 1998, 256-57).

**Back to Barthes: the Return of the Author**

If Bakhtin’s notion of the author changed substantially, Barthes’s did not stay static either, and it changed again after writing ‘De l’oeuvre au texte’ and ‘La mort de l’auteur’. In 1971 he published *Sade, Fourier, Loyola*, in which he announced ‘un retour amical de l’auteur’ (Barthes, 1971d, 1044). In the preface to this text, Barthes discusses how one can ‘live with an author’, not by re-living or recreating the world and the actions which they describe, but by allowing their language to penetrate our own. *Sade,*
Fourier, Loyola also contains biographical notes on the lives of Sade and Fourier, which, however, do not try to tell the story of their lives in a narratively coherent manner (1971d, 1165-73). The notes (biographèmes) (1971d, 1045) do not follow any chronological order but group together events and obsessions in the writers’ lives; so, for Sade, Barthes tells of the concrete events of his life, but also of his love of dogs and his anger that, when he was transferred from Vincennes to the Bastille, he was not allowed to take his big pillow with him (1971d, 1170). Barthes explains in the preface to Sade, Fourier, Loyola that this manner of treating authors’ biographies comes from a personal preference:

Si j’étais écrivain, et mort, comme j’aimerais que ma vie se réduisit, par les soins d’un biographe amical et désinvolte, à quelques détails, à quelques goûts, à quelques inflexions, disons, des ‘bigraphèmes’, dont la distinction et la mobilité pourraient voyager hors de tout destin et venir toucher, à la façon des atomes épiciens, quelque corps futur, promis à la même dispersion. (Barthes, 1971d, 1045)

In his 1978 Leçon, he lists the authors he loves, listing Michelet, Benveniste and Foucault among them (1978, 801). The author, and the interest in his life, were back. How did this sudden reversal come about?

His definition of what living with an author means gives us a clear indication that, like Bakhtin, Barthes’s focus moved from visual representation to language. Although Barthes never believed that literature ‘represents’ reality, and although he concentrated on language from the start, a good deal of his critical energy is spent on denying literature’s mimetic function, which to a certain extent locked his thought into the debate on mimesis. But with Sade, Fourier, Loyola the focus changes, and Barthes starts seeing these authors not as carriers of a certain type of mimesis, but as ‘Logothètes’, founders of languages. This distinction would not mean very much to Lotman or Benveniste for whom language represents reality – so a new language would be a new way of representing the world – but, for Barthes, who, like Genette, argued against the representative function of language, it makes a great deal of difference.

87 Foucault elaborated a similar idea in 1979, 153-54.
As Burke argues, Barthes's arguments against the author and against mimesis go hand in hand; 'what Barthes has been talking of all along is not the death of the author, but the closure of representation' (Burke, 1992, 48). The notion of the author was problematic for Barthes because the author was an opening into the text's referentiality; one could always assume some kind of link between him and the world:

Correspondingly, the break with the author effects a severance of the text from its putative referential obligations, and allows language to become the primary point of departure and return for textual apprehension and analysis. (Burke, 1992, 43)

So, 'if a text has been "unglued" of its referentiality, its author need not die; to the contrary, he can flourish, become an object of biographical pleasure, perhaps even a founder of languages' (Burke, 1992, 47). Burke adds:

When the scene of representation has dissolved around him, Balzac can come back, an author of texts, no longer a scribe of reality; his work is no more 'a channel of expression' but a 'writing without referent'. (Burke, 1992, 48)

Burke also notes that Barthes’s objections to representation are more of moralistic than epistemological nature; what Barthes ‘spent a writing life challenging is what we might call the ethics of representation, the ways in which a society transforms culture into nature and thereby stamps its products with the seal of authenticity’ (Burke, 1992, 52).

It is his dislike of stereotypes and of the notion of the vraisemblable that drives Barthes against the notion of representation itself; and it is probably in Leçon that he states his position in the clearest manner.

