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The Chronotope in Myth, Epic, and the Novel

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Ohio University

Introduction

In the 1930s Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) borrowed the term *chronotope* (literally, ‘time-space’) simultaneously from Albert Einstein and from the Russian physiologist Aleksei Ukhtomsky, and introduced it to literary theory in a thoroughly reconceived form.¹ In 1937-1938 he wrote a book-length study titled ‘Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes on Historical Poetics’ that could not be published until 1975 because of Bakhtin’s strained relations with the Soviet authorities. As he was preparing the text for publication in 1973, Bakhtin made a few additions to it. He did not live to see the volume in print.² As part of the reception of Bakhtin’s ideas in the West the chronotope became a widely used tool in

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¹ Bakhtin mentions Ukhtomskii’s presentation on the chronotope in biology at which he was present in 1925 (Mikhail Bakhtin, *Voprosy literatury i estetiki: Issledovaniia raznykh let* [Questions of Literature and Aesthetics: Researches of Various Years] [Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1975], p. 235n1; further referred to as *Voprosy*).

² The essay first appeared in the volume of Bakhtin’s theoretical writings, *Voprosy*, pp. 234-407, under the title ‘Forms of Time and the Chronotope in the Novel: Essays in Historical Poetics’. It was published in the English translation in Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 84-258, which I have consulted. (Holquist and Emerson translate the Russian *ocherki*, ‘essays’, in the title of Bakhtin’s text as ‘notes’. To avoid confusion, in this paper I shall use their version of the title.) All quotations from Bakhtin that follow are in my translation from the Russian original unless otherwise specified. In what follows I also provide references to the Emerson and Holquist translation alongside those to the Russian original.

literary analysis, cultural studies, film studies, and other fields.³ From the very beginning Bakhtin infused the term with far-reaching philosophical significance. He understood it as the conjunction of temporal and spatial relations that underlies the formation of meaning not only in literary texts, but also in language and culture at large. In this paper I set Bakhtin's ideas in the context of four other twentieth-century theories of time and space in mythical and literary narratives: Ernst Cassirer's discussion in the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Volume 2: Mythical Thought* (1925) and *Volume 3: Phenomenology of Knowledge* (1927); Aleksei Losev's analyses in *The Dialectics of Myth* (1930); Mircea Eliade's reflections on space and time in his influential studies *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (1949) and *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (1957); and Jacques Derrida's critique of Claude Lévi-Strauss' structuralist approach to myth in his seminal essay (originally a lecture and later a book chapter in *Writing and Difference*, 1967) 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences'. The picture that emerges from these comparisons considerably expands and complicates the problematic of the chronotope as it was discussed in Bakhtin's work. It shows, for example, that the theme of time and space in mythical and literary narratives received two contrasting philosophical interpretations, with Cassirer and Bakhtin on the one side of the argument and Losev and Eliade on the other. The two sides largely overlapped in understanding contrasts between myth and modern fiction but this did not prevent them from making broader evaluative judgments that were directly opposed to one another. While Cassirer and especially Bakhtin on the whole took a positive, progressivist view of the modern conception of time and space, Losev and Eliade each presented an extensive critique of the modern outlook from an alternative, non-modern position. Derrida's contribution, in turn, was not so much a quasi-Hegelian resolution of this collision as a further reduction of the problem at hand, along modernist lines. But the very shortcomings of Derrida's own proposal point towards a more adequate approach to the problem of time and space in myth, epic,

³ For an overview of the spread of Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope in Western scholarship see Nele Bemong and Pieter Borghart, 'Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives', in Nele Bemong et al (eds.), *Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives* (Gent: Academia Press, 2010), pp. 3-16.

and the novel.

I.

Cassirer's views are especially important for our theme because his work directly influenced Bakhtin and Losev and their encounters with his ideas had far-reaching effects on their own formulations of the problem of time and space. Bakhtin's indebtedness to Cassirer is a well-acknowledged fact in his intellectual biography, with a whiff of scandal about it.⁴ Losev acknowledged, with appreciation but also some criticisms, the parallels between his own work and Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* – parallels all the more striking because the two philosophers worked independently of each other. Eliade, by contrast, makes no reference to Cassirer in the two books mentioned above, but his very silence is telling, especially against the background of the large overlap between their respective interests, ideas, and sources.

Cassirer argues that the basic opposition underlying both spatial and temporal divisions in mythical consciousness is drawn along the line between the sacred and the profane, the view that will also be elaborated by Eliade.⁵ He discusses the intrinsic connection between space and time, which corresponds to Bakhtin's chronotope, in the section on mythical time. Time, Cassirer points out, is a constitutive element of myth. 'True myth,' he writes, 'does not begin with the intuition of the universe and its parts and forces as merely formed into definite images, into the figures of demons and gods; it begins only when a genesis, a becoming, a life in time,

⁴ See, for example, Craig Brandist, 'Bakhtin, Cassirer and Symbolic Forms', *Radical Philosophy*, 85 (September/October 1997), pp. 20-27. Some scholars openly write about Bakhtin plagiarising Cassirer's work – without necessarily denying the Russian scholar's originality. See Brian Poole, 'Bakhtin and Cassirer: The Philosophical Origins of Bakhtin's Carnival Messianism', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 97:3/4, Summer /Fall 1998, pp. 537-578; Galin Tihanov, *The Master and the Slave: Lukacs, Bakhtin and the Ideas of Their Time* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); and David Shepherd, 'A Feeling for History? Bakhtin and "The Problem of Great Time"', *The Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 84, no. 1 (January 2006), pp. 32-51. See also Holquist's essay, quoted below.

⁵ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 2: Mythical Thought*, trans. R. Manheim (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1955), pp. 83-152.

is attributed to these figures.⁶ If we take into account Cassirer's view of how these 'definite images' are formed in the first place, then time and space actually turn out to take shape simultaneously as far as their role in the genesis of the mythical world is concerned. In the third volume of his trilogy on symbolic forms Cassirer describes the formation of the *I*, the self-conscious ego – which is the *conditio sine qua non* for the emergence of the world in consciousness in general – as a dynamic flow where fixed forms only gradually achieve stability: 'In myth we can still look directly into the growth of the more stable eddies which gradually detach themselves from the continuum of the life stream. We can see how, from life as a whole, from its undifferentiated totality . . . one's own being and also a form of what is human rises up and separates out only very slowly – and how within this being the reality of the genus and the species always precedes that of the individual.'⁷ With a reference to Hermann K. Usener, the author on whom he repeatedly drew, Cassirer further stresses that mythical reality is 'demonic in this wholly indeterminate sense, long before it becomes a realm of determinate demons, delimited from one another and endowed with personal attributes and characteristics'. 'From the elementary mythical experiences,' he concludes, 'which rise up out of nothing and dissolve into nothing there now emerges something resembling the unity of a *character*.'⁸ Thus one can say that spatial and temporal distinctions are closely intertwined with each other in the course of the entire process by which the mythical world comes into being.

Cassirer elucidates the specific nature of mythical space and time by setting them in contrast with their scientific counterparts, i.e., mythical space vs. the space of geometry and mythical time vs. the time of modern science. Thus mythical time, he observes, possesses its own character that is quite distinct from time as it is conceived in modern historiography.

What distinguishes mythical time from historical time is that for mythical time there is absolute past, which neither requires nor is

⁶ Ibid., p. 104.

⁷ Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms, Vol. 3: The Phenomenology of Knowledge*, trans. R. Manheim (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1957) pp. 89-90. On p. 164 Cassirer yet again describes the mythical world 'not as a finished form, but as an ever renewed metamorphosis'.

⁸ Ibid., pp. 90-91; see also p. 107.

susceptible of any further explanation. History dissolves being into the never-ending sequence of becoming, in which no point is singled out but every point indicates the way to one farther back, so that regression into the past becomes a *regressus in infinitum*. Myth, to be sure, also draws a line between being and having-become, between present and past; but once this past is attained, myth remains in it as in something permanent and unquestionable.⁹

Cassirer adopts Friedrich Schelling's notion of mythical time as unified and indivisible, in fact, lacking sequential character: 'Single Time'. Its internal segmentation is concurrent with the division of space. The Latin *tempus* comes from the Greek *tempos* and *temenos*; it harks back to the basic gesture of dividing both space and time into sacred and profane domains (*templum*, 'temple') and derives, according to Usener, from the notion of division as such.¹⁰ Some initial biological feeling for time, its cyclical nature, the ebb and tide of life, Cassirer explains, eventually develops into 'cosmic' time, and by its nature mythical time knows none of that objective character which is expressed in the mathematical-physical concept of Newton's time – a time that flows in and by itself, independently of any external objects. The same is true of the contrast with historical time, Cassirer notes, with its definite chronology, strict distinction between before and after, and clear, unambiguous order in the sequence of temporal moments: 'Myth is aware of no such division of the stages of time, no such ordering of time into a rigid system where any particular event has one and only position.' Cassirer sees the cause for such character of mythical time in what he called 'the law of concrescence' in myth, i.e., the essential tendency of mythical thinking, according to which 'wherever it posits a relation, it causes the members of this relation to flow together and merge'. As he puts it, 'The stages of time – past, present, future – do not remain distinct; over and over again the mythical consciousness succumbs to the tendency

⁹ *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2, p. 106.

