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## From Martin Buber's *I and Thou* to Mikhail Bakhtin's Concept of 'Polyphony'

Bakhtinian scholars and Buber's commentators tend to treat the relation between Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin differently. The former, with very few exceptions, introduce Bakhtin's dialogism either as developed independently of Buber or as incompatible with his teaching of the 'I-Thou' relationship. The possibility of talking about Buber's influence on Bakhtin is mostly avoided or denied because of the absence of explicit references to Buber in Bakhtin's writings. The latter, stressing striking conceptual similarities between both thinkers, neither exclude nor asseverate Buber's possible impact on Bakhtin. The problem of influence remains open. It is precisely this unresolved problem that has inspired the present paper, devoted to an investigation of Buber's influence on Bakhtin's concept of dialogue, on which his book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* elaborated. This investigation is divided into two parts. The first part reconstructs the history of the origin and rise of Bakhtin's study of Dostoevsky and posits the question of the influence of Buber's classic work *I and Thou* on Bakhtin's thought. In the second part a number of significant parallels between Buber's and Bakhtin's concepts of artistic creativity as one of the forms of dialogue will be analyzed.

### I

Bakhtin's first major work entitled *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo* (Problems of Dostoevsky's Art), renamed *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* in the second, considerably revised and enlarged edition in 1963, appeared in Leningrad in 1929. Not only was this a significant contribution to Dostoevsky studies, but also it was Bakhtin's first and foremost philosophical project in which his great concept of dialogism ("polyphony") was initially announced to the world.

Our knowledge of Bakhtin's biography up to 1929 and hence of the period he had been at work on his 1929 book on Dostoevsky is very sketchy. From Bakhtin's correspondence with Matvey Kagan,<sup>1</sup> we know that he began working on his study of Dostoevsky at least from 1921. In a letter to Kagan dated January 18, 1922, he writes, "I am now writing a work on Dostoevsky, which I hope to finish

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1 Matvey Isaevich Kagan (1889–1937), philosopher and Bakhtin's closest friend.

very soon....”<sup>2</sup> According to the Petrograd newspaper *Zhizn iskusstva* (The Life of Art), seven months later, in August 22–28, 1922, a monograph by Bakhtin on Dostoevsky was finished and being prepared for publication. However, this book was first printed only seven years later, in 1929. Caryl Emerson, the most knowledgeable Bakhtinian scholar in the United States, the author of several highly regarded books on Bakhtin and the translator of Bakhtin’s work, claims in the editor’s preface to the second English edition of *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (1984): “This 1922 manuscript has not survived, so we do not know its relationship to the 1929 published text.”<sup>3</sup> Also, Tzvetan Todorov, another renowned Bakhtinian scholar working in France and the author of the monograph *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, has claimed: “In 1929 he [Bakhtin] published a book: *The Problems of Dostoevsky’s Work*; it is known that an early version, probably quite different from the published one, had been completed as early as 1922.”<sup>4</sup>

Exactly when Bakhtin wrote his Dostoevsky book of 1929 is not clear, even today. There is no evidence that “this 1922 manuscript,” which Bakhtin had been working on at least from 1921, was sent to press. Neither draft pages nor a final copy of this manuscript are known to be extant; what remains of it are the letter from Bakhtin to Kagan, the newspaper notice in which the Dostoevsky book was announced in August 1922 as forthcoming—both cited above—and myths about its disappearance.

According to the testimony of Samson Broitman, who knew Bakhtin personally, Bakhtin claimed that the book was written four or five years prior to its publication,<sup>5</sup> that is, in 1924 or 1925, thereby making it clear that the 1922 manuscript had indeed not been finished. Moreover, in his text published in 1929, Bakhtin refers to critical literature mostly published (in Russia and Germany, and in both languages) during the period from 1922 to 1925. The text also includes references to the books published in 1926<sup>6</sup> and 1928.<sup>7</sup> These references are actually

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in K. Nevelskaja, pseud., ed. *M. M. Bakhtin & M. I. Kagan* (po materialam semeinogo arkhiva – Materials from a Family Archive), *Pamjat* no. 4 (Paris: YMCA Press, 1981), 263.

<sup>3</sup> See Caryl Emerson, trans. and ed., editor’s preface to Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxxix.

<sup>4</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle in Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 13 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1998), 4.

<sup>5</sup> S. N. Broitman, *Dve besedy s M. M. Bakhtinym* (Two Conversations with M. M. Bakhtin) in S. N. Broitman and N. Gorbanov, eds., *Khronotop* (Dagestan: Dagestanskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, 1990), 112.

<sup>6</sup> Max Scheler, *Wesen und Formen der Sympathie* (1926).

not just corrections made in an earlier Dostoevsky text, which was completed at the end of 1922 as announced in *The Life of Art* (but for unknown reasons failed to appear) and only revised seven years later for the book's final publication. Rather, they are proofs that the 1929 publication is the result of reworking and rewriting the same book which, although published in 1929, was started in 1921. Moreover, reworking of the Dostoevsky book was a task that occupied Bakhtin again thirty years later in 1961–62.<sup>8</sup> It would be, therefore, not wrong to assume that Bakhtin wrote his study of Dostoevsky's novels in stages. Thus, the process of writing can be described as follows: he abandons his first 1922 version, but then, rewrites it in 1924–25, and not once, but over and over again, never really finishing this work, even in 1929.

It is important to note at this point that the references in the 1929 version show that the period between 1922 and 1925 was most intensive and extraordinarily productive for Bakhtin. It is precisely during that time frame that Bakhtin read the great majority of the books and articles in different disciplines that affected his work on Dostoevsky. The following works, quoted by Bakhtin to which he gave great attention in his study of Dostoevsky, should be mentioned here first of all: S. A. Askoldov, *Religiosno-eticheskoe znachenie Dostoevskogo* (Religious-ethical Meaning of Dostoevsky), 1922; Otto Kaus, *Dostoevski und sein Schicksal*<sup>9</sup> (Dostoevsky and His Fate), 1923; B. M. Engelgardt, *Ideologicheski roman Dostoevskogo* (Dostoevsky's Ideological Novel), 1924; V. Komarovich, *Roman Dostoevskogo "Podrostok" kak khudozestvennoe edinstvo* (Dostoevsky's Novel *The Adolescent* as an Artistic Unity), 1924; L. P. Grossman, *Put' Dostoevskogo* (Dostoevsky's Path), 1924; and *Poetika Dostoevskogo* (Dostoevsky's Poetics), 1925. Bakhtin's polemic with these scholars occupies the central place in his discussion of the key theoretical and methodological problems of critical literature on Dostoevsky.

Needless to say, that along with the explicit polemic with scholars quoted by Bakhtin there is a hidden polemic with other philosophers not mentioned in his study of Dostoevsky. The philosophical significance of German–Jewish thought for Bakhtin, in general, and the influence of Hermann Cohen and Ernst Cassirer on his philosophy, in particular, were already widely discussed by many Bakhti-

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7 F. M. Dostoevsky, *Pisma* [Letters] (Moscow: Leningrad, 1928), vol. 1; and G. Simmel, *Gete* [Goethe] (Moscow: Izd. Gosudarstvennoj akademii khudozestvennykh nauk, 1928). Russian translation.

8 M. M. Bakhtin, "Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book," in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. C. Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 283–302.

9 Bakhtin quotes Kaus in German.

nian scholars.<sup>10</sup> Brian Poole's archival work<sup>11</sup> has uncovered notebooks in which Bakhtin made copious notes from Cassirer's work. Pool has argued that several pages of Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (1965) are lifted word-for-word from Cassirer's *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy* (1927), without reference to the original. Furthermore, according to Pool, the ethics described in Bakhtin's work *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity* (written between 1920 and 1927) are mostly derived from a source Bakhtin does not even mention, namely, the phenomenology of Max Scheler, whose text *The Essence and Forms of Sympathy* merited a 58-page synopsis in a notebook of Bakhtin's from 1926.<sup>12</sup> It is, therefore, not surprising that Bakhtin does not mention Buber in his Dostoevsky book.<sup>13</sup> But if, as Broitman testifies, the book was written in 1925, or at least no earlier than 1924, that is, a year or two after the appearance of Buber's philosophical essay *Ich und Du* (I and Thou), 1922–23, could Bakhtin not have been familiar with Buber's work, which – precisely at this time—lay at the very core of

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**10** See Caryl Emerson, *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 230–231. On the influence of the Marburg school on Bakhtin's aesthetics, see Brian Pool, *Nazad k Kaganu* [Back to Kagan] in *Dialog-Karnaval-Khronotop*, ed. N. A. Pankov (Vitebsk, 1995), no. 1, 38–48.