Here, Barthes claims that literature (it is worth noting that he goes back to using the term in a positive sense, as a practice, rather than as a social institution) springs from man’s persistent attempts to represent reality through language, a task which is impossible because ‘on ne peut faire coïncider un ordre pluridimensionnel (le réel) et un ordre unidimensionnel (le langage)’ (Barthes, 1978, 806). Literature is realist in the sense that it has the real as the object of its desire; it is irrealist in the sense that it can never recreate reality the way it believes and wishes it should. From this it would seem that Barthes’s main objection to linguistic representation is that language is not
mimetic enough: it can only recreate one-dimensional, singular aspects of reality, leaving its multiformity untouched and unaccounted for. It is in this sense that language is 'fasciste': it always simplifies the world to the point where the rule of stereotypes becomes practically unavoidable (1978, 803). We are forced to identify ourselves and to relate to others within the limitations of the language we speak; so, for example, in French or Serbo-Croat it would be impossible to speak without referring to gender, while Finnish would allow us to refer to the third person without specifying whether it is a 'he' or a 'she'.

In Leçon, Barthes redefines his literary manifesto in a manner similar to the penultimate chapter of Le Degré zéro de l'écriture ('L'écriture et la parole') where he suggests that representation of different social languages and of verbal diversity in general is 'l'acte littéraire le plus humain' (Barthes, 153, 182). In Leçon, Barthes says:

Si j'étais législateur – supposition aberrante pour quelqu'un qui, étymologiquement parlant, est 'an-archiste' - [...] j'encouragerais [...] l'apprentissage simultané de plusieurs langages français, de fonctions diverses, promues à égalité. [...] Cette liberté est un luxe que toute société devrait procurer à ses citoyens: autant de langages qu'il y a de désirs: proposition utopique en ceci qu'aucune société n'est encore prête à admettre qu'il y a plusieurs désirs. (Barthes, 1978, 807)

Barthes stresses his agreement with Benveniste that language is 'le social même', and suggests that, consequently, the only way to counteract the fascism of language is to let social languages play in the space of the literary text:

[La] force de la littérature, sa force proprement sémiotique, c'est de jouer les signes plutôt que de les détruire, c'est de les mettre dans une machinerie de langage, [...] bref c'est instituer, au sein même de la langue servile, une véritable hétéronymie des choses. (Barthes, 1978, 808)

Here Barthes also redefines the role of semiology one more time, this time as a practice of gathering the impurities of language, 'la corruption immédiate du message: rien de moins que les désirs, les craintes, les mines, les intimidations, les avances, les tendresses, les protestations, les excuses, les agressions, les musiques, dont est faite la

88 My emphasis.
langue active' (Barthes, 1978, 809). The notion of an active language which is marked by the speakers' intentions and desires is very Bakhtinian indeed; and the notion that literature will represent the diversity and multiformity of the world by reflecting linguistic diversity is even more so.

Conclusion

Barthes’s notion of the role of the author changed throughout his life. At first the author was seen as the source of a literary work’s unity, as a center of themes and obsessions (Michelet). Not long after that, in Mythologies Barthes shows his impatience with the popular and media obsession with the figure of the author and the mythologies surrounding him (the writer works even when on holiday), as well as her (you are only allowed to write novels if you have had children). In Sur Racine, Barthes argues that the author is there to give the work a unity from which an interpretation could be attempted, and not to authorise a single, ‘true’ interpretation through psychology or biography or even history. In Critique et vérité, the rebellion against the rule of the author as the figure of authority, setting boundaries beyond which interpretation must not go, is already well formulated, finding in the end its strongest expression in ‘La mort de l’auteur’. The author ‘returns’ in Sade, Fourier, Loyola, having been re-defined as an ‘inventor of languages’ rather than as an authority figure providing an opening into the text’s referentiality. As Burke points out, this last move shows that Barthes was not so much anti-author as anti-mimesis all along. Mimesis for Barthes is inevitably corrupted by doxa, a socially sanctioned vision of the world, which is necessarily full of stifling stereotypes and prejudices. Whenever seen as a locus of a particular language and set of obsessions and desires that do not follow doxa, an author can be studied and even loved.89 Allowing language to move freely, to express a multitude of desires, to break down stereotypes and prevent their creation, is what Barthes believes literature should do. And it cannot do that if the author functions like a figure of authority, with his image set in stone and his work’s referentiality preventing the free flow of both his text’s and reader’s desire. This vision of literature’s ideal role is what sets Barthes apart from the other advocates of the author’s irrelevance (like the New Critics, or even like Foucault).