¹⁰ Hermann K. Usener, *Götternamen: Versuch einer Lehre von der religiösen Begriffsbildung* (Bonn: F. Cohen, 1896). Eliade made use of Usener's study as well. It is worth noting here that Losev developed a philosophy of language in the volume titled *Filosofia imeni* (The Philosophy of the Name, written in 1923, published in 1927) that was inspired in part by the Eastern Orthodox theological movement called *imiaslavie*, or onomatodoxy, centred upon the veneration of God's name. Losev's treatise contains no mention of Usener.

and temptation of levelling the differences and ultimately transforms them into pure identity.' Myth and magic are constantly committing the logical error of *pars pro toto*. 'The magical "now",' writes Cassirer, 'is by no means a mere now, a simple, differentiated present, but is, to quote Leibniz, "chargé du passé et gros de l'avenir" – laden with the past and pregnant with the future.'¹¹ As it extricates itself from its own sensible nature, Cassirer continues, this notion of time yields to a more formal and abstract-contemplative view, which in turn leads to the formation in consciousness first of a universal representation of time comprising all things, including demons and the gods, and then, the idea of time.

In modern thought, Cassirer points out, time is virtually subsumed under *number*. According to the theory of relativity, for example, all points in the universe are defined by their coordinates, i.e., numerical values that no longer qualitatively differ from one another and are therefore completely interchangeable.¹² By contrast, mythical time always remains qualitatively differentiated and heterogeneous, attributes on which Losev and Eliade will likewise insist. Cassirer views religious time as a special phase in the evolution of mythical time in general. It varies in Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Taoism. The Greek thinking about time, according to Cassirer, is a synthesis of the Indian orientation towards dynamic becoming and the Chinese tendency towards stability and equilibrium. Thus the present of Plato's ideal form, for example, expresses eternity, 'the infinite duration of time'.¹³ Plato's speculative time, 'the moving image of eternity', will eventually play the key part in the formation of the empirical-scientific representation of time. Johannes Kepler's 1618 treatise *Harmony of the World* is a major step in the evolution of the concept of time as a 'uniformly changing magnitude to which all un-uniform change and motion are referred and by which they are measured'. This is a purely ideal and logical time, 'imbued with the concept of function', which raises it to an entirely new semantic level; phenomena viewed under such a concept of time 'become ripe for knowledge'.¹⁴ When Kepler calculates their orbits, Cassirer remarks, the planets are toppled from their thrones of the

¹¹ *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2, p. 111.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

ancient gods and the view of time is transferred from the world of mythical imagery to ‘the *exact* conceptual world of scientific cognition’.¹⁵

The most basic contrast that Cassirer draws between mythical and scientific time is that the former is based on feeling, whereas the latter, on abstract notions. Therefore scientific time, according to Cassirer, more adequately represents reality than does mythical time, even though to mythical consciousness its own time may seem quite real. Cassirer views the overcoming of mythical time as a step forward in the progress of modern knowledge. ‘Philosophical knowledge must first free itself from the constraint of language and myth;’ he believes, ‘it must, as it were, thrust out these witnesses of human inadequacy, before it can rise to the pure ether of thought.’¹⁶ But as it rises into the pure ether philosophical knowledge must also reconcile itself to eternal separation between its own ideas and reality, the subject and the object, the process of cognition and its ultimate goal. ‘In language, in religion, in art, in science, man can do no more,’ Cassirer wrote in his last book, sounding a Kantian note, ‘than to build up his own universe – a symbolic universe that enables him to understand and interpret, to articulate and organize, to synthesize and universalize his human experience.’¹⁷ – *Ad infinitum*, one might add. His view thus remains, after all, an example of the Enlightenment’s treatment of myth, from which it is distinct only by being far more sensitive and discerning than the frequently dismissive modern reductions. Cassirer’s modern commitments are vividly attested in the closing paragraphs of his trilogy. The third volume of *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* ends with the chapter on

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 140. I must note here that Cassirer was hasty with regard to Kepler’s view of time. In *Harmonices mundi* Kepler did not fully part ways with the mythical view of the cosmos. The first two books of the treatise deal with geometry, while the last three tie together geometry with astronomy and music simultaneously. The result is interplanetary polyphony that has a generic affinity to the Pythagorean-Platonic mythosopic ‘harmony of the spheres’ precisely by virtue of the astronomer’s desire to imagine the cosmos as an integral whole and, furthermore, an artistic whole: a divine musical composition (Johannes Kepler, *The Harmony of the World*, trans. E. J. Aiton, A. M. Duncan, and J. V. Field [Philadelphia]: American Philosophical Society, 1997).

¹⁶ Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, p. 16.

¹⁷ Cassirer, *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1944), p. 221; quoted in Charles Hendel’s Introductory Note to Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, p. xii.

‘The Theoretical Foundations of Scientific Knowledge’, where his entire argument culminates in a paean to the queen of modern sciences, physics. The ending is a masterpiece of Kantian ambivalence. Knowledge, in order to be knowledge, he concurs with Kant, must be a system and yet it can never be one. The single point that gives ‘the greatest possible unity’ to ‘the guiding lines’ of the understanding ‘towards which all its laws follow, and in which they all meet’ is, in Cassirer’s words, ‘a genuine transcendental idea’ (Kant called it a *focus imaginarius*), namely something unattainable.¹⁸ Curiously, science’s pursuit of such an elusive goal is more reasonable, Cassirer thinks, than myth’s pursuit of its own kind of unity.

Both science and myth seek to establish, he argues, ‘the unity of consciousness’ through their respective ‘modes of synthesis’. Scientific knowledge seeks a ‘systematic unity’ of ‘the whole experience’, which it achieves through the ‘synthetic judgment’. This type of judgment, according to Cassirer, ‘considers the unity it effects not as conceptual identity but as a unity of *different* entities’. The disparate elements of experience are connected through a relation, he explains, that ‘belongs, so to speak, to a different plane of signification from the particular contents; it is not itself a particular content, a specific thing, but a universal, purely ideal *relation*’.¹⁹ Now myth performs a similar operation, Cassirer proposes, but by its own peculiar means. From magic, i.e., the more primitive level of mythical thinking marked by a dispersal of ‘the world into a confused multiplicity of demonic forces’, Cassirer argues, it develops into a ‘hierarchy of the forces and gods’, in parallel, as it were, to the ordering of causes and effects in scientific thought. As he points out, ‘Just as scientific cognition strives for a hierarchy of laws, a systematic superordination and subordination of causes and effects, so myth strives for a hierarchy of forces and gods.’²⁰ The essential difference between these two modes of ordering the world is that scientific thought understands connections among diverse phenomena as an ‘ideal relation’ (expressed especially well by mathematical symbols), whereas myth, confusedly, brings things into ‘a substantial

¹⁸ *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, p. 478. Cassirer quotes Kant’s *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 2nd edition, p. 672; his translator Manheim references the English translation by Meiklejohn, p. 374.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-62.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

unity', marked by 'a material indifference' among them. In contrast to science, which rises from empirical phenomena to the understanding of ideal relations among them, according to Cassirer, 'for the mythical view there is fundamentally but one dimension of relation, one single "plane of being"'.²¹ 'In (scientific) cognition the pure relational concept comes, as it were, *between* the elements which it links,' he writes. 'For it is not of the same world as these elements – it has no material *existence* comparable to theirs, but only an ideal *signification*.' Myth, by contrast, 'knows only immediate existence and immediate efficacy'.²² It is from this Cassirer derives the 'law of the *concrecence or coincidence of the members of a relation in mythical thinking*' that I mentioned above.²³ According to this law, a part can be equivalent to the whole, a particular thing to the universal order of things, an effigy to its real prototype, and so on. Further, as he grappled with the relation between the body and soul, Cassirer described the transition from myth to metaphysics by evoking 'the primordial decree of fate' by which myth unites the corporeal and the spiritual – without, however, 'drawing all the logical consequences implicit in [their] separation'.²⁴ 'It is metaphysical thinking,' he continues, 'that first takes the final and decisive step. It makes [their] "coexistence" a merely empirical and therefore accidental affair.'²⁵ The 'decree of fate' that binds the body and soul, the inner and the outer, thought and matter in myth is, in fact, that 'mystery of efficacy' which one finds, according to Cassirer, in the 'magical power' that holds the mythical world together and is itself the primordial indifference of the corporeal and the spiritual.