**11** Brian Pool, "Bakhtin and Cassirer: The Philosophical Origins of Bakhtin's Carnival Messianism," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 97, 3/4 (Summer/Fall 1998): 537–578.

**12** Brian Pool, "From Phenomenology to Dialogue: Max Scheler's Phenomenological Tradition and Mikhail Bakhtin's Development from 'Toward a Philosophy of the Act' to His Study of Dostoevsky," in Ken Hirschkop and David Shepherd, eds., *Bakhtin and Cultural Theory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), 109–135.

**13** To the list of German philosophers, whose concepts Bakhtin borrowed without acknowledging his sources, we can add, though only hypothetically, Jacob Boehme. It seems to be more than a pure coincidence that Bakhtin's central notion of 'polyphony,' by which he means "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousnesses, [...] with equal rights and each with its own world, [which are] combine[d] but not merged in the unity of some spiritual event" (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 6, 13), resonates with Jacob Boehme's conception of the Spirit as a divine, polyphonically tuned organ, in which every voice and every pipe, in piping out its own tone, echoed the eternal Word (Boehme deals with this theme in chapter 14 of his *De signatura rerum* (The Signature of All Things), 1635. And although Bakhtin insists that the term "polyphony" is only a musical term, "a simple metaphor" (22), and he never, as we will see, really displayed any familiarity with specific theological sources, we know from his lectures on Kant given in the mid-1920s that he was familiar with German Christian mysticism (See K. G. Isupova, ed., *M. M. Bakhtin: Pro et contra*. vol. I, St. Petersburg: Izdatelstvo russkogo khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta, 2001, 73–74, lecture 6, Nov. 16, 1924) and therefore his notion of 'polyphony' might be of a more religious character than has been recognized in any of the literature on Bakhtin.

his interest? Hardly likely. Some Bakhtinian scholars<sup>14</sup> as well as Buber's commentators, such as Maurice Friedman<sup>15</sup> and Steven Kepnes,<sup>16</sup> stress striking terminological and conceptual similarities between Buber's 'I-Thou' teaching and Bakhtin's concept of dialogism introduced in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art*. The most explicit example is the correlation between Buber's concept of "the eternal Thou" and Bakhtin's concept of "the third party." Friedman points this out as "the most surprising resemblance"<sup>17</sup> between Buber and Bakhtin. The point is that, like Buber, Bakhtin does not reduce the dialogical 'I-Thou' relationship to the relation between men alone. For him the saying of "Thou" takes place

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14 Nina Perlina, "Bakhtin and Buber: Problems of Dialogic Imagination," *Studies of Twentieth Century Russian Literature* 9:1 (1984): 13–28. Perlina argues that Bakhtin has an affinity with Buber. She writes that Bakhtin and Buber "belonged to the same cultural epoch" (26) and probably arrived at their conclusions simultaneously through their common fascination with Cohen's philosophy and their interest in Goethe, Christ, and Socrates (22). However, as Maurice Friedman stresses, "like most other Bakhtin critics she has very little understanding of Buber." See Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, 4th ed., revised and expanded (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 354. Among the papers devoted to Bakhtin and Buber, see also A. B. Demidov, "Osnovopolozhenija filosofii komunikazii I dialoga" (The Foundations of a Philosophy of Communication and Dialogue) in *Dialog-Karnaval-Khronotop*, vol. 4, ed. N. A. Pankov (Vitebsk 1992), 5–35. Demidov places Bakhtin's concept of the 'I-Thou' relationship in the larger European context. Of special interest for him are the 'I-Thou' categories elaborated by Karl Jaspers, Martin Buber, and Semyon Frank. For Caryl Emerson's remarks on the Bakhtin-Buber debates in the late 1990s, see in her publication *The First Hundred Years of Mikhail Bakhtin*, 225–227. See also E. A. Kurnosikova, *Problema Ya-Ty v zerkale refleksii* (The I-Thou Relationship through Mirror Reflection) in *Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin v Saranske: Oчерk zizni I dejatel'nosti* (Bakhtin in Saransk: A Sketch of His Life and Work), ed. G. B. Karpunov, et al. (Saransk: Izdatel'stvo Saratovskogo universiteta, 1989), 170–172.

15 Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, Appendix B, *Martin Buber and Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogue of Voices and the Word That Is Spoken*, 353–366. Speaking of Buber's influence on Bakhtin, Friedman points to the fact that Bakhtin himself said in an interview, "But Buber is a philosopher. And I am very much indebted to him, in particular for the idea of dialogue. Of course, this is obvious to anyone who reads Buber." *Ibid.*, 353. Friedman quotes these passages from Josef Frank in "The Voices of Mikhail Bakhtin," *The New York Review of Books* (October 23, 1986), 56. Frank, however, had cited Maïia Kaganskaïa's essay "Shutovskoi khorovod," *Sintaksis* 12 (1984): 141. Friedman is obviously not familiar with Kaganskaïa's literary essay, which is a mixture of fact and fantasy. In this essay Kaganskaïa also writes: "Recently I have met Bakhtin on the Champs-Élysées; he was wrapped in a white toga with an epitaph written in Latin. He stood at the border between the Renaissance and the Middle Ages." *Ibid.*, 144 In the light of this vignette, the source appears not to be credible.

16 Steven Kepnes, *The Text as Thou: Martin Buber's Dialogical Hermeneutics and Narrative Theology* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), 63–71.

17 Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, 357.

in man's relation with the world, that is, with "the world order, nature,"<sup>18</sup> the world of physical objects and different objective phenomena, and this includes the saying of "Thou" to God. In his analysis of Dostoevsky's characters, he writes that for them "to conceive of an object means to address it;" the Dostoevskian hero "does not acknowledge an object without addressing it," "does not think about phenomena, he speaks with them,"<sup>19</sup> he thinks and talks about the world and its order, "as if he were talking not about the world but with the world."<sup>20</sup> The world, to which one addresses oneself dialogically, becomes a "Thou" for the speaker; he reacts to it, he sees himself "personally insulted by the world order, personally humiliated by its blind necessity" and "casts an energetic reproach at the world order, even at the mechanical necessity of nature."<sup>21</sup> "But while speaking [...] with the world," Bakhtin says, the hero "simultaneously addresses a third party as well: he squints his eyes to the side, toward the listener, the witness, the judge,"<sup>22</sup> he speaks "to God as the guilty party responsible for the world order."<sup>23</sup> And this "third," Friedman claims,<sup>24</sup> is an application of Buber's concept of the "eternal Thou," according to which "in each *Thou* we address the eternal *Thou*."<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, Bakhtin makes use of such characteristic Buberian terminology and concepts as 'meeting/encounter',<sup>26</sup> 'three spheres in which the world of relation arises',<sup>27</sup> 'affirmation of the being addressed' (transformed by Bakhtin into

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18 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 236.

19 *Ibid.*, 237.

20 *Ibid.*, 236.

21 *Ibid.*

22 *Ibid.*, 237.

23 *Ibid.*, 248.

24 Friedmann asserts, however, that the Bakhtinian scholar Michael Holquist has previously arrived at the conclusion that "if there is something like a God concept in Bakhtin, it is surely the superaddressee" (third party). See Friedmann, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, 358. See also Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, eds., *M. M. Bakhtin: Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), Slavic series, no. 8, xviii.

25 Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, trans. R. Gregor Smith, (New York: Scribner/T.& T. Clark, 1958), 22.

26 The German word *Begegnung* used by Buber means both "meeting" and "encounter." Accordingly, in English editions of Buber's work this term appears in both variants in the translation. In Bakhtin's study of Dostoevsky, we find also both variants: *vstrecha* [meeting] and *stolknovenie* [encounter].