89 See, for example, Barthes, 1979.
Bakhtin's vision of the author's role changed as well. From the early notion of the author as creator, the supreme authority shaping his character's souls and consummating their lives, the author becomes a structuring force that brings into existence a verbal universe over which it has no ultimate authority. The role of the author of the novel is not to create a world over which he will have absolute control, but to bring forth different social languages, to follow the logic of chronotopes and genres, to set in motion verbal relationships and watch them unfold. This is why Dostoevsky as a polyphonic writer is preferable to Tolstoy, who as a monologic writer liked to have his characters and his represented world fully under his control. Also, in this respect, the author, as the medium for different linguistic genres, is not that different from the author as envisaged by the Formalists.

In the case of both Barthes and later Bakhtin, the author is problematic if he has the absolute power over his text and if he projects a single authoritative view of the world. If he is a medium for different social languages and different viewpoints, or if, in the case of Barthes, he invents new languages and allows his own desire to flow freely, and encourages the reader's to do the same, the author is a deeply positive figure. He is a positive figure if he renounces the authority he could have as an author of a represented verbal universe (Bakhtin, Barthes), or the authority granted him through a society's cultural institutions and the tradition they uphold (Barthes). The author as the medium of languages and desires, of new and marginal viewpoints, the creator of the site where ideologies meet and mingle and different social languages try to speak to one another, is the author of the literature both Barthes and Bakhtin desired.
Conclusion

Roland Barthes and Mikhail Bakhtin were two of the most interesting figures in literary theory that the twentieth century had. They shared a strong sense of the importance of language in shaping our personal and cultural identity. They both felt acutely how a dominant language can oppress human relations and determine the way human beings see themselves and each other, and looked for ways in which we can go beyond the context of the culture into which we were born (and, more importantly, bred). Barthes throughout his life kept coming back to his idea that bourgeois culture and ideology completely dominates every aspect of life in France, and constantly looked for ways in which that process can be subverted. Bakhtin, who devoted most of his life to literary studies, nevertheless argued for the liberation of human thought from fear and intimidation that the dominant ideology can inflict on it. Although written about specific literary issues, Bakhtin’s essay on the relationship between the epic and the novel, and his study of Rabelais and the folk culture (to cite just two examples), have nevertheless been interpreted, and justly, as critiques of the Stalinist regime in Soviet Russia.

Barthes proposed different models through which dominant ideology can be opposed and subverted, and all of them pointed to the literary text in one way or another. The earliest, writing, or écriture, was defined in *Le Degré zéro de l’écriture* as an act of responsibility towards history, and argued for a strong awareness for the residual meaning in words, for the consciousness of their inalienable historical memory. This bears strong resemblance to Bakhtin’s idea that words always carry the echoes of meanings other people give them, and that the novel is the literary genre which is most faithful to the living language precisely because it acknowledges and addresses that.

In his early work, Barthes also suggested that the most human act of a writer consists of a faithful reproduction of other people’s speech, not as caricatures, but as portraits which represent not only the words but also the view of life which stands behind them. Later, in *Leçon*, he also argued for a writing which would show the ‘véritable hétéronymie des choses’ by playing with signs and languages. This is very similar to Bakhtin’s account of the novel’s role in representing language, and particularly of the polyphonic novel (like the novels by Dostoevsky), which represent characters through the language they use and the ideology which stands behind that language.
According to Barthes, the decisive period in the development of the French novel was the year of the revolution of 1848, when the bourgeois writer realised that his view of the world was not the universally human one, that there was another class which was opposed to his own, and that he could not go blindly on writing about the human condition as if the bourgeois self was the only type of the self possible. In a similar way, Bakhtin considers that the crucial point in the creation of the novel as a genre would the moment when a culture recognises that its national language is not one and indivisible, that there are many different social languages which are spoken as a part of it, and that all of these languages are representative of a particular view of the world. Furthermore, the culture has to realise that other languages, too, are not just funny ways in which foreign people speak, but are also valid, to use Lotman’s phrase, communicative-modelling systems.