Several objections can be raised to this manner of distinguishing myth from science and vice versa. First, as I have pointed out above, the critical philosophy on which Cassirer relies concedes only the unity of a particular phenomenon in the mind of the thinking subject as the key condition without which the phenomenon cannot be known, but denies the possibility of such unity in the phenomenon itself or in nature as a whole. This non-integrity of the modern world, its 'broken' nature was apparent

²¹ Ibid., p. 63.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid., p. 64.

²⁴ *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, p 102.

²⁵ Ibid.

in it from the beginning: the early modern poets lamented the advent of a world that was 'all in pieces' and a 'time' that was 'out of joint'. Four centuries later it was precisely this brokenness that became the world's most celebrated feature of knowledge, when the picture of the world became 'fractal', to borrow a term from Jean-François Lyotard.²⁶ Second, far from functioning as purely ideal signification, scientific symbols acquire their meaning *only* through the demonstration of their efficacy in an experiment and eventually in technological exploitation. They are meaningful only to the extent that they participate in changing the material world. It is the *manner* in which this material efficacy is believed to operate that makes scientific symbols distinct from their mythical counterparts.

Further, Cassirer's analysis of the unity of mythical consciousness stands in need of revision, too. This unity is not assured through some confusion between parts and wholes. A clear understanding of the difference between them forms the background for their interaction in myth and magic. The sharp contrast between a mere effigy, for example, and the vast, intricate forces that it brings into action is certainly part of the marvel of magic. Similarly, the marvel of Orpheus' mythic musical feats stems from the acutely perceived contrast between a musician's (trifling) act of singing and the (grandiose) cosmic harmony of things. What distinguishes the mythical notion of the whole from the scientific one (which, as I have just noted, is an unattainable goal for modern science), is not just that myth resolutely asserts the *integrity* of its world, but also that it foregrounds and highlights in the most spectacular manner the *mystical* nature of this integrity. Now mythical mystery is radically different from what is loosely called 'mysteries of nature' in colloquial discourse about science. The former cannot be solved in principle; the latter, by contrast, invite rational scrutiny and presuppose eventual explanation. Potential rational explicability of all and any phenomena is an indispensable assumption underlying modern scientific thinking. By contrast, the mystery that shines in those quintessentially mythical events that are called 'miracles' is by its very design not susceptible of rational comprehension. Similarly, mythical efficacy is distinct from its scientific counterpart by virtue of the fact that

²⁶ *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p. 60.

in myth a part manifests its identity with the whole in such a way that the *mystical* nature of their mutual connection is exemplified and held up for the marvelling mythical subject.

One must be careful, incidentally, not to think of mythical mystery as something wholly irrational – nor to think of the presuppositions underlying the modern scientific outlook as wholly rational. Science has its own irrationality, rooted in the basic contradiction inherent in the beliefs, to repeat, that, on the one hand, every individual phenomenon must be whole in order to be rationally understood but, on the other hand, the *sum* of all phenomena escapes this demand – because time and space are supposedly infinite. No amount of casuistry and hair-splitting evasion can reconcile these two beliefs: their conjunction in the modern scientific outlook is irreducibly irrational. In order to resolve it and cleanse itself of the persistent irrationality that clings to the modern scientific project the scientific mind will need to revise its very foundations and, in the first place, those ‘transcendental forms of intuition’, infinite time and space. By contrast, mythical mystery, its mysticism notwithstanding, performs a perfectly rational function: it assures the unity and thus the reality of the mythical world. In the most precise dialectical terms, the contrast between the scientific outlook and its mythical counterpart consists in the contrast between mediation and immediacy: the former is built on the idea of infinite mediation, whereas the latter, on the idea of instantaneous immediacy. The former assumes the shape of an endless flow of uncertain knowledge (hypotheses), whereas the latter, the shape of self-evident ultimate certainty here and now (miracles). The irrational element in myth is thus the notion of instantaneous omniscience; it is the direct opposite of the irrational element in science, i.e., knowledge infinitely postponed.

2.

Bakhtin’s views on the nature of time and space in the literary narrative and other cultural forms remain the subject of competing interpretations. For the purposes of this paper I shall focus primarily on his most extensive statement on this subject, amplified by selected references to other relev-

ant texts.²⁷ I further concentrate on Bakhtin's ideas regarding the relations among mythical, epic, and novelistic chronotopes.

Bakhtin defined the chronotope as 'the substantial mutual connection between temporal and spatial relations, artistically appropriated in literature'.²⁸ He also stressed that he intended the term to express 'the inseparability of time and space (time as the fourth dimension of space)'.²⁹

In a literary-artistic chronotope, a fusion takes place of temporal and spatial features within a meaningful and concrete whole. Time condenses here, thickens, and becomes artistically visible; space is likewise intensified and drawn into the movement of time, plot, and history. The typical features of time are disclosed in space, while space is conceived through and measured by time. This intersection of series and fusion of features characterises the literary chronotope.³⁰

As I mentioned earlier, Bakhtin held this conjunction to be a feature not only of literary texts, but also of objective reality.³¹ This is the meaning of his remark in which he both acknowledges Kant's doctrine of transcendental forms of perception, and distances himself from it.³²

²⁷ The dating of Bakhtin's text 'Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel: Notes on Historical Poetics' has been in flux. In the original 1975 publication the years 1937-1938 were indicated (with concluding remarks added in 1973). The same dating is preserved in Galin Tihanov's book *The Master and the Slave*, p. 140. In a 2006 article David Shepherd notes that most of it was written in the 1940s. The integrity of the text has been questioned, too. According to Shepherd, it appears to consist of materials drawn from Bakhtin's study of the *Bildungsroman* (Shepherd, 'A Feeling for History?', p. 38; see also Poole, 'Bakhtin and Cassirer', p. 545).

²⁸ Bakhtin, *Voprosy*, p. 234 (*Dialogic Imagination*, p. 84).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 235 (*Dialogic Imagination*, p. 84).

³⁰ *Ibid.* (*Dialogic Imagination*, p. 84).

³¹ Comparing his concept of the chronotope to Kant's discussion of time and space in the *First Critique* ('Transcendental Aesthetic') Bakhtin wrote: 'Kant defines space and time as necessary forms of all cognition, beginning with basic perceptions and representations. We accept Kant's assessment of the significance of these forms in the process of cognition but, unlike Kant, we understand them not as "transcendental", but as forms of actual reality itself. We shall try to uncover the role of these forms in the process of concrete artistic cognition (artistic vision) in the context of the genre of the novel' (*Voprosy*, p. 235n2).

³² *Ibid.* Michael Holquist grapples with this remark in his chapter 'The Fugue of Chro-

The bulk of Bakhtin's essay is devoted to the history of the chronotope from the ancient Greek novel – or what is called so – to François Rabelais, with an occasional glance towards the modern novel after Rabelais. The Greek novel manifested three chronotopes: the one of adventure, in which 'Fate, the gods, and the villains' are the main active forces and the human characters merely react to them; time is divided here into segments, at once interrupted and connected with each other by accident and supernatural interference. The second is the chronotope of adventure-cum-everyday life, where the human characters begin to seize the initiative but act wrongly on their own. And the third is the biographical chronotope, where the purely external and public persona of the archaic hero gradually develops an interior private dimension, while the overall narrative reveals how the character's life fulfils its original design. Bakhtin sees these chronotopes as the products of the disintegration of what he calls 'the folk-mythical fullness of time'.³³ At the same time these chronotopes show the beginnings of the novelistic time proper, i.e., some openness towards the future resulting from the fact that they reveal social contradictions. Bakhtin views mythical time as a 'historical inversion': the ideals of justice, perfection, and social harmony that can only be attained in the future are imagined to have existed in the past. 'The present and especially the past were enriched,' he writes, 'at the cost of the future.'³⁴ The mythical subject would sooner create superstructures (heaven) or substructures (underground kingdoms) or place the Golden Age somewhere beyond vast distances than to recognise actuality – the present – as a 'horizontal' jour-

notope', in Bemong and Borghart (eds.), *Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope*, pp. 28-29. Holquist misunderstood Bakhtin's statement that time and space are 'forms of actual reality itself' and translated 'actual reality itself' as 'most immediate reality' (in the sense of 'most immediately perceived'), giving it a Kantian twist expressly contradicted by Bakhtin. The misunderstanding hinges on the Russian word *samoi*: Holquist takes it to mean 'most', whereas in fact it is a pronoun *sama*, 'herself', in the genitive, relating to *deistvitel'nost'*, 'actuality', rather than to *real'naia*, 'real'. It is also worth noting here that the stable Russian expression *real'naia deistvitel'nost'* used by Bakhtin is a combination of the Latin-derived word for 'real' and the word for 'actuality' that may be derived both from the medieval Latin *actualitas* and German *Wirklichkeit*. It rolls off the Russian tongue but in English 'real actuality' is awkward while 'actual reality', a peculiar inversion, is just as flowing.

³³ Ibid., p. 296 (*DI* 146).