27 In investigating the dialogic life of the Dostoevskian hero and his 'I-Thou' attitude to the world and himself, Bakhtin describes three spheres of relation (akin to Buber's three spheres in which the world of relation arises: man's life with nature, with other men, and his life with 'spiritual beings; see Buber, *I and Thou*, 21–25): (1) "the world order, nature," (2) the

his own characteristic terminology of 'dialogical addressivity'), 'making the other present' or 'seeing the other from within' (which Bakhtin variously called 'seeing *the man in man*' [italics in original], 'the intimate contact with someone else's discourse about the own self and the world', and 'penetrating in someone else's deepest "I"'). Furthermore, he shares certain emphases, for example, the radical distinction which he, like Buber, makes between 'dialogue' and 'dialectic', as well as between the 'dialogical relationship' and the 'subject-object relationship'. In view of the chronological precedence of Buber's work *I and Thou* with regard to Bakhtin's Dostoevsky book, it is by no means implausible that Bakhtin's use of some of Buber's key concepts suggests Buber's direct impact on Bakhtin's development as dialogical thinker. Besides, the fact that Bakhtin was introduced to Buber's work is indisputable. Bakhtin's other work *Forms of Time and Chronotope in the Novel* (1937–38) is the striking evidence of this statement:

[...] the motif of meeting is one of the most universal motifs, not only in literature (it is difficult to find a work where this motif is completely absent) but also in other areas of culture and in various spheres of public and everyday life. In the scientific and technical realm where purely conceptual thinking predominates, there are no motifs as such, but the concept of contact is equivalent in some degree to the motif of meeting. In mythological and religious realms the motif of meeting plays a leading role, of course: in sacred legends and Holy Writ (both in Christian works such as the Gospels and in Buddhist writings) and in religious rituals. The motif of meeting is combined with other motifs, for example that of apparition ("epiphany") in the religious realm. In those areas of philosophy that are not strictly scientific, the motif of meeting can be of considerable importance (in Schelling, for example, or in Max Scheler and particularly in Martin Buber).<sup>28</sup>

However, it is hard to explain why after having read Buber and mentioning him in his work of the late 1930s, Bakhtin insists on the originality of his idea of dialogism, writing in 1961: "After my Dostoevsky book, but independently of it, the ideas of polyphony, dialogue, unfinalizability, etc., were widely developed."<sup>29</sup> But it seems highly likely that the reason for the absence of Buber's name in Bakhtin's Dostoevsky book—in both versions, its earliest publication in 1929 and the 1963 second edition—was purely political.

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sphere of human relationships, in which the relation "of *I* with another and with *others* takes place," and (3) "the sphere of ideas (but not of ideas only)", see Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 236, 280, and 32, respectively.

<sup>28</sup> M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 98–99.

<sup>29</sup> Bakhtin, *Toward a Reworking of the Dostoevsky Book*, 285.

Sergei Averintzev, who met Bakhtin in the 1970s, claims that the lack of references to Buber's work and the absence of his name in Bakhtin's Dostoevsky study does not point to the fact that Bakhtin was not influenced by Buber already in the 1920s. "As I first met Bakhtin," Averintzev says, "I asked him directly [...] why he did not refer to Buber. 'You know how it was in the 1920s' was his reluctant answer. Although the term anti-Zionism has been invented by us later."<sup>30</sup> On the basis of Averintzev's testimony, we can not only posit the influence of Buber on Bakhtin's concept of dialogism, but also understand the reason why Bakhtin could not refer to Buber at that time.

In Russia of the early 1920s, Buber was quite well known as both a Zionist and religious thinker, but most likely primarily as the former rather than the latter. His speech given at the Fifth Zionist Congress on Jewish art as well as his *Three Speeches on Judaism* were translated into Russian and published in Jewish journals<sup>31</sup> as well as in books.<sup>32</sup> (The *Three Speeches on Judaism* were translated in 1919 by I. B. Rumer,<sup>33</sup> a cousin of the poet Ossip Mandelstam.) It is clear that both dimensions of Buber's philosophy made it impossible for Bakhtin to mention Buber's name in the Dostoevsky book.

The years 1922–1929 were a time of what was called "proletarianization" in all areas of cultural life. The campaign to proletarianize Soviet culture (known also as the anti-religious campaign, which began in 1922 and reached its peak in 1928) aimed at eliminating religion from Russian culture in order to form a new, atheistic Communist culture. The Bolshevik ideology sought the wholesale rejection of religion, which in the words of Karl Marx was "the opiate of the masses." Nadezhda Mandelstam, the wife, and later widow, of Ossip Madelstam, recalls in her memoirs *Hope Against Hope* (1970) that in the middle twenties "even such hackneyed expressions as 'thank god' were regarded as a concession to religion," not to mention that any reference to God was something that no-

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**30** Quoted in Mikhail Gasparov, "Iz razgovorov S. S. Averintzeva" [From Conversations with S. S. Averintzev] in *Sapisi i vypiski* [Notes and Extracts] (Moskwa: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2008), 110. It is crucial to note here that Averintzev, who with Sergei Bocharov, has edited Bakhtin's writings: M. M. Bakhtin, *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* [The Aesthetics of Verbal Creation], eds., S. S. Averintzeva and S. Bocharov (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1979), also notes in his commentaries to this publication that Bakhtin had greatly admired Buber (389).

**31** His speech at the Fifth Zionist Congress was published in the weekly newspaper *Buduschnost* (*Future or Futurity*) in 1902.

**32** M. Buber, *Evreiskoe iskusstvo: Referat, chitannyi na V Sionistskom kongresse* [The speech at the Fifth Zionist Congress on Jewish Art] (Charkov, 1902).

**33** M. Buber, *Obnovlenie evreistva: Perevod s nemezkogo* (Renewal of Judaism: Translation from German), trans. I. B. Rumera (Moscow: Safrut, 1919).

body “officially could afford to do.”<sup>34</sup> This campaign against religion as such was accompanied by intensified assaults not only on the Russian Orthodox Church and all Christian religious organizations, groups, and circles, but also on Jewish religious institutions. During the years 1922–1929 not only churches, Christian theological institutes, and religious associations among the intelligentsia were closed down, but also synagogues and traditional institutions of Jewish education, such as the *yeshiva* and the *cheder*. Religious propaganda in general was prohibited and it became forbidden to even print religious books and Jewish calendars. The authorities clamped down on expressions of Jewish nationalism, be they expressions of the Jewish religion or Zionism. Zionist activities and Zionist publications were considered to be anti-Soviet activity and counter-revolutionary agitation against Soviet Russia. During these years there were mass arrests of Zionists, accused of having close ties with foreign countries united against the Soviet government. In fact, for almost the same reasons—foreign connections and opposition to the Soviet regime—many leading religious thinkers, Christian and Jewish (such as Nikolai Berdjajev, Lev Schestov, Fedor Stepun, and Lev Kar-savin, to name only a few) were arrested and expelled from Russia, not to mention scholars who committed themselves to the Christian religion rather than to Marxism. The stated purpose of these arrests was to purge public and academic institutions of those who were considered enemies of the people.

Bakhtin himself was arrested around January 7, 1929 (other sources say on December 24, 1928), as a minor figure in the *Voskresenie*,<sup>35</sup> an intellectual “underground” religious–philosophical group with which Bakhtin was associated in the 1920s. The subject of most burning concern for the majority of the *Voskresenie* group, which included two Protestants, two Roman Catholics who were formerly Russian Orthodox, and several Jews, was the German philosophy of religion. For instance, in 1926, writing to Kagan, Lev Pumpiansky (a philosopher and literary scholar, one of the leading representatives of the so-called Bakhtin Circle and a prominent member of the *Voskresenie* group, arrested in 1928) described the meetings of the *Voskresenie* circle thus: “All these years, and especially this one, we have kept busy dealing with theology. The circle of our closest friends remains the same: Yudina [the pianist], Bakhtin, Tubiansky [the Indic scholar] and myself.”<sup>36</sup> In 1928–1929 several members of his circle were arrested. Bakhtin was condemned to five years incarceration in the concentration camp at Solovki; for health reasons, however, his sentence was commuted to exile in Ka-

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34 Nadezhda Mandelstam, *Hope Against Hope*, trans. from the Russian by Max Hayward, The Modern Library: New York 1990, 90.

35 The group's name, *Voskresenie*, means both “Sunday” and “resurrection.”

36 Quoted in Nevelskaja, *M. M. Bakhtin I M. I. Kagan*, 266.

zakhstan. The publication of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* coincided with its author's arrest and exile in May 1929.