Barthes argues in *Le plaisir du texte* (as well as in 1973a and 1973b) that everyday language is made up of different, oppositional discourses, all fighting for dominance over each other (Barthes, 1973c, 1508). As every one of these discourses comes from a specific place in the social hierarchy, and has its own sociolinguistic reference, Barthes feels that there is a strong sense of a war-like topos which is present in each of them. The world of language (*la logosphère* — a term used by Bakhtin as well, and similar to Lotman’s notion of the ‘semiosphere’90) behaves like an ‘immense and perpetual conflict of paranoias’ (Ibid.). In the war of languages, Barthes suggests that only the text which is ‘atopical’, produced and read without being situated in a specific place in the conflict of the logosphere, can offer a moment of peace, a suspension of the war-like character present in the everyday language. ‘Le plaisir du texte (la jouissance du texte) est… un effacement brusque de la valeur guerrière’ (1509); but, at the same time, it cannot be an avoidance of ideology. To wish for an entirely non-ideological text is to wish for a sterile, frigid text; as Barthes puts it, the text needs its shades, it needs ‘un peu d’idéologie, un peu de représentation, un peu de sujet’ (1510).

For both Barthes and Bakhtin, the awareness of one’s own sociolect (and not just idiolect), and its position in the logosphere, is the first step in a responsible attitude to language, both where the novelist and the language scholar are concerned.

However, in his later work, Barthes was more in favour of the text constructed of different social languages without favouring any one in particular and without

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90 On this, see Mandelker, 1995.
elaborating their specific position amidst other sociolects. He argued that only such a text could counteract the terror of everyday language and its ideological blindness. At this point, he was wary of what he termed the 'fascism' of language, its ability to force us to say certain things whether we want to or not (for example, in French, to make reference to gender). He was also convinced that any thoroughly argued ideological position was bound to either oppress or intimidate (or both), that the fragmented, atopical writing which freely mixed languages in a 'carnivalesque' manner was the only possibility he saw as truly subversive of the established order. It was, as it were, a model of heteroglossia (coexistence of different languages) without the dialogism; Barthes started to believe that any dialogue was more likely to produce a conflict than to solve a problem. Although he noted that different social groups in France do not really speak to each other, he did not wish for a literature that would make them do so, but for a writing which would undermine the self-importance all of these different groups invested into their own languages. Irreverence and asocial disdain became for him the only way out of the 'prison-house of language'. It needs to be said however, that some of the more recent studies of Bakhtin have criticised him for his lack of acknowledgement that the dialogue can have its unpleasant sides; for example, Bernstein suggested (1989, 199) 'that dialogism itself is not always just clement or life enhancing, and that the resonance of multiple voices may be a catastrophic threat as much as a sustaining chorale', and Fogel (1989, 174-75) pointed to 'a set of great nineteenth-century anti-conversational, yet extremely dialogical, novels which fix on a more coercive and authorian dialogue regime to return it incessantly upon the reader'. Perhaps Barthes's insistence that heteroglossia and dialogism create a possibility for antagonism and not just for an exchange of thoughts between friends, is a useful corrective for Bakhtin's sometimes overly optimistic view of human communication and the nature of human language. At the same time, both Barthes and Bakhtin believed in the importance of literary utopias as alternatives to the oppression of the dominant language: Barthes had his concept of the scriptible text (which would, in a way, open up a dialogue between the reader and the text, in that the reader would not be just a passive consumer, recipient of the writer's monologue, but also an active agent who reconstructs the text for himself), and Bakhtin proposed the model of the polyphonic novel which would represent the characters' voices as equal to the voice of the author. Diana Knight argues (1997, 1) that 'a surprising proportion of [Barthes's] ideas are formulated through an explicit vocabulary of utopia', showing an 'almost obsessive
thought pattern’. Knight argues that ‘Barthes never stopped hypothesizing and fantasizing how things might be otherwise – otherwise, that is, than in his own alienated and class-torn society’ (2), and she says that utopia as writing emerges in Barthes’s work ‘as the ultimate mediator between the literary and political dimensions of his work’ (3).