³⁴ Ibid., p. 297 (*Dialogic Imagination*, 147).

ney forward. Such vertical, otherworldly super- and substructures hollow the future out, thinks Bakhtin, and 'bleed it white'. Eschatology is only another way of doing the same thing and it matters not whether the end comes as a universal catastrophe or the Kingdom of God; all that matters, Bakhtin remarks, is that the immanent present open towards the future is annihilated. (This 'futuristic' orientation is typical of the modern attitude in general. One could recall here, for example, Karl Marx's statement that history 'cannot draw its poetry from the past but only from the future'.)³⁵ Bakhtin finds a healthy alternative to this bleak picture in folklore. Here his rhetoric changes abruptly from condemnation to idealisation: in folklore he sees 'straight and honest growth' of the human being who is free from 'any false humility, any ideal compensation for weakness and need'.³⁶ Even the fantastic is 'realistic' in folklore and this 'folkloric realism' remains the source of realism for literature in general and the modern novel in particular.

In Rabelais' novelistic chronotope Bakhtin notes, first and foremost, 'the category of spatiotemporal growth' under which the real – that is, the immanent – world is presented. There are vast spaces and temporal vistas unfolding into infinite distance in all directions here, uninhibited by any otherworldly, miraculous interruptions. In fact, this growth is opposed to 'the medieval vertical [axis], is polemically poised against it'.³⁷ As an alternative to the old hierarchical picture of the world Rabelais proposes 'the re-creation of a new, whole and harmonious man, and new forms of human communication'.³⁸ Assisted by folklore and Antiquity, the Rabelaisian chronotope removes the false hierarchical relations between things and ideas and inaugurates a world in which things and human beings partly re-discover and partly create anew a more adequate order of things, better corresponding to their own nature. Corporeality plays the central part in this new world – providing a healthy alternative, Bakhtin believes, to the old false idealism imposed on humanity by 'the scholastic thinking,

³⁵ Karl Marx, 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte', in *The Portable Marx*, edited by Eugene Kamenka (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England; New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 290.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 300 (*Dialogic Imagination*, 150).

³⁷ Ibid., p. 318 (*Dialogic Imagination*, 168).

³⁸ DI 168 (*Voprosy*, p. 317).

false theological and juridical casuistry, and, finally, the very language itself, permeated as it is by the centuries and millennia of lies'.³⁹ We see here how myth is insensibly subsumed under religion and official ideology, with folk consciousness and progressive literature struggling to overthrow them. On the surface, this sounded exactly like the Soviet ideology and propaganda of the 1930s; in fact, however, this was Bakhtin's way of bringing the same accusation against Soviet officialdom that Losev levelled at it a few years earlier: the ideology was just as mythical in its foundations as the medieval one, its vehement claims to being 'scientific' notwithstanding. The difference between Bakhtin and Losev, however, is that, unlike Losev, Bakhtin seems to assume that there is the right kind of modern consciousness that eschews myth, ideology, and officialdom and does fulfil the promise of humanity's liberation strictly by its own power and in this world. In other words, for Bakhtin, in the classic modern mode, it is the *transcendent* as such, whether medieval or utopian Communist, that limits the human powers of self-transformation. One cannot help noticing a Nietzschean motif in this resentment of transcendence and affirmation of pure immanence but this motif is immediately contravened by Bakhtin's repeated appeals to *folklore* as the ultimate source of the desired immanentism. The truly productive chronotope has its roots in the *collective* folkloric perception of the world, itself rooted in collective agricultural production. Folkloric time is the 'time of productive growth', it is oriented towards the future, connected to space and the earth, and thoroughly unified.⁴⁰ (Bakhtin deploys here the standard dual Soviet motif of collective labour and man's 'struggle against nature'.) The cyclical character of this folkloric time is, however, its negative feature, and the orientation 'forward' is hampered by it. In subsequent history this time decomposes, falls apart into separate 'great realities', individualised times of private existence, history of nations, and the history of humanity at large. The dialogic intertwining of these chronotopes – that further fall apart into more detailed ones: the road, the threshold, the encounter, the parlour, and so on – constitutes the chronotopic fabric of the modern novel.

The contrast between 'the absolute past' of epic and the inexhaustible

³⁹ *Voprosy*, p. 318 (DI 169).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 356-357 (DI 206-207).

present of the novel is the beating heart of Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope – similarly to the role that the contrast between sacred and profane time and space played in both Cassirer's and Eliade's analyses.⁴¹ Where the chronotope of the epic past is 'closed', that of the modern present is 'open'; where one is 'hierarchical', the other is 'relative'; where one is 'fully completed and finished' and thus creatively barren, the other one is 'unfinalisable' and thus full of creative potential.⁴²

The epic past is not called 'the absolute past' for nothing: as simultaneously an axiological (hierarchical) past, it is devoid of any relativity, that is, devoid of those gradual, purely temporal transitions that would link it to the present. It is walled off by an absolute boundary from all subsequent times and, above all, from that time in which the singer and his listeners find themselves. This boundary is, consequently, immanent to the very form of epic poetry; it is felt and it sounds in every word of it. . . . But precisely because it is separated from all subsequent times the epic past is absolute and finished. It is closed like a circle and everything in it is fully completed and finished. There is no room in the epic world for anything unfinished, undecided, and problematic. No escape is left in it into the future; it is sufficient unto itself and does not presuppose, nor does it need, any continuation. Temporal and axiological determinations are merged into a single uninterrupted whole here (as they are merged in the ancient semantic layers of language). All that is joined to this past is thereby joined to genuine substantiality and significance, but at the same time it becomes finalised and finished, it loses, so to speak, all rights to and possibilities for real continuation. Absolute finality and closed quality are remarkable features of the axiological-temporal epic past.⁴³

Strictly speaking, when Bakhtin describes this 'absolute past', he is actually

⁴¹ Bakhtin developed this contrast especially in the essay '*Epos i roman (O metodologii issledovaniia romana)*' (Epic and the Novel [On Research Methodology for the Novel]), *Voprosy*, pp. 447-483 (*Dialogic Imagination*, pp. 3-40).

⁴² *Voprosy*, p. 459.

⁴³ Ibid. Emerson and Holquist translate the Russian adverb *odnovrememno*, 'simultaneously', in the sentence of this passage by the adjective 'monochronic', and the Russian *tseinnostnyi*, 'value-related or more technically 'axiological', as 'valorized' (see *Dialogic Imagination*, p. 15). Cf. also Tihanov, *The Master and Slave*, p. 154n77.

describing a *mythical* chronotope. But the way he envisions it is a striking departure from Cassirer's description of the mythical world, in which

[r]eality – corporeal or psychic – has not yet become stabilized but reserves a peculiar “fluidity.” Reality is not yet divided into definite classes of things with characteristics established once and for all; nor have any hard and fast dividing lines been drawn between the various spheres of life. . . . For here, too, the fundamental motif of myth – the motif of “metamorphosis” – prevails. This mythical change of forms also draws the I into its sphere and absorbs its unity and simplicity. Like the boundary between natural forms, the boundary between “I” and “thou” is fluid throughout. Life is still an unbroken stream of becoming, a dynamic flow which only very gradually divides into separate waves.⁴⁴

It is important to recognise that the *epic* chronotope as such cannot be reduced to its *mythical* component, but is in fact a dynamic structure consisting of *two* sharply different times and spaces, one of which is indeed ‘the absolute past’ of myth, while the other is the radically different present, namely, in Bakhtin's words, ‘that time in which the singer and his listeners find themselves’. The boundary between the time of myth and the epic singer's present, according to him, defines epic poetry as a genre.⁴⁵ The divide within epic time had already become apparent to Cassirer, who observed that in myth ‘a rigid barrier divides the empirical present from the mythical origin and gives to each its own inalienable “character”’.⁴⁶ But Bakhtin refined this observation by recognising in the conjunction of two radically different types of time and space the primary quality of the epic perspective on things. This point, which is often overshadowed by Bakhtin's vivid if tendentious description of ‘the absolute past’, is crucially important for understanding the relations among such symbolic forms as myth, the novel, and philosophical discourse.

Both Cassirer's and Bakhtin's views of mythical time and space stand in need of adjustment. Contrary to Bakhtin, the mythical chronotope as such is dynamic and fluid, while being also complete: an internally dynamic

⁴⁴ Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, p. 71.

⁴⁵ *Voprosy*, p. 459.

⁴⁶ *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2, p. 106.

self-sufficient totality. However, contrary to Cassirer, this fluidity is the result not of the indeterminacy of its phenomena, but of their all-around connectedness, universal relatedness and mystical identity of all temporal moments and spatial points with one another. And it is precisely the *epic distance* that makes the completeness of this time apparent, the fullness of days that epic upholds as both perfect and – irretrievably lost to the singer’s present. It is also this nostalgic epic vision of universal relatedness, may I note, and the holistic nature of mythical time that Bakhtin mistook for an oppressively closed-off and creatively stifling atmosphere.