In those years of the growing restrictions on religious activities and public discussions of theological questions, references to religious discourse and religious philosophy of all belief systems had to be deleted from scholarly texts. For example, we know that several references to religious discourse were deleted from an early version of another of Bakhtin's texts, *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity*, from roughly the same period.<sup>37</sup> The omission of any mention of Buber, a German-Jewish religious philosopher and a Zionist, in Bakhtin's 1929 book on Dostoevsky is, hence, also not surprising.

But by the late 1930s the official position on Zionism in the USSR began to change to a more favorable one. It is precisely at this time that Buber's name appeared first in Bakhtin's work. By the early 1960s Soviet anti-Zionism, merged with Soviet anti-Semitism, started again and intensified after the 1967 Six Day War.<sup>38</sup> And again at precisely this time, any acknowledgment of Buber's work is absent in Bakhtin's Dostoevsky book of 1963.<sup>39</sup>

## II

The purpose of the present paper is not only to elucidate why Buber's work is not acknowledged in Bakhtin's study of Dostoevsky, but also, more importantly, to show how Bakhtin applied Buber's ideas from *I and Thou* to the fields of literary criticism and scholarship. A characteristic example is Bakhtin's concept of artistic creativity, which plays a major part in his analysis of Dostoevsky's "non-objectified" and "non-monological," that is, "dialogical" and "polyphonical," mode of "artistic visualization" (Bakhtin's terms) and representation of the world, and which can be regarded as the application of Buber's model of the 'I-Thou' relationship of man with spiritual entities (*geistige Wesenheiten* or as R. Gregor Smith translates it, "spiritual beings"<sup>40</sup>) that illustrates this relation-

<sup>37</sup> See Averintzev's and Bocharov's commentaries to this text: M. Bakhtin, *Avtor i geroi* (Author and Hero), ed. S. G. Bocharov (St. Petersburg: Izdatelstvo "Azbuka" 2000), 322–25.

<sup>38</sup> Also known as the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.

<sup>39</sup> It is important to note that in the 1970s many of Buber's works were withdrawn from the public libraries in the USSR and moved to special departments of restricted access. See in *Kratkaja ebreiskaja enziklopedia* (Short Jewish Encyclopedia) (Jerusalem: Carmel, 1982), vol. 1, col. 552–554. At that time references to government-suppressed literature could lead to arrest. Not surprisingly, we do not find in Bakhtin's work any reference to Buber in the 1970s, as well.

<sup>40</sup> Buber, *I and Thou*, 22.

ship from the realm of art. The investigation of the similarities between Bakhtin and Buber proceeds in two steps. In the first, we will consider section eleven in *I and Thou* in which Buber explicates his view of human spiritual creative activity and which is an essential part of his teaching of the 'I–Thou' relationship. The second step analyzes Bakhtin's exposition of this activity—drawn into discussion of Dostoevsky's dialogic feeling for the world<sup>41</sup> and "his artistic perception of the world"<sup>42</sup> in the categories of coexistence and interaction – all this, in Bakhtin's own words, "prepared the soil in which Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel was to grow"<sup>43</sup> and is apparent, as he shows us, in the way a fictional character is represented in Dostoevsky as well as in the very principle of novelistic construction created by Dostoevsky, that is, in "the unity of a polyphonic novel."<sup>44</sup> Also belonging to this analysis is a consideration of Bakhtin's critical remarks on the traditional methods used at that time for interpreting of Dostoevsky's work. This last step, we would stress, examines Bakhtin's view of the process of creation in close connection with Buber's understanding of the creative act (considered in the first step). In Buber's terms this is a relational event that takes place between two separate existing beings—an artist and a sensed form (*Gestalt*)—and becomes present to us through the mediation of those fields of symbolic communication, such as literature, sculpture, and music. Finally, it should be mentioned here that having said that Bakhtin was introduced to Buber's work *I and Thou* already in the 1920s, we shall present Bakhtin's study of Dostoevsky following the original 1929 edition of his Dostoevsky book. Thus, the expansions included by Bakhtin in his second 1963 edition will be not examined here.<sup>45</sup>

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41 The present paper does not deal with the question of whether Bakhtin, constructing an image of Dostoevsky as the creator of the polyphonic novel, presents in his book an objective view of Dostoevsky's aesthetics or not. For an in-depth treatment of this question, see Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge MA and London: Harvard University Press, 1984), 276; Joseph Frank, *Dostoevsky: The Stir of Liberation, 1860–1865* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 346; Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Creation of a Prosaics* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 231; and René Wellek, "Bakhtin's View of Dostoevsky: 'Polyphony' and 'Carnavalesque,'" *Dostoevsky Studies I* (1980): 31–9.

42 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 29.

43 *Ibid.*, 31.

44 *Ibid.*, 16.

45 Since the first Russian edition of Bakhtin's *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* (1929) does not exist in English, all references to this book will be cited according to the second English edition of Bakhtin's revisited version of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1963) and to Appendix I of that edition, where we find the passages from the original edition of the Dostoevsky book (M. M. Bakhtin, *Problemy tvorchestva Dostoevskogo*, Leningrad: Priboi 1929). However, all quo-

Now we will consider section eleven in Buber's essay *I and Thou* more closely, attempting to highlight the unique aspects of his dialogic aesthetics, which left distinct traces in Bakhtin's concept of artistic creativity. At the basis of Buber's aesthetic position lies the conviction that the work of art is neither an impression of objectivity nor an expression of subjectivity. Rather, it is the witness of the 'I-Thou' relationship between the artist or "onlooker" as Buber calls him (in Smith's translation, the "beholder"<sup>46</sup>) and the *Gestalt* which arises out of the stream of perception, proves to be something unique and meaningful and calls on the artist to perform a creative act:

This is the eternal source of art: a man is faced by a form [*Gestalt*], which desires to be made through him into a work. This form is no offspring of his soul, but is an appearance [*Erscheinung*]<sup>47</sup> which steps up to it and demands of it the effective power. The man is concerned with an act of his being. If he carries it through, if he speaks the primary word out of his being to the form which appears, then the effective power streams out, and the work arises.<sup>48</sup>

As Buber explains to us in the following paragraphs, this form which the artist meets outside as well as within the soul does not spring from his own imagination and also does not originate in his past experience or, in Buber's own formulation, it is not "an image" of his "fancy" (*ein Gebild der Einbildung*) nor "a thing among the 'inner' things,"<sup>49</sup> familiar and known, already experienced, and placed in the ordered scheme of things. On the contrary, such a form rises to meet his senses "through grace"<sup>50</sup> in the present moment of intense perception, revealing itself as something unexpected, exclusive, not on a par with other things in "the world which is experienced."<sup>51</sup> And though the visualization of form is an ability that is already present in the perception of the artist, the form does not arise out of him and therefore out of detached subjectivity, but out of life. That is, it emerges into view (the German term *Erscheinung* may loosely be called "emergence-into-view") in the real intercourse of the artist with his

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tations from the second English edition will be corrected and brought in conformity with the 1929 Russian edition.

46 Buber, *I and Thou*, 25.

47 In R. Gregor Smith's translation, this term has been translated into English as 'appearance,' but it may also be translated as 'apparition' (or 'epiphany'). Interestingly, precisely this theological term has been used by Bakhtin in his comments—quoted above—on the motif of meeting in Buber's work. See Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 98–99.

48 Buber, *I and Thou*, 24.

49 Ibid., 25.

50 Ibid., 26.

51 Ibid., 25.

surrounding reality. This means consequently that art, according to Buber, cannot be understood as autonomous of reality, as something existing only as a content of one's single experience or imagination. At the same time, Buber's point is not that art making its discoveries in the outside world deals with real actual objects (*Gegenstände*). What the artist is faced with is not plain reality, but the *Gestalt*, which may be termed 'vision' that lacks a concrete image and is thus a "vision without image."<sup>52</sup> One "can neither experience nor describe the form," says Buber, "if a test is made of its objectivity [*Gegenständlichkeit*] the form is certainly not 'there'" but "the relation in which [one] stand[s] to it is real."<sup>53</sup> In his concept of human creative activity, Buber ascribes enormous importance to what takes place between the artist and the form in the reality of that relation. This relation, to his mind, plays an infinitely greater part in aesthetic experience than has been hitherto thought.