As has been pointed out by Morson and Emerson, Bakhtin’s book on Dostoevsky ‘is really two books, something like the gestalt ‘duck-rabbit’ drawing’ (Morson and Emerson, 1990, 234). It functions both as a literary study of Dostoevsky’s works and as a ‘metaphilosophical work that challenges all of theoretism and semiotic totalitarianism by proposing a non-monologic, antisystemic conception of truth’ (Ibid.). Even if one was to prove conclusively that Bakhtin was wrong, and that the authorial voice in Dostoevsky’s novels functions in the same authoritarian manner as it does in, say, Tolstoy’s, the fact that Bakhtin elaborated the model of the polyphonic novel would provide us with an alternative for the present state of affairs, one which would exist as a critical utopia, just like Barthes’s scriptible text. As Barthes put it in Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes:

A quoi sert l’utopie? A faire du sens. Face au présent, à mon présent, l’utopie est un terme second qui permet de faire jouer le délic de signe: le discours sur le réel devient possible, je sors de l’aphasie où me plonge l’affolement de tout ce qui ne va pas en moi, dans ce monde qui est le mien. (Barthes, 1975, 153)

And yet, it was as if Barthes had never stopped wishing for a pure language which would make the world speak its true nature, whereas for Bakhtin the existence of different languages which described it represented the true nature of the human world. If the ability to ‘see language’ was Barthes’s illness, it was Bakhtin’s joy; for both, it was probably their greatest talent.

Nevertheless, both of them saw the world through language, and approached human reality from a language-oriented point of view. The material world hardly interested them and they both saw literature as based almost entirely on language alone. Although Barthes in Mythologies did point out to the social realities which lay behind the bourgeois myths, he still insisted, contrary to Sartre, that literature is made of nothing but language and that the only possible type of engagement in literature consists
of a sense of responsibility towards language and not towards social reality. Neither Barthes nor Bakhtin believed in the role of the author as a psychological agent in a biographical sense, both saw him mainly as a constellation of forces belonging to the literary and cultural tradition. In his chronotope essays, Bakhtin defined the writer's contemporaneity as consisting mainly of the 'realm of literature', and, more broadly, of culture (Bakhtin, 1996a, 255-56). The writer writes in a dialogue with the literature and culture he encounters in his time, and the individual aspect of his work originates from his unique position in space and time in relation to that culture.

Bakhtin developed the idea of a morality which is based on the specific position one occupies in time and space; he argued for a very Sartrian need for a 'non-alibi' in existence, and insisted that we can only act morally if we take into account the specific circumstances of our relationship with others, and not just act on general moral rules. Bakhtin also argued that we have to respect the particularity of others, and listen to their individual voices. As for Barthes, Gardiner (1999, 266) noted the link with Bakhtin which could only have been the result of a peculiar likeness of temperaments, and said that 'Bakhtin continually emphasises the presence of what Barthes once called the 'grain of the voice', the trace of the flesh-and-blood personality that lies behind every utterance'. Patrizia Lombardo, commenting on the same essay by Barthes ('Le grain de la voix', 1972), said:

Here lies the perfection of literature, that which makes it a song, music: the voice, mysteriously taken from a person, both particular to a body and anonymous like matter in its primordial state, this voice is integrated into what is by nature mute, the written page. (Lombardo, 1989, 63)

Moreover, one senses that for Barthes, too, the relationship with his own contemporaneity consisted of a series of repositionings and renegotiations, each designed to prevent him from being stuck in a single role for very long.

And this is probably the most striking similarity between the two thinkers: Barthes can be seen as a model of Bakhtinian subjectivity par excellence.

George Wasserman remarked (1981, 7) that every attempt at thinking or writing about Barthes regretfully reduces his writing to an oeuvre and his person to a finalised image, whereas 'every text he has written is, before anything else, an act of resistance to such closures'.
Barthes himself noted that he was always in a process of starting different projects, but never had any will to finish them. For him, this tendency to postpone completion was a way of keeping interest and plans alive; since they hardly ever fully exhausted themselves, grand plans for the perfect book kept coming back as ‘traces of an obsession’, ready to be revived at any moment. Besides, they also offered to others suggestions of ideas, open to different types of development (Barthes, 1975, 227-28). Barthes was as uncomfortable about the idea of finalisation as Bakhtin was, and he even defined his own intellectual progress as a series of resistances to his own ideas (1975, 186). In the same way as he never asked for anything other than a ‘privileged’ relationship with others, one that would be marked by a difference and not by exclusivity or generalised equality, Barthes always kept redefining his relationship to different ideas, without ever fully subscribing to any of them (at least not for very long) (1975, 144). As he disliked being qualified by adjectives and having his own image thrust back into his face, Barthes also disliked being defined through any one of the approaches he developed throughout his career (1975, 127).