Indebted as he was to his German colleague, Bakhtin’s view of the history of chronotopes is much more dichotomous than Cassirer’s. ‘The absolute past’ versus the unfinalisable present is, as I noted above, the key distinction in Bakhtin’s theory. Bakhtin sees no way out of this dichotomy apart from the unfinalisable present’s uncompromising struggle against the oppression of ‘the absolute past’.⁴⁷ Such is the underlying dynamic, for example, of the chronotope of the carnival, whose sharp end aims at the ‘official’ order of things that in turn corresponds almost feature for feature to ‘the absolute past’, i.e., to myth. In Cassirer’s grandiose parade of symbolic forms, replacing one another in a rational historical progression, Bakhtin’s eye is fixated on a dualistic opposition between two deeply antagonistic forces and two spatio-temporal kingdoms, divided by abyssal discord. In theory, this discord was supposed to resolve itself into heteroglossal *dialogue*, which performs in Bakhtin’s thought a function similar to that of sublation (*Aufhebung*) in Hegel’s dialectic. But despite his extensive assimilation of Hegel’s legacy, Bakhtin never became a Hegelian and his *dialogue* never evolved into a dialectical category.⁴⁸ Everything hinges here on a certain attitude towards the category of infinity.

The defining character of the modern view of time and space can be described as immanentist infinitism, i.e., the intimately coupled mutually exclusive beliefs that reality is at once *infinite* and strictly *limited* to the immanent (as opposed to the transcendent) domain. Cassirer’s phenom-

⁴⁷ Craig Brandist remarks that Bakhtin ‘followed Cassirer in posing the struggle between different orientations of various symbolic forms ‘as irreconcilable in principle’ (Brandist, ‘Bakhtin, Cassirer, and Symbolic Forms’, p. 22.).

⁴⁸ For a discussion of Bakhtin’s Hegelianism see Brandist, ‘Bakhtin, Cassirer, and Symbolic Forms’, pp. 26-27.

ology of symbolic forms was partially protected against the immanentist infinitism of modern progress by its author's hopes for the 'fullness of scientific knowledge', i.e., for the eventual emergence of scientific knowledge as a *system*. Bakhtin dismissed Cassirer's hopes and decisively took the side of infinitism. For him, 'system' looked too much like dogmatic officialdom. Needless to say, this is precisely the aspect of his outlook that later endeared him to his poststructuralist admirers. His theory of the carnival and praises of Rabelais are among the most vivid examples of immanentist infinitism produced by the culture and thought of modernity. Yet this faith in unfinalisable progress is so irrational that, his devotion to infinitist metaphysics notwithstanding, even Bakhtin knew moments of longing for the crowning fullness of things. At one point he decided, in a paradoxical but hardly unexpected move, to find such a 'finalisation' in nothing other than his favourite *unfinalisability*. (Remarkably, categories of *myth* and *symbol* played the central part in that attempt.) It is precisely unfinalisability, infinite openness that explodes all set limits, that Bakhtin discerns in 'the basis of myth that has not been rationalised by official consciousness', i.e., in the 'miracle and revelation' of humanity's 'great experience'. In contrast to the pragmatic and utilitarian 'small experience', which Bakhtin here identifies with 'official culture', this 'great experience' consists in 'the system of folkloric symbols, millennia in formation, depicting the model of the final whole'. (Let us note in parentheses that in that moment Bakhtin was thinking of this 'model of the final whole' as something that 'lies at the foundation of any artistic image' – a point that echoes his idealising treatment of folklore in the chronotope essay.) The defining quality of great experience is its capacity to 'animate everything (to see in all things non-finality and freedom, miracle and revelation)'.⁴⁹ Thus unfinalisability becomes the substitute for the mystery at the heart of miracles and revelations that are the stuff of myth. The result is highly ambiguous, of course, cancelling rather than upholding any hope for the final synthesis. In this it is also quite typical of modern thinking in which the unattainable final goal

⁴⁹ Bakhtin, 'K voprosam samosoznaniia i samootsenki' ('Towards Issues of Self-Consciousness and Self-Evaluation', in Mikhail Bakhtin, *Sobranie sochinenii* (Works), vol. 5 (Moscow: Russkie slovari, 1997), p. 78. An extensive passage from these notes in English translation can be found in Shepherd, 'A Feeling for History?', pp. 40-42.

of scientific progress has replaced medieval divine mystery.⁵⁰ Still Bakhtin was clearly attempting to overcome the limitations of modern infinitism – even if his overall philosophical position did not provide adequate means of doing so.

Though they never found their way into a larger work, these thoughts considerably complicate the picture of Bakhtin that has emerged from his published chronotope essay and that lends itself much more easily to a poststructuralist interpretation by presenting Bakhtin as a thinker decisively in the modern mode: singer of the modern chronotope and theorist of unending dialogue. In these notes he describes such dialogue as *bezysk-bodnyi*, which means ‘endless’ in the sense of ‘no way out’, ‘irreparable’, and ‘inconsolable’. Committed as he was to the unfinalisable present, Bakhtin was nonetheless haunted by the inescapable vacuity, lapse of meaning, at the heart of modern infinitism. In an astute editorial comment Ludmila Gogotishvili notes that, despite himself, Bakhtin everywhere presupposes what she calls ‘a semantic field’ that stands for the completeness of things. ‘Although it has no stable linguistic designation,’ she writes, ‘this semantic field of an all-embracing axiological and value-laden whole, *in* which and *against* whose *background* alone are dialogical relations possible, is nonetheless palpable in all of M. M. B[akhtin]’s writings, presenting – for reasons that include its “namelessness” – one of the most difficult places for interpretation.’⁵¹ In his notes on self-consciousness where he articulated these thoughts, however, Bakhtin did give this semantic field several names. He called it ‘the truth of an all-encompassing whole’, ‘the true voice of being, the whole being’, and ‘the voice of the whole’.⁵² Such holism stands on its head the logic of decentring, irreducible ambiguity, and infinite diffu-

⁵⁰ I have discussed this replacement in my book *The Orpheus Myth and the Powers of Music*, pp. 92-94, and further developed some of its aspects in my essay ‘Teleology in Nature and Life-Transforming Art’, Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (ed.), *Phenomenology of Space and Time: The Forces of the Cosmos and the Ontopoietic Genesis of Life: Book One* (Heidelberg, New York, Dordrecht, and London: Springer International Publishing Switzerland, 2014), pp. 227-236.

⁵¹ Gogotishvili’s editorial commentary on Bakhtin’s text ‘*K filosofskim osnovam gumanitarnykh nauk*’ (Towards Philosophical Principles of the Humanities), in Bakhtin, *Works*, vol. 5, p. 389. Gogotishvili goes on to note ‘remote dialogical consonances’ that this holistic semantic field has with Platonic myth.

⁵² Bakhtin, *Works*, vol. 5, pp. 77-78.

sion that constitutes the poststructuralism *avant la lettre*, so to speak, in Bakhtin's legacy in general and his theory of the chronotope in particular.

3.

In *The Dialectics of Myth* Losev evoked Cassirer's theory to open his own analysis of mythical time, quoting with approval his German colleague's observations about the perceptions of time in various cultures. However, Losev also diverged from Cassirer both in his understanding of the contrasts between mythical and scientific time, and especially in their assessment.⁵³ Cassirer's key error, in Losev's view, was that he denied mythical consciousness all ability to distinguish between reality and fantasy, truth and falsehood, substance and appearance.⁵⁴ Losev argued, by contrast, that myths possessed their own, mythical veracity and claim to truth that became especially apparent when rival mythologies, such as those of ancient paganism and early Christianity, struggled with one another.⁵⁵

For Losev, the time of modern science is 'homogeneous and infinite', which recalls Cassirer's description, but it is also 'empty and dark'.⁵⁶ As such, it is sharply divorced from living human experience in which 'genuinely *real* time', according to Losev, is non-uniform, has 'folds and breaks', can be shaken by concussions, compressed or extended – in short, it possesses a figure and shape. In ancient Neoplatonism, for example, Losev finds a cosmos that contains five 'planes of spatiotemporal being', each associated with one of the five primitive elements: Fire (the original unity), Light (intelligence, idea), Air (Soul, Spirit), Earth (Sophic body), and Water (the qualification of the fourth principle through the first three, i.e., of Earth through Fire, Light, and Air). Bodies can thus be fiery, luminous, airy, terrestrial, or aquatic. In principle, Losev states, 'The cosmos is infinitely diverse in its temporal structure.'⁵⁷

⁵³ Aleksei Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*, trans. V. Marchenkov (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), pp. 80-81.

⁵⁴ Cf. Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, p. 67.