In order to explain this part of Buber's concept of the human relation to creative work, it becomes necessary to characterize his central concept of *I and Thou* with greater precision. The basic premise of Buber's exposition of the life of dialogue is that there is no 'I' in itself; 'I' exists only either in the relation 'I-Thou' (*Ich-Du-Beziehung*) or 'I-It' (*Ich-Es-Verhältnis*). These two combinations—'I-Thou' and 'I-It'—are two primary principles or two "primary words,"<sup>54</sup> as Buber terms them, governing man's attitude to his own self and to the world in which he lives. This "twofoldness" runs through every human activity. But whatever we do, Buber says, the 'I' that speaks the primary word 'I-Thou' sees the world in a different way than the 'I' of 'I-It' and, to be sure, the 'I' can pass from the realm of 'Thou' to the realm of 'It' and back again, thus changing its 'I-It' relation to the 'I-Thou' relationship.

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52 In his 1956 essay *What Is Common to All* [Dem Gemeinschaftlichen folgen] published in the *Neue Rundschau* Buber, speaking of the English novelist Aldous Huxley, describes this act thus: "In fact, the artist is removed from the common seeing in his decisive moments and raised into his special formative seeing; but in just these moments he is determined through and through, to his perception itself, by the drive to originate, by the command to form. Huxley understands this manner of seeing everything in brilliant coloration and penetrating objectivity not only as 'how one should see', but also as 'how things are in reality'. What does that mean concretely? What we call reality always appears only in our personal contact with things which remain unperceived by us in their own being; and there exists personal contact which, freer, more direct than the ordinary, represents things with greater force, freshness, and depth." Martin Buber, *What Is Common to All*, in: Judith Buber Agassi (ed.), *Martin Buber on Psychology and Psychotherapy: Essays, Letters, and Dialogue*, Syracuse University Press 1999, 102.

53 Buber, *I and Thou*, 25.

54 *Ibid.*, 19.

The man entering into the 'I-It' or subject-object relation views the world as 'It' (*Es-Welt*), that is, the world of indifferent and neutral objects, standing before him, external to him, and existing in and for themselves. And "the primary connection of man with the world of *It*," Buber writes, "is comprised in *experiencing* [italics in original]."<sup>55</sup> In order to "'find [his] bearings' in the world"<sup>56</sup> surrounding him, man's desire is to experience it. More precisely, this means to observe the world, to approach it from various points of view, to study it in parts, to analyze it objectively, and then to connect the "objective products" of human spirit together into "manifold systems of laws"<sup>57</sup>—"the law of life," "the law of the soul," "the social law," or "the cultural law."<sup>58</sup> In that relation, the 'I' declares itself to be "the experiencing *I*,"<sup>59</sup> that is, the bearer of knowledge, and the world round about to be the object that "permits itself to be experienced."<sup>60</sup> Taking up of this attitude to the world, the man speaks "the word of separation" through which "the barrier between subject and object has been set up."<sup>61</sup>

In *I and Thou*, Buber considers another attitude to the world—the 'I-Thou' relationship—which does not involve objectification, as the combination of 'I-It' does. The 'I' of 'I-Thou', standing, as it were, face to face with the world, transcends objectification. "When *Thou* is spoken," writes Buber, the man "has no thing for his object [*Gegenstand*],"<sup>62</sup> but is concerned throughout with how his being relates to the world that surrounds him. Here, the man sees the world not as the sum total of things to be experienced, but as the wholeness and unity of being, which "is opened to him in happenings, [...] affects him,"<sup>63</sup> fills his life, touches him, "stirs in the depth" of his soul, and "gives itself"<sup>64</sup> to him. Correspondingly, "the *I* of the primary word *I-Thou* makes its appearance as person"<sup>65</sup> who rises above the neutral attitude to the world and takes up the personal attitude to the reality around him, that is, "becomes conscious of

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55 Ibid., 48.

56 Ibid., 50.

57 Ibid., 30.

58 Ibid., 62.

59 Ibid., 55.

60 Ibid., 21.

61 Ibid., 35.

62 Buber says that "when *Thou* is spoken, there is no thing. [...] When *Thou* is spoken, the speaker has no *thing* [italics in original]; he has indeed nothing. But he takes his stand in relation." Ibid., 20.

63 Ibid., 42.

64 Ibid., 43.

65 Ibid., 67.

himself as sharing in being, as co-existing"<sup>66</sup> and thus affirms that reality as "a being [which] neither merely belongs to him nor merely lies outside him."<sup>67</sup> In this case, the man desires with his whole being—and in Buber "the primary word *I–Thou* can be spoken only with the whole being"<sup>68</sup>—"the full sharing in being"<sup>69</sup> and the more direct "contact with the *Thou*"<sup>70</sup> (*die Berührung des Du*) rather than the information about its essence. And if this act is performed by man as "*the* [italics in original] act of [his] being"<sup>71</sup> in relation to the 'Thou', if it is an act of "affirmation of the being addressed"<sup>72</sup> and of "response of man to his *Thou*,"<sup>73</sup> and if there is a "mutual giving," saying 'Thou' to what meets him, the man gives himself to *it*, in turn, *it* says 'Thou' to him and gives itself to him,<sup>74</sup> in this case, that act can be the source of creative inspiration and also the source of spirit.<sup>75</sup> For in this case, man's attitude to the world is lifted to a higher spiritual plane of being, though "it does not help to sustain [him] in life, it only helps [him] to glimpse eternity."<sup>76</sup> By this Buber means eternal values, a true order of being, independent of time and socio-historical changes, "the eternal *Thou*," and "divine meaning in the life of the world,"<sup>77</sup> to be sure, not the meaning of "another life', but that of this life of ours, not one of a world 'yonder' but that of this world of ours."<sup>78</sup> Such an attitude to the world is associated in Buber's *I and Thou* with the dialogical life.

This view on the relationship of man to the world forms the foundation of Buber's concept of human relations with 'spiritual beings' in the realm of art. The latter is also "twofold." But Buber believes that only the 'I' of 'I–Thou'

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66 Ibid., 68.

67 Ibid., 67.

68 Ibid., 16 and 26.

69 Ibid., 68.

70 Ibid., 67.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid., 30.

73 Ibid., 48.

74 Ibid., 43.

75 What Buber means by "spirit" is not "intellect." Ibid., 37. "Spirit in its human manifestation," he argues, "is a response of man to his *Thou*." Ibid., 48. "Spirit" he writes, "is not like the blood that circulates in you, but like the air in which you breathe. Man lives in the spirit, if he is able to respond to his *Thou*. He is able to, if he enters into relation with his whole being. Only by virtue of his power to enter into relation is he able to live in the spirit." Ibid., 49. On the meeting between 'I' and 'Thou' as the source of 'action' and 'creative inspiration,' Ibid., 22, 24–26.

76 Ibid., 43.

77 Ibid., 83.

78 Ibid., 105.

can have a true relationship with the form, for that form is not an object but a 'Thou' which is "disclosed to the artist as he looks at what is over against him."<sup>79</sup> Objectification destroys it, making it into an 'It'. "If [the artist] [does] not serve it aright," writes Buber, if he "turn[s] aside and relax[es] in the world of *It*," "it is broken."<sup>80</sup> Thus, to get access to the form, it is for him 'to step into direct contact with it' through activity. And this activity does not by any means imply a merely 'objective' observation of the form apart from any personal relation to it or neutral description of the general qualities of the form and integration of parts in a synthetic or an analytic way into an artificial totality (what is usually meant by 'synthesis'). Quite to the contrary, a genuine 'I-Thou' relationship of the artist to the form consists in affirming its existing wholeness, its unity, its "exclusiveness,"<sup>81</sup> its true 'otherness', and its independence from any external standard or rule prescribed by formal laws of artistic canons as well as from the artist's own stylistic preferences. This relationship "includes a sacrifice and a risk;" these are two conditions for seeing and "bodying forth"<sup>82</sup> the form as a 'Thou':

This is the sacrifice: the endless possibility that is offered up on the altar of the form. For everything which just this moment in play ran through the perspective must be obliterated; nothing of that may penetrate the work. The exclusiveness of what is facing it demands that it be so. That is the risk: the primary word can only be spoken with the whole being. He who gives himself to it may withhold nothing of himself.<sup>83</sup>

According to the above paragraph, the first condition is the affirmation of the form as existing being, as something which is really active of itself, something more than a passive object of the artist's experience but with rights equal to those of the artist. This condition means also the confirmation that the form can dictate the mode of expression, thus "the endless possibility" to express it 'otherwise' must be sacrificed "on the altar of the form." The second condition implies 'mutual giving', the openness of the artist, as a partner, to his vis-à-vis (*Gegenüber*), the wholeness of the form vis-à-vis man's wholeness, for they presuppose one another, but also "the directness" of the relationship between the two—"no system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy," Buber adds in the next paragraph, "intervene between *I* and *Thou*."<sup>84</sup> These two conditions

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79 *Ibid.*, 50.