Hence a very specific sense of loss which was felt by his friends and colleagues when he suddenly died in 1980. Tzvetan Todorov (1981, 323) argued that Barthes had created for himself a unique and irreplaceable role in the intellectual life of France, as he was the one who always positioned himself towards the main discourses of the time with a certain distance, looked at them from a position of displacement. Every time he did that, the discourse thus defamiliarised would appear under a different light than before. Serge Doubrovsky (1981, 329) remarked with deep regret that, for the first time, Barthes’s work stopped being provisional any more, and was suddenly arrested in its movement of return and surprise: it became a corpus.

I have thus committed a serious act of blasphemy, as I have looked at the work of Roland Barthes and Mikhail Bakhtin in the context of differences between French and Eastern European structuralism. I have boxed them both into a single context, by arguing that Bakhtin’s thought can be productively studied as a part of Soviet structuralism (late Formalism and Soviet semiotics), with particular similarities to Tynianov’s and Lotman’s literary studies, and that structuralism was the period that marked Barthes’s work the most. However, I have an excuse: the term structuralism, as it was used here, applies not only to those works of literary theory and criticism which deal with binary oppositions and actantial models, but also to those which argue that
there is a systemic (albeit very complicated) relationship between literature and culture, between culture and system(s) of belief, and between literature, culture and history. Structuralist work, like that of Iurii Lotman, usually does argue that literature is a system which behaves as if it were relatively autonomous, but it is also fully aware that literature uses material which is of an extra-literary nature, and that this material sometimes retains the memory of its previous, extra-literary function. As Lotman put it:

Why, then, from a structuralist point of view, must a work be studied as a synchronically closed structure, and why is an immanent analysis of the text the natural result? Do not structuralists thereby ignore the non-aesthetic meaning in a work? (Lotman, 1977, 32)

I hope that that I have succeeded in convincing the reader that the kind of structuralism which is capable of asking such questions is far from being a rigid and rather old-fashioned system of thought, and that it can still offer an exciting and fruitful way of looking at literature and culture.
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I have used the author-date system of reference, so the works published by a same author are arranged by the date of publication.

For Barthes and Bakhtin, the bibliography given is mainly that of the texts and editions of their work quoted or mentioned in this thesis, arranged according to the date of publication. I have used the three volumes of Barthes’s Collected Works, so the dates given are of the original publication, with a reference to the relevant volume of the Oeuvres complètes.

Since I mostly referred to the English translations of Bakhtin, here I provide the details of the Russian publications as well. The bibliography in Ken Hirschkop’s Mikhail Bakhtin: An Aesthetic for Democracy lists, as far as I can tell, all of Bakhtin’s works published so far, both in Russian and English.

The three volumes of Barthes’s Oeuvres complètes provide us with the full bibliography of his works (as does the special edition of Communications 36 (1982), which is dedicated to Barthes); and for a bibliography of his works in English, Rick Rylance’s Roland Barthes, or indeed, most other post-1980 books on Barthes in English should list them all.

For secondary literature on Barthes and Bakhtin, I list only those works I found relevant for my thesis, regardless of whether I directly referred to them or not. For fuller bibliographies of the secondary literature on Barthes and Bakhtin, I refer the reader to Rylance and Hirschkop, respectively.

For secondary literature, when an author has published a collection of his or her articles I cite only the collection, unless I have quoted from an article in its original place of publication.

In the case of collective works and special editions of journals from which I have quoted several articles by various authors (or which I simply found useful as a whole), I list the individual author, the title of their article and the title of the publication in which it appeared in (depending on the subject matter) the Secondary Literature or General sections of the bibliography, giving the full details of the publication of the collective work or the special edition of the journal in the Collections of Articles and Special Journals sections of the bibliography. Collections of Articles and Special Journals sections (there are three of them, one for Barthes, one for Bakhtin, and one general) are arranged in alphabetical order by title.
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