⁵⁵ Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*, pp. 26-27.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

Like Cassirer, Losev draws a contrast between mythical and modern scientific time, but, unlike his German counterpart, he does not believe that modern thought leaves myth behind. Rather, modern science is itself based on its own mythology. (Cassirer argued only that the 'expressive function' as the 'spiritual potency' from which myth arises survives the decline of myth proper and retains its relevance in the modern world.⁵⁸) In his critique of the modern myths of infinite time and space Losev links this mythology to the basic tenets of the Enlightenment outlook. He describes the modern myth of matter, the centrepiece of modern mythology, as 'the myth of the universal dead Leviathan who – and this constitutes the materialist faith in miracles – is embodied in the real things of this world and dies in them to rise again and to ascend to the black heaven of dead and dull sleep without dreams and without any sign of life'.⁵⁹ It is hardly surprising that materialism, including the so-called 'dialectical materialism', became Losev's chief target, given the prominent place this doctrine held in Soviet Marxism, the ideology that was aggressively and violently asserting itself in Russia at that time. Losev did not simply criticise materialism, and by implication also the entire Soviet Marxist ideology, but in fact denied it the status of a scientific outlook altogether, and treated it instead as a rather unattractive kind of a myth:

Materialists believe in the miraculous, supernatural embodiment – not quite of the father, but of some deaf and blind *mother*, i.e., matter – its embodiment into a clear and meaningful world, into real things. Materialist dogma requires at the same time that there be 'force and matter', *movement* rather than mere dead things. (Some materialists even define materialist dialectics as the science of the universal laws of motion.) This reminds one of the Christian religion where the embodied Word of God promises to send and does indeed send another 'Comforter . . . even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father', who would give the gracious powers for life, ministry, creation, and 'movement' (John 15:26). Thus, the materialist doctrine of matter, the laws of nature (which act in the physical world), and movement represents a degeneration of the Christian teaching about the Holy Trinity and about the embodiment of the

⁵⁸ Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 3, pp. 78-79.

⁵⁹ Losev, *The Dialectics of Myth*, p. 117.

Son of God. This degeneration is, however, no less mythological and dogmatic than any other religious dogma.⁶⁰

And yet Losev did not single out the Soviet ideological mind-set among other varieties of the modern outlook. For him, Soviet Marxism was only a particularly loathsome distillation of the modern worldview in general that in its metaphysical foundations was identical with and, in fact, grew out of bourgeois ideology. It was, as Losev uncharitably described it, the outlook 'of the entire nauseous swarm of petty, cold egotists with regard to whom, one must admit, the Russian Revolution was not only just, but even insufficient'.⁶¹ The mythical subject that created and sustained this mythology was, in Losev's words, a 'miser who wants to submit the entire world to his wretched proprietary caprice' and who 'precisely for this purpose . . . imagines the world as a soulless, mechanically moving beast (he would not dare appropriate any other world)'.⁶² In his at times overheated polemic with this mythical subject, in which he himself often wore the mythopoeist's mask, Losev gave the chronotope created by it the following withering treatment: 'You are in love with an empty, black hole that you call "the universe", study in your universities, and idolize in our places of worship. You live by the cold lechery of paralysed space and mangle yourselves in the black prison, which you have built for yourselves, of nihilistic natural science. And I, on the contrary, love the sky that is bright, blue, and dear to my heart.'⁶³ One could recall that just a few years before Losev published these indictments, Walter Benjamin had described capitalism as the religion of modernity, a perverse cultic practice suffused with a 'monstrous sense of guilt that knows no redemption'.⁶⁴

Rather than with the abstract schemata of modern science, mythical time, Losev insisted, had to be approached dialectically, and this meant that time should be understood inseparably from eternity, as the 'alogical

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 118.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 137.

⁶⁴ Walter Benjamin, 'Capitalism as Religion', *Selected Writings, Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. M. Bullock and M. W. Jennings, trans. E. Jephcott (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002), p. 288, quoted in Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations*, trans. J. Fort (Brooklyn, NY: Zone Books, 2002), p. 80.

becoming of eternity' or as 'the actual infinity where limitless becoming and eternal self-presence are one and the same thing'.⁶⁵ (Let me note in passing that *actual infinity* is Losev's way of distancing a dialectical understanding of infinity from its abstract reductions, be they ideal-transcendentalist or material-immanentist.) Eternity is the compression of all possible times into one indivisible point and, conversely, various types of time represent various degrees of eternity within time. A body, Losev explains, that moves with an infinitely great speed is at once in motion and at rest, as it 'finds itself at once everywhere . . . and nowhere'. This is the eternity of the ideal forms, 'the kingdom of absolute goals' in which effects are simultaneous with their causes. 'The world,' remarks Losev, 'is thus a system of various densities of time,' and it is dialectically necessary that at the boundary of the universe time should condense into eternity.⁶⁶ Thus Losev, in contrast to Cassirer and Bakhtin, strives towards a dialectical overcoming, not only of the Enlightenment attitude towards myth as something obsolete, but also of the very foundations of the Enlightenment outlook itself. Anticipating Eliade's attitude, Losev called time 'the pain of history misunderstood by the scientific "calculation" of time'.⁶⁷

Losev's reflections on space were mostly concerned with its representations in various cultural-historical styles of painting. The space of Byzantine murals and mosaics, for example, is 'ideographic' and is symbolised by such signs as the golden background in two-dimensional depictions; it is archaic and conditioned, Losev notes, by the feudal social order.⁶⁸ By contrast, the single-point linear perspective produces the 'egocentric orientation', where space is 'closed and concentric'. Chinese and Japanese painting represents the 'eccentric-concentric' orientation in space: 'The viewer,' writes Losev, 'perceives this space *from within* a painting, from its

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 112. Losev's exposition of the dialectic of eternity and time in these passages is the most original contribution to the theme of the chronotope among the five authors discussed in this essay. It represents only a brief summary of an extensive area in Losev's philosophy that must remain outside the confines of this paper.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 85.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 82.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 94. For his observations on space Losev relied on Nikolai Tarabukin's (1889-1956) manuscript titled '*Problema prostranstva v zhivopisi*' (The Problem of Space in Painting), published posthumously in *Voprosy iskusstvovedeniia*, Nos. 1-4 (1993) and No. 1 (1994), pp. 319-336.

centre.⁶⁹ This is the *radial* kind of space: it ‘unfolds outward in all directions along radii’. Futurism and Expressionism came close to a similar vision, albeit from a different worldview. Gothic stained-glass windows produce a space with ‘the character of something concealed’, while Gothic architecture ‘aspires to annihilate all obstacles to the element of space’. ‘It raises into infinity a vast swelling sea of ribbed vaults,’ remarks Losev. This is a vision in which ‘there is no limited space’, a vertical space, for which Losev borrows Wilhelm Worringer’s phrase ‘aesthetically refined chaos’.⁷⁰ The futurists attempted to depict a space ‘that simultaneously wants to be time – like the four-dimensional space of modern physics developing under the sign of the relativity principle’, or ‘hyperspace’. Marc Chagall’s space is one ‘not of perception but of representation’, while Vasiliy Kandinsky’s is ‘precosmic chaos’.

Losev evokes these reflections by Nikolai Tarabukin in order to support his closely intertwined theses about the irreducibly *personalistic* nature of mythical space and irreducibly *mythical* nature of any perception of the world. Space, in other words, is always *inhabited* both by the viewer and by the creatures that render it visible. He closes by describing the mythical chronotope of the Soviet ideological discourse:

From the point of view of the Communist mythology, not only ‘a spectre wanders in Europe, the spectre of Communism’ (the beginning of the *Communist Manifesto*) but also ‘the vermin of counterrevolution are swarming’, ‘the jackals of imperialism are howling’, ‘the hydra of the bourgeoisie is baring its teeth’, ‘the jaws of financial sharks are gaping’, etc. Here we also find scurrying about such figures as ‘bandits in tail-coats’, ‘monocled brigands’, ‘crowned bloodletters’, ‘cannibals in mitres’, ‘cassocked *jaw-shatterers*’, etc. In addition, everywhere here are ‘dark forces’, ‘gloomy reaction’, ‘the *black* army of *obscurantists*’; and in this darkness there is ‘the *red* dawn’ of ‘world fire’, ‘the *red* flag’ of rebellion... What a picture! And they say there is no mythology here.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 95.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 96. It was for the contraband insertion of passages like this one into the censor-approved text of *The Dialectics of Myth* that Losev was arrested in 1930 and sentenced to ten years of labour camps by the Soviet authorities. See my ‘Translator’s Intro-

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Eliade's and Losev's analyses of time and space share many points of agreement. The uneven, figured nature of time and space in particular was recognised by both authors. 'For religious man,' wrote Eliade, 'space is not homogeneous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others.'⁷² Such space is in direct contrast with 'the chaos of the homogeneity and relativity of profane space':

Revelation of a sacred space makes it possible to obtain a fixed point and hence to acquire orientation in the chaos of homogeneity, to "found the world" and to live in a real sense. The profane experience, on the contrary, maintains the homogeneity and hence the relativity of space. No *true* orientation is now possible, for the fixed point no longer enjoys a unique ontological status; it appears and disappears in accordance with the needs of the day. Properly speaking, there is no longer any world, there are only fragments of a shattered universe, an amorphous mass consisting of an infinite number of more or less neutral places in which man moves, governed and driven by the obligations of an existence incorporated into an industrial society.⁷³

Aside from the striking anticipation, at the end of this passage, of the post-modern unmaking of the world, Eliade also forcefully advances the view that, *pace* Cassirer and especially Bakhtin, the sacred is the domain of the real, whereas the profane is the domain of the unreal. Both Cassirer and Losev do note that, for the mythical subject, mythical time and space are completely real, although Cassirer thinks that the 'objective' category of reality only takes shape in theoretical and especially scientific consciousness, while Losev denies scientific time and space any privileged status vis-à-vis their mythical counterparts.⁷⁴ But Eliade goes much farther and

duction', in *The Dialectics of Myth*, pp. [8] and [12-15].