80 *Ibid.*, 25.

81 *Ibid.*

82 *Ibid.*

83 *Ibid.*

84 *Ibid.*, 26.

characterize the true 'I-Thou' relationship as distinct from the 'I-It' relation. And it hardly needs to be emphasized that only the former, in Buber's view, allows the artist an intimate glimpse into the depths of what is presented to him. What the form presents, then, or, more precisely, opens up to the artist is a portal into "the heaven of *Thou*," "the cradle of the Real Life,"<sup>85</sup> and also into "the starry heaven of the spirit."<sup>86</sup> "And yet I behold it [i. e., the form]," Buber continues in the first person discourse, "splendid in the radiance of what confronts me [...] I behold it [...] as that which exists in the present. [...] It affects me, as I affect it."<sup>87</sup> It follows a process of interaction between forces going from the form to the man and from the man to the form, a process in which the effect of 'I' on the form is as creative as that of the form on 'I' and which is thus by its nature the dialogical relationship. The aim of creative work, as set in the final passages of section eleven, is to "draw forth" that which is disclosed to the artist, to "body it forth," to give it aesthetic "shape," and finally to "lead the form across"—in and through his work—"into the world of *It*,"<sup>88</sup> where it becomes a thing, "an object among objects [...] fixed in its size and its limits."<sup>89</sup> But, Buber insists, even after becoming a thing, the work of art is always ready to become someone else's 'Thou' or, more exactly, it can be re-encountered by someone else as his 'Thou', for "from time to time," he writes, "it can face the receptive beholder in its whole embodied form."<sup>90</sup>

This last quotation is of significant importance for understanding Buber's concept of art, which, as could be argued, frees the experience of art from its basis in the external, material existence of the artwork. As Buber contends in the previous section, the work of art, which was produced by an 'I-Thou' relationship and becomes present to us by way of language or sound, is not just "the verse made up of words" nor "the melody made up of notes" but "a unity" (*Einheit*), a lived unity of the life of dialogue, a unity which indeed can be "scattered into these many pieces,"<sup>91</sup> but if we do this, it ceases to be that which it actually is, and we are left only with a thing among things, able to be experienced and described as a sum of qualities. But, for Buber, the work of art cannot be left as a thing. The mystery of mutual action, the creative burning of the spirit in it, the eternal values which it bears in itself, as well as the

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85 *Ibid.*, 24.

86 *Ibid.*, 51.

87 *Ibid.*, 25.

88 *Ibid.*

89 *Ibid.*, 30.

90 *Ibid.*, 25.

91 *Ibid.*, 24.

effects of art on man cannot be described in this way at all. To properly interpret the work, the interpreter must take the attitude of a “receptive beholder.” That is to say, he does not simply experience a work of art nor does he concern himself in the first place with partial qualities and isolated ‘contents’ or formal laws of technique and style, limiting his relationship to art to the subject–object relation. Rather, he finds himself ‘bodily confronted’ by the work as a ‘Thou’ that stands over against him, fully present in the unity of the whole, and breeding the response in him.<sup>92</sup>

At this point it remains to be seen how Bakhtin makes use of Buber’s concept of the ‘I–Thou’ relationship with *geistige Wesenheiten*. First of all, Bakhtin’s interpretation of the wholeness and unity of Dostoevsky’s work proves to be a significant confirmation of Buber’s attitude toward the work of art as ‘Thou’ that requires the affirmation of its ‘otherness’ as well as its wholeness and unity, which is more than a framework of the material arranged by the author in his work and not just the matter of the sum total of formal devices.

Bakhtin’s monograph, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Art*, opens with the clarification that the present book offers a different view of Dostoevsky’s work than any of the earlier and still popular approaches to Dostoevsky—socio-historical, ideological, and psychological—and suggests studying the Dostoevskian novel as “genuine polyphony.”<sup>93</sup> This type of novel, Bakhtin argues, is an entire “universe”<sup>94</sup> unto itself, i. e., it “does not fit any of the preconceived frameworks or historico-literary schemes that we usually apply to various species of the European novel,”<sup>95</sup> but it is comprehensible as a “wholeness”<sup>96</sup> and “an organic unity”<sup>97</sup> in its own right. To be sure, Bakhtin emphasizes that the latter does not lend itself “to an ordinary pragmatic interpretation at the level of the plot”<sup>98</sup> or to “a monologic understanding of the unity of style,”<sup>99</sup> that is, it cannot be understood just in terms of generic and compositional features of the novel and is different in principle from a “mechanical”<sup>100</sup> or technical unity of fixed elements in the author’s design. Moreover, Bakhtin refuses to accept “the ulti-

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<sup>92</sup> See also Kepnes’ interpretation of Buber’s dialogic aesthetics. Kepnes’ work focuses on the problem of the interpretation of the work of art and the response to the text as ‘Thou’. Kepnes, *The Text as Thou*, 23–26.

<sup>93</sup> Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, 6.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

mate whole"<sup>101</sup> of Dostoevsky's work as a result of "the author's synthesis" or of "the unified, dialectically evolving spirit, understood in Hegelian terms,"<sup>102</sup> i. e., "the spirit of the author himself, objectified in the whole of the artistic world he had created."<sup>103</sup> For, as he understands it, this is the unity of a dialogically perceived and understood world, that is, "a higher unity, a unity, so to speak, of the second order, the unity of a polyphonic novel"<sup>104</sup> which has to do with "Dostoevsky's artistic vision"<sup>105</sup> and "his artistic perception of the world,"<sup>106</sup> whereas the novel itself is merely a material embodiment of it.

Furthermore, in Bakhtin's critique of "the methodological helplessness"<sup>107</sup> of the critical literature on Dostoevsky, unable "to understand the profound organic cohesion, consistency and wholeness of Dostoevsky's poetics,"<sup>108</sup> we find the striking parallel with Buber's understanding of the 'I-It' relation to art which involves objectification as well as direct application of scientific-objectified methods of analysis<sup>109</sup> and therefore blocks avenues to the understanding of artwork as 'Thou'.

All of the Dostoevskian scholars, Bakhtin claims, were faced throughout with separate problems in particular spheres of Dostoevsky's work and none of them with all its complexity. As a result, Dostoevsky's work has been studied as "some sort of conglomerate of disparate materials,"<sup>110</sup> to be considered from different points of view. Critics either devoted themselves to an investigation of the ideological content in Dostoevsky's novels, "seeking above all purely philosophical postulates and insights" expressed "in the pronouncements of Dostoevsky (or more precisely of his characters),"<sup>111</sup> or "took Dostoevsky's world as the ordinary world of the socio-psychological European novel"<sup>112</sup> that gives us insight into the psychic and mental life of man, and, according to this, investigated the consciousness of Dostoevsky's heroes, to be sure, chiefly the psychological content of their consciousnesses. However, the object of Bakhtin's most vehement attacks is not as much this 'taking in pieces' of Dostoevsky's work as

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101 Ibid., 18.

102 Ibid., 26.

103 Ibid., 277.

104 Ibid., 16.

105 Ibid., 5.

106 Ibid., 29.

107 Ibid., 6.

108 Ibid., 8.

109 See Buber's discussion of knowledge in Buber, *I and Thou*, p. 50.

110 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 8.

111 Ibid., 276.

112 Ibid., 9.

first and foremost the consistent “objectification”<sup>113</sup> and “monologization”<sup>114</sup> of the world represented in Dostoevsky. As Bakhtin’s outline of the peculiar feature of the critical literature on Dostoevsky demonstrates, these are two basic attitudes of critical thought to Dostoevsky’s work, typical as well for the narrowly ideological treatment of his work as for the purely psychological approach. The former considers the Dostoevskian novel as “a philosophical monologue”<sup>115</sup> with divided roles, that is, as a mere play of the intellect<sup>116</sup> concerned with the arrangement and rearrangement of the ideas and “philosophical stances, each defended by one or another character,”<sup>117</sup> turned into objects through which the author manages to issue his speech. The naïve realism of the latter—that fell into a dependence upon the so-called ‘sciences of man’, psychology and psychopathology—“swims in too shallow waters.”<sup>118</sup> Here, Bakhtin argues, Dostoevsky’s work and the world he created in it, regarded as “the objectified world”<sup>119</sup> of the old and traditional European novel, has been reduced to the study of a fragmentary part of that world—of “psyches” of the heroes, “psyches perceived as things”<sup>120</sup> among other things in the “world corresponding to a single and unified authorial consciousness,”<sup>121</sup> to be sure, such things that have minds and act by psychological laws. The fact that we have to engage here with quite different objects, says Bakhtin, presented “after all, in the language of art, and specifically in the language of a particular variety of novel,”<sup>122</sup> and not with “a materialized psychic reality,”<sup>123</sup> has been simply ignored.

Both approaches, Bakhtin summarizes, are equally incapable of visualizing “a dialogicality of the ultimate whole”<sup>124</sup> (Buber would say that they do “not know the dimension of the *Thou*”<sup>125</sup>) that permeate all of Dostoevsky’s works, in which nothing and nobody becomes “an object for the other”—“and this consequently makes the viewer [i. e., the author himself] also a participant,” and not

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113 Ibid., 12.

114 Ibid., 10.

115 Ibid., 9.

116 Speaking of the philosophical plane in the Dostoevskian novel, Bakhtin notes that it is not an “abstract playing with ideas.” Ibid., 24.

117 Ibid., 5.

118 Ibid., 9.

119 Ibid.

120 Ibid.

121 Ibid., 9.

122 Ibid., 20.

123 Ibid., 13.

124 Ibid., 18.

125 Buber, *I and Thou*, 71.

a detached “all-encompassing”<sup>126</sup> observer. In clarifying this point, Bakhtin insists that both approaches simply replace the wholeness and unity of Dostoevsky's work by a totalization of the whole, perceived either as a so-called ‘objective’ description of the external, empirical world, or as a ‘subjective’ romantic realism, or as a “philosophy in the form of a novel.”<sup>127</sup> This is why, says Bakhtin, “all the major monographs on Dostoevsky [...] contribute so little toward understanding”<sup>128</sup> what he formulates as “Dostoevsky's fundamental task.”<sup>129</sup> This task comprises “destroying the established forms of the fundamentally *monologic* (homophonic) European novel” [italics in original] and “constructing a polyphonic world,”<sup>130</sup> i.e., a polyphonic space in which there is no objectification and which is neither objective nor subjective but is pure activity and intense dialogic interaction of “independent and unmerged consciousnesses”<sup>131</sup> and “pure voices”<sup>132</sup> joined together in the unity of some spiritual event. This insight, as must already be evident, demonstrates also that for Bakhtin as for Buber to gain access to the original Thou-ness of the work of art means to understand it properly.

Now, attention must be drawn to Bakhtin's definition of the Dostoevskian novel as a novel in which dialogue is real, present, and performed, which sounds like Buber's definition of the work of art as the witness of the life lived in the dialogue. Here, it needs to be said that, in Bakhtin's understanding, the polyphonic novel created by Dostoevsky is not a report of the dialogical life of other people observed from without or a vision of the imagination or a philosophical theory that Dostoevsky's work represents or exemplifies. That would be “possible in a novel of the purely monologic type as well, and is in fact often found in that sort of novel,”<sup>133</sup> as Bakhtin tells us. He emphasizes that polyphony is not so much the content or the theme as the immanent structure of the Dostoevskian novel which displays a living interaction and fully realized dialogic contact of the writer's ‘I’ with another and with others. According to Bakhtin's interpretation, the attitude of the author to his hero is that of ‘I–Thou’. Dostoevsky, he writes, does not see his hero as a “voiceless object of the author's

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126 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 18.

127 *Ibid.*, 26.

128 *Ibid.*

129 *Ibid.*, 8.

130 *Ibid.*

131 *Ibid.*, 6.

132 *Ibid.*, 53.

133 *Ibid.*, 10.

words”<sup>134</sup> or “a created thing;”<sup>135</sup> he does not construe an “objectified image of the hero”<sup>136</sup> or use his hero as “merely material”<sup>137</sup> or “an explanatory function”<sup>138</sup> in his work. Rather the hero is for him a free and autonomous subject, a fully valid ‘thou’—“thou art,”<sup>139</sup>—and he makes him present in his wholeness, that is, portrays him as “a carrier of a fully valid word”<sup>140</sup> on himself and the world and is interested in him as a personality “with equal rights and [...] with its own world.”<sup>141</sup> Moreover, the author appears not in the aspect of an external authority over the hero, superior to him, but the author’s discourse is, as it were, “dialogically *addressed* [italics in original] to him,” as if to another person, so that “the author speaks not *about* a character, but *with* him [italics in original].”<sup>142</sup> In Bakhtin’s view, such a dialogic relationship between the author and his characters as performed in the work of art is not invented. It is rather a representation of what Dostoevsky found and discovered in reality itself and what continues to be repeated in the work of art. In this regard, when Bakhtin calls Dostoevsky the innovator “in the realm of the novel as an artistic form”<sup>143</sup> and “the creator of the polyphonic novel”<sup>144</sup> and “polyphonic world,”<sup>145</sup> he does not mean that Dostoevsky as an artist created a world of his own, which is not deduced from, or generated by, anything and is, as it were, produced by the author out of himself, and hence “in essence [...] [is] fabricated from beginning to end.”<sup>146</sup> Rather, he means by this something quite similar to Buber’s formula regarding the task which confronts the artist who “is faced by a form which desires to be made through him into a work” and is concerned with realization—“to produce is to draw forth, to invent is to find, to shape is to discover. In bodying forth I disclose.”<sup>147</sup>

More significant parallels with Buber’s view on human creative activity or, more specifically, on the relationship between the artist and the *Gestalt*, are

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134 Ibid., 63.

135 Ibid., 64.

136 Ibid., 53.

137 Ibid., 54.

138 Ibid., 49.

139 Ibid., 10.

140 Ibid., 63.

141 Ibid., 6.

142 Ibid., 63.

143 Ibid., 276.

144 Ibid., 7.

145 Ibid., 8.

146 Ibid., 65.

147 Buber, *I and Thou*, 24 and 25.

still to be found in Bakhtin's discussion of "Dostoevsky's creative vision,"<sup>148</sup> which we will be examining in some detail below. Particularly illustrative is the notion of "vision" in itself. In Bakhtin's study of Dostoevsky this notion, like Buber's notion of *Gestalt* in *I and Thou*, is bound up with the process of artistic creation. Moreover, similar to Buber, Bakhtin associates this notion with the source and the origin of the work of art. Following Buber's claim that the *Gestalt* is not "the offspring of the [artist's] soul" or "a thing among the 'inner' things" reflected and expressed in his work, Bakhtin argues that "the soil in which Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel was to grow" is neither Dostoevsky's "worldview in the ordinary sense of the world"<sup>149</sup> nor his own thoughts, evaluations, and points of view<sup>150</sup> transformed into artistic images of his novels. Rather, it is his artistic vision of the "now," in the present, and is a result of the interaction between the author and the world around him and a discovery of something outside of him, something which is expressed as yet by no one and calls to be made into a work of art, something which is both new and eternal but at the same time something that refers to the world of men, in which people's lives and interrelations between human beings unfold. Such a "vision," according to Bakhtin, implies the artist's "extraordinary capacity" and "gift"<sup>151</sup> to "penetrate"<sup>152</sup> into the deepest and most intense layers of life,<sup>153</sup> to see beyond the observable material of reality and superficial forms of life, to see "the world in terms of interaction and coexistence,"<sup>154</sup> to conceive all its contents and forces as coexisting simultaneously among people, on different planes, in the external objective social world<sup>155</sup> and in "the depths of the human soul,"<sup>156</sup> and "to guess at their interrelationships in the cross-section of a single moment."<sup>157</sup> In describing Dostoevsky's artistic vision of the dialogic nature of the human world, Bakhtin also emphasizes that this vision—although it does reflect "the objective com-

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148 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 28.

149 *Ibid.*, 29.

150 *Ibid.*, 186–198.