⁷² Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. W. R. Trask (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1959), 21.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-24.

⁷⁴ In fact, Losev argued that for modern science the reality of either its subject or its objects is irrelevant, that 'the laws of physics and chemistry are the same whether matter really exists or does not really exist' and that '[f]or its own existence, science needs nothing more than a *hypothesis*'. As he stated further, anticipating Thomas Kuhn's theory of

launches a direct attack on the notion of the superiority of science over myth, arguing for a view that is the inversion of the one predominant in modern culture. '[T]he sacred is pre-eminently the *real*,' he writes. 'Religious man's desire to live *in the sacred* is in fact equivalent to his desire to take up his abode in objective reality, not to let himself be paralyzed by the never-ceasing relativity of purely subjective experiences, to live in a real and effective world, and not in an illusion. . . . [W]here the sacred manifests itself in space, *the real manifests itself*, the world comes into existence.'⁷⁵ Losev's and Eliade's comments on this subject make it especially apparent how the standard accusations, levelled by modern critics at the 'archaic man': that he is incapable of distinguishing fantasy from reality in fact mask the problem inherent in the modern worldview itself. For in modern thinking, things – all things – are perpetually suspended in an ontological limbo: they are neither fish nor fowl, neither completely real nor entirely fantastical, they neither fully exist nor do they merely seem to be. The entire domain of existence, in other words, is a potentiality, waiting for the human will to exercise its limitless power over it – to pulverise it into nothingness or to grant it, with godlike magnanimity, the right to become real in order to be consumed as a sacrificial victim on the altar of humanity's infinite external expansion.

As he contrasts the (sacred) cosmos with (profane) chaos, Eliade also points out that the former arises through a cosmogony that is then repeated by 'religious man' in his rituals, fashioned after the deeds of his gods. Furthermore, cosmogony forms the foundation of 'every construction or fabrication' for which it serves as the 'paradigmatic model'.⁷⁶ In a virtual polemic with Bakhtin, who denied, as we recall, the very possibility of creativity in 'the absolute past', Eliade argues that *only* in sacred time and space is real creativity possible. Such genuine creativity is assured, according to Eliade, by the existence of the Centre of the world, i.e., the point where the profane can be transcended and the human person can emerge into the sacred, 'the space where a break in (the ontological) plane occurs,

the evolution of science, 'The essence of pure science is to put forth a hypothesis and then to replace it with a new and more perfect one if there are sufficient grounds for this' (*The Dialectics of Myth*, pp. 23-24).

⁷⁵ *The Sacred and the Profane*, pp. 28 and 63.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

where space becomes sacred, hence pre-eminently *real*.⁷⁷ 'A creation,' as he puts it, 'implies a superabundance of reality, in other words an irruption of the sacred into the world' – an irruption that is also caused by 'an excess of power, an overflow of energy', and 'a surplus of ontological substance' flowing from the gods. 'This is why the myth,' Eliade remarks, 'which narrates this sacred ontophany, this victorious manifestation of a plenitude of being, becomes the paradigmatic model for all human activities.'⁷⁸ It is worth noting here that Bakhtin could have encountered a perspective that was very similar in this regard to Eliade's in Russian Symbolism in general and the writings of Viacheslav Ivanov (1866-1949) in particular. Ivanov developed a philosophy of art whose aim – in the wake of Vladimir Solov'ev's (1853-1900) doctrine – was to transform artistic creativity into *theurgy*, humanity's participation in the project of divine creation.

Reversing the dynamic that Bakhtin perceived between 'the absolute past' and the modern present, Eliade argues that immersion in the desacralised time of historical progress actually strips the modern person of the ability to create independently. '[T]he modern man can be creative,' he writes, 'only insofar as he is historical; in other words, all creation is forbidden him except that which has its source in his own freedom; and, consequently, everything is denied him except the freedom to make history by making himself.'⁷⁹ Eliade could have alluded here to the modern theories according to which humanity evolves either as a matter of deterministic objective laws or under the leadership of small oppressive elites who deny the great masses the right to participate in defining their destiny. But instead he sounds the motif of the modern man's Cartesian solitude, i.e., the unavailability of a breakthrough into anything genuinely different from himself. In response to the reproach that mythical time is devoid of history and 'paralyzes any creative spontaneity', Eliade states that, while being perhaps justified in part, this reproach nonetheless misses the point. 'For religious man, even the most primitive,' he writes, 'does not refuse

⁷⁷ Ibid. Elsewhere Eliade also speaks of the sacred world as reflecting the existence of its creators, of "the very structure of the cosmos" keeping the "memory of the celestial supreme being alive" in the form of verticality, i.e., a spatial dimension that evokes transcendence (p. 129).

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 45 and pp. 97-98.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 156.

progress in principle; he accepts it but at the same time bestows on it a divine origin and dimension.' The milestones of progress that the modern man claims as strictly his own achievements are perceived in primitive societies, Eliade points out, 'as a series of new divine revelations'.⁸⁰ Such an assimilation of progress to a religious view has far-reaching implications that seem to have remained unexplored by Eliade.

Closely associated with this characteristic of mythical space is yet another point of contention with Bakhtin: the view of the mythical chronotope as closed. As though responding to Bakhtin's insistent remarks on this point, Eliade speaks of the ritual moment of transcendence as the opening-up of the profane space to its sacred counterpart. Directly contradicting Bakhtin whose work he, of course, could not have known, Eliade insists that 'religious man lives in an open world' and his existence is 'open to the world' in the sense that he is 'accessible to an infinite series of experiences that could be termed cosmic'.⁸¹ By contrast, 'for the nonreligious men of the modern age, the cosmos has become opaque, inert, mute; it transmits no message, it holds no cipher'.⁸² If Losev anticipated later insights into the mythical nature of the scientific outlook, Eliade articulated an argument that would become central in the late-twentieth-century debate on the environmental crisis. In his criticisms of the modern amoral relation between humanity and nature he observed: 'From the point of view of profane existence, man feels no responsibility except to himself and to society. For him, the universe does not properly constitute a cosmos – that is, a living and articulated unity; it is simply the sum of the material reserves and physical energies of the planet, and the great concern of modern man is to avoid stupidly exhausting the economic resources of the globe.'⁸³

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 90.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 169-170. Cf. also p. 172.

⁸² Ibid., p. 178. One might recall that around the time when Eliade wrote *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1949) Karl Popper (1902-1994) gave the 'open-vs.-closed' metaphor a decidedly political and ideological dimension in the contrasts he drew between 'open' and 'closed' societies (Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* [London: Routledge, 1945]). It is hard to avoid the impression that Bakhtin's popularity in the West was fuelled in part by the resonance between his advocacy on behalf of the 'open' chronotope of the modern novel and Popper's advocacy on behalf of secular liberal-democratic ideology.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 93-94.