151 *Ibid.*, 30.

152 Bakhtin quotes Vyacheslav Ivanov who defined "Dostoevsky's realism as a realism based not on cognition (objectified cognition), but on 'penetration,'" and, indeed, the former affirms this definition. However, in Bakhtin's opinion, Ivanov "did not show how this principle [...] becomes the principle behind Dostoevsky's artistic visualization of the world, the principle behind his artistic structuring of [...] the novel." *Ibid.*, 11.

153 *Ibid.*, 30.

154 *Ibid.*, 30–31.

155 *Ibid.*, 27.

156 *Ibid.*, 277.

157 *Ibid.*, 28.

plexity [...] and multi-voicedness of Dostoevsky's epoch"<sup>158</sup>—is different from that which is concerned with concrete social order or certain problems connected with human inner life or human relationships in one specific limited epoch. Like Buber, he characterizes this vision in terms of 'opening up a portal into eternity' (to paraphrase Buber's words<sup>159</sup>). Dostoevsky's artistic vision, he says, rises above time; it is "the triumph over time" and "overcoming time in time;"<sup>160</sup> it is directed upon the essential in life and valid "for any epoch and under any ideology;"<sup>161</sup> it is addressed to the eternal,<sup>162</sup> to a different order of existence independent of "all concrete social forms (the forms of family, social or economic class, life's stories),"<sup>163</sup> that is, to "the abstract sphere of pure relationship, one person to another,"<sup>164</sup> to oneself, and to the whole world<sup>165</sup> and inevitably leads up to the relation between man and God.<sup>166</sup> Thus Bakhtin stresses that "if we were to seek an image toward which this whole world [i. e., Dostoevsky's polyphonic world] gravitates, an image in the spirit of Dostoevsky's own worldview, then it would be the church as a communion of unmerged souls, where sinners and righteous men come together."<sup>167</sup> "But even the image of the church," Bakhtin insists, "remains only an image, explaining nothing of the structure of the novel itself."<sup>168</sup> Like Buber, he believes that "artistic vision" is not an "image" that can be described or expressed in a conventional symbol, but something that

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158 Ibid., 30.

159 Ibid., 79.

160 Ibid., 29.

161 Ibid., 278.

162 In Bakhtin's own words, only things which are "essential" are incorporated into Dostoevsky's world; "such things can be carried over into eternity. [...] That which has meaning only as 'earlier' or 'later', which is sufficient only unto its own moment, which is valid only as past, or as future, or as present in relation to past or future, is for him [i. e., for Dostoevsky] nonessential and is not incorporated into his world." Ibid., 29.

163 Ibid., 264, 278, and 280.

164 Ibid., 265.

165 Ibid., 237.

166 For an extensive discussion of the religious/theological aspects of Bakhtin writings, see L. A. Gogotishvily and P. S. Gourevitch, ed., *M. M. Bakhtin kak filosof* (Bakhtin as Philosopher) (Moscow: Naauka, 1992), 221–252; Carol Adlam, et al., eds., *Face to Face: Bakhtin in Russia and the West* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 45–53; Ruth Coates, *Christianity in Bakhtin: God and the Exiled Author* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Anton Simons, "The Author's Silence: Transcendence and Representation in Mikhail Bakhtin" in *Flight of the Gods: Philosophical Perspectives on Negative Theology*, eds. Ilse N. Bulhof and Laurens Ten Kate (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 353–374.

167 Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 26–27.

168 Ibid., 27.

after being embodied in a work of art may open up, affording a glimpse of new sides of human life.

Moreover, for Bakhtin as for Buber the creative act does not mean a mere mirroring of what is revealed to the artist into the artwork. This act presupposes sacrifice. And although Bakhtin does not use this term, he posits nevertheless that the creation of "a polyphonic world," which permits only certain artistic means for revealing and representing itself, implies the act of offering the will to domination and authoritarian control for the sake of "the artistic will of polyphony."<sup>169</sup> The latter, he explains, is "a will to combine many wills, a will to the event" that strives for "a unity of a higher order than in homophony,"<sup>170</sup> therefore "the monologism of an artistic world,"<sup>171</sup> dominated by the author's authoritarian voice, must be destroyed. This is apparent, as Bakhtin shows us, in the very principle of novelistic construction created by Dostoevsky.

Thus Bakhtin writes that "the affirmation of someone else's consciousness—as an autonomous subject and not as an object—is the ethico-religious postulate determining the *content* [italics in original] of the [Dostoevskian] novel."<sup>172</sup> But this ethico-religious principle governing Dostoevsky's worldview "does not in itself create a new form or a new type of novelistic construction."<sup>173</sup> In saying this, Bakhtin tends to link the creation of the polyphonic novel to aesthetic, artistic activity rather than to ethical activity, to be sure, for him, the former presupposes the latter. Therefore, he insists that the unity of Dostoevsky's world – "a genuine polyphony," in which "a combination of several individual wills takes place" and "the boundaries of the individual will" and "a single voice" are in principle exceeded—cannot under any condition be reduced "to the empty unity of an individual act of will."<sup>174</sup> That is why, to his mind, Dostoevsky shifts "the dominant"<sup>175</sup> or "the center of gravity"<sup>176</sup> in this new kind of unity from "a

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169 Ibid., 21.

170 Ibid.

171 Ibid., 57. Thus Bakhtin writes that "Dostoevsky's major heroes are, by the very nature of his creative design, *not only objects of authorial discourse but also subjects of their own directly signifying discourse.* [italics in original] In no way, then, can a character's discourse be exhausted by the usual functions of characterization and plot development, nor does it serve as a vehicle for the author's own ideological position (as with Byron, for instance). The consciousness of a character is given as *someone else's* [italics in original] consciousness, another consciousness, yet at the same time it is not turned into an object, is not closed, does not become a simple object of the author's consciousness." Ibid., 7.

172 Ibid., 10.

173 Ibid., 11.

174 Ibid., 21–22.

175 Ibid., 13.

monological sermon,”<sup>177</sup> from “a monologically formulated authorial world-view,”<sup>178</sup> and from “a realization of one’s own private personality” to an “internally dialogic approach”<sup>179</sup> to the characters created by him, none of which becomes an integral and unified voice or merges with the voice of the author himself, that is, serves “as a mouthpiece for the author’s voice,”<sup>180</sup> but each “sounds, as it were, alongside the author’s word and in a special way combines both with it and with the full and equally valid voices of other characters.”<sup>181</sup> “The very distribution of voices and their interaction,” Bakhtin emphatically stresses, “is what matters to Dostoevsky,”<sup>182</sup> and what he, as the artist, is concerned with is not the expression of a sole and single writer’s ‘I’<sup>183</sup> but the “fundamental task” which he set for himself<sup>184</sup> and which, as Bakhtin defines it, is “the realization of the polyphonic project,”<sup>185</sup> that is, the transformation of his special polyphonic artistic vision—which cannot be subject to artistic assimilation from the “monologic position”<sup>186</sup>—into an “artistically organized coexistence and interaction of spiritual diversity.”<sup>187</sup>

With this, we conclude our survey of the similarities between Bakhtin’s and Buber’s views on artistic creation, although we are far from having exhausted the subject. We have only touched upon several basic principles of their aesthetic position, which should by now be apparent and which have underlain our thesis – advanced from the very beginning of the present paper – on Buber’s influence on Bakhtin. This survey clearly reveals the importance of Buber’s ‘I–Thou’ philosophy for literary studies in general and for understanding of Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony in particular. Buber’s ideas expressed in *I and Thou* shed additional light on the problem which was central to Bakhtin, namely, the problem of how to understand a literary text as both the product of a single author and the intersection of several unmerged voices or, in other words, how to deal with the

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176 Ibid., 14.

177 Ibid., 13.

178 Ibid., 11.

179 Ibid., 14.

180 Ibid., 5, see also 51.

181 Ibid., 7.

182 Ibid., 279.

183 Ibid. In chap. 5, sect. iii, *The Hero’s Discourse and Narrative Discourse in Dostoevsky*, Bakhtin also speaks of weakening authorial discourse as connected with Dostoevsky’s artistic task to break down the monologic canon.

184 Ibid., 65.

185 Ibid., 204.

186 Ibid., 18; see also 78.

187 Ibid., 31.

phenomenon of a text whose multivoicedness contradicts the reigning notions of authorship.