Just as with space, Eliade framed his discussion of time in terms of the contrast between archaic and modern, religious and non-religious, as well as sacred and profane perspectives. The archaic view of time, according to him, is marked by the repetition of archetypal actions that form a never-ending series of cycles in which the world, humanity at large, and the individual are returned to their point of origin and begin their existence anew – only for this existence to end in exactly the same point where it began. The rituals of birth, death, and rebirth allow the archaic man – who is more or less equivalent to ‘religious man’ – to shake off the dust of what little history is possible within these cycles and to start anew. ‘Religious participation in a festival,’ Eliade observes, ‘implies emerging from ordinary temporal duration and reintegration of the mythical time reactualized by the festival itself.’⁸⁴ Sacred time, he writes, ‘is a *primordial mythical time made present*’. It is ‘indefinitely recoverable, indefinitely repeatable’ and it ‘does not constitute an irreversible duration’.⁸⁵ In full agreement with both Cassirer whom he does not mention and Losev whose work he could not have known, Eliade firmly puts myth in the centre of his discussion of sacred time. As he states, ‘The sacred time periodically reactualized in pre-Christian religions (especially in the archaic religions) is a *mythical time*, that is, a primordial time, not to be found in the historical past, an *original time*, in the sense that it came into existence all at once, that it was not preceded by another time, because no time could exist *before the appearance of the reality narrated in the myth*.’⁸⁶

Modernity breaks this cyclical flow of sacred time and introduces a new set of temporal parameters. The modern view of time, for Eliade, finds expression in the idea of infinite progress. ‘From the seventeenth century on,’ he observes, ‘linearism and the progressivistic conception of history assert themselves more and more, inaugurating faith in an infin-

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 69.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 68-69.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 72; emphasis in the original. In general, Eliade tends to overestimate origins as the temporal focus of mythical time. He is closer to the mark when he speaks of myth as revealing eternity in the profane world, which implies that the mythical moment is neither the beginning nor the end but a non-time where all these temporal determinations are fused together. In the mythical narrative, which of necessity has the beginning, the middle, and the end, these moments can be said to *frame* eternity.

ite progress, a faith already proclaimed by Leibniz, predominant in the century of “enlightenment,” and popularized in the nineteenth century by the triumph of the ideas of the evolutionists.⁸⁷ Incidentally, he notes quite correctly the immanentist bias of modern historical thinking (even if he unjustly blames Hegel for it), when he writes that ‘historicism arises as a decomposition product of Christianity; it accords decisive importance to the historical event (which is an idea whose origin is Christian) but to the *historical event as such*, that is, by denying it any possibility of revealing a transhistorical, soteriological intent.’⁸⁸ Much like Losev, Eliade viewed his contemporary situation as a conflict between the modern view of time, which he designated as ‘historicism,’ and its archaic counterpart. ‘[T]he modern world,’ he wrote, ‘is, at the present moment, not entirely converted to historicism; we are even witnessing a conflict between the two views: the archaic conception, which we should designate as archetypal and an-historical; and the modern, post-Hegelian conception, which seeks to be historical.’⁸⁹ Eliade further notes, echoing Losev yet again, that elements of the archaic outlook are not entirely absent from the modern one but survive in it, in desacralized forms.

Given substantial agreement between these two thinkers, it is important to note the following difference in their respective theories. While Eliade sees the advent of modernity as *de*-sacralisation, Losev regards it as *re*-sacralization. In other words, according to Losev, modern consciousness develops its own myths and, instead of suppressing the sacred as such, it makes sacred those things which pre-modern cultures held as profane, and vice versa. What Losev describes in his philosophy of myth is not a process of the *decline* of the sacred, but a literal cultural *revolution*, not unlike the Nietzschean thoroughgoing ‘transvaluation of values’. Eliade, on the other hand, did acknowledge the continued existence of myths and rituals in the modern world but he saw them merely as camouflaged and degenerate survivals from the archaic past.⁹⁰ Even when he speaks

⁸⁷ Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return, or, Cosmos and History*. Trans. W. R. Trask (Princeton UP, 1954; French original: *Le Mythe de l'éternel retour: archétypes et répétition*, Gallimard, 1949), pp. 145-146.

⁸⁸ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 112.

⁸⁹ Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, p. 141.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 204-206.

of Marxism and psychoanalysis he sees these doctrines not as generating new mythology, but as reiterating an old one. 'Marx takes over and continues,' he writes, for example, 'one of the great eschatological myths of the Asiatico-Mediterranean world – the redeeming role of the Just (the "chosen", the "anointed", the "innocent", the "messenger"; in our day, the proletariat), whose sufferings are destined to change the ontological status of the world.'⁹¹ While Losev, too, notes the aping tendency in modern mythology, still in his philosophy of myth there is a more acute sense that modernity is suffused with its own, relatively original mythology, such as the myth of an infinite dark and cold outer space, which is both hostile and irreducible to pre-modern myths.

One of Eliade's most penetrating insights into the driving forces of this 'mythomachy', as it were, is the understanding that, ultimately, it is about *power*. 'Man *makes himself*,' Eliade says of the modern historical subject, 'and he only makes himself completely in proportion as he desacralizes himself and the world. *The sacred is the prime obstacle to his freedom. He will become himself only when he is totally demysticized. He will not be truly free until he has killed the last god.*'⁹² (Let us recall here Losev's equally unkind depiction of the modern mythical subject quoted above.) The Losevian motif of the de-animation of the cosmos performed by modern thought is not absent from Eliade's view either. 'Definitively desacralized, time presents itself as a precarious and evanescent duration,' he notes in the conclusion of his discussion, 'leading irremediably to death.'⁹³

Both Losev and Eliade are representatives of religious consciousness that, far from merely surviving in the modern world, has always been an alternative to its outlook, coexisting with it and challenging it just as much as the modern world challenged it, too. It would be misleading, though, to think of this consciousness as culturally conservative, let alone reactionary, as well as to think that the critique of modern progress emanated only from the religious intellectual opinion. Disillusionment with modern progressivism accompanied it from the very beginning, taking on various forms, such as romanticism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Eliade, in fact, evokes two major modernist writers, T. S. Eliot

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 206.

⁹² Ibid., p. 203.

⁹³ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, p. 113; emphasis added.

and James Joyce, as artists whose work, as he puts it, is 'saturated with nostalgia for the myth of eternal repetition and, in the last analysis, for the abolition of time'.⁹⁴ He also offered a rather remarkable prophecy of the postmodern outlook, when he predicted 'an epoch not too far distant, when humanity, to ensure its survival, will find itself reduced to desisting from any further "making" of history . . . will confine itself to repeating prescribed archetypal gestures, and will strive to forget, as meaningless and dangerous, any spontaneous gesture which might entail "historical" consequences'.⁹⁵ Arthur Danto's writings on the post-Warholian art world depict just such a state of affairs, where the modern historical narrative is exhausted, artistic production consists in repetitiously quoting the 'archetypal gestures' of the avant-garde, and artistic genius, the glory of modern art, is regarded as morally suspect.⁹⁶

Sceptical motifs with regard to modern culture vis-à-vis its 'primitive' forebears began to develop also in ethnography and cultural anthropology in the first half of the twentieth century. In the post-war period Claude Lévi-Strauss became one of the most visible figures in whom the idea of the superiority of scientific thinking over mythical thought began to show fatigue. This fatigue is especially evident in the famous comparison, drawn in his 1962 book *The Savage Mind*, between the modern engineer and the primitive *bricoleur*, a comparison that ostensibly highlights the differences between the 'abstract science' of the former and the 'concrete science' of the latter. But even as he contrasts them with each other, Lévi-Strauss also puts these figures on the same plane, making them characters in the same play, as it were, and this, in turn, suggests that the former's claim to rationality is no better founded than the latter's, i.e., that in essence the engineer's *modus operandi*, its blueprints and scientific apparatus notwithstanding, is not entirely dissimilar from that of the *bricoleur*. And yet Lévi-Strauss' philosophical methodology, structuralism, retained its claim to being a rational, scientific approach to the study of myth and culture. It was at this internal contradiction that Jacques Derrida levelled his criticisms.

⁹⁴ Eliade, *The Myth of Eternal Return*, p. 153.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 153-154.

⁹⁶ Arthur Danto, *Beyond the Brillo Box: The Visual Arts in Post-Historical Perspective* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 1992).

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Derrida's essay is not specifically about time and space, its conceptual scope is broader – among the broadest, one could say, that a philosopher can impart to his or her argument. He attacks the very foundations of the concept of *structure*, which, in turn, underlies the forms of time and space, as well as any number of other elements in a narrative and the narrative itself as a whole. His aim is to show that the concept of structure is in its depth irrational. 'Structure', for Derrida, encompasses all the central concepts of traditional metaphysics, thus by making it his main target he levels his critique at the entire philosophical tradition. Therefore, despite the fact that criticisms of Lévi-Strauss' structuralist theory of myth form the bulk of Derrida's essay, the theory itself serves merely as an example intended to demonstrate that a great shift has occurred – not just in philosophy, but in the unspecified region 'beyond philosophy' as well. Derrida refers to this shift as 'rupture' and points to the 'destruction of metaphysics' by Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, and Martin Heidegger in order to suggest its nature.⁹⁷ He further thinks that this rupture is inevitable: the critique of ethnocentrism, he states, must necessarily coincide with 'the destruction of metaphysics'.⁹⁸ His argument is built as a series of attacks on what he perceives as inconsistencies or even paradoxes in Lévi-Strauss' approach to myth and (social) science, eventually leading to the conclusion – anticipated to an extent by Lévi-Strauss himself – that myth and the science of mythology, the mythical *bricoleur* and the 'engineer' of rational knowledge are, after all, creatures of a kind.⁹⁹ Their basic similarity is, further, confirmation and expression of the indistinguishability of the centre from the margin, which, in turn, opens up a vision of

⁹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. A. Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 278-282. The essay 'Structure, Sign, and Play' is Chapter 10, pp. 278-293; further referred to as 'Structure, Sign, and Play'.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 282.

⁹⁹ Cf. Jean Baudrillard's explanation of the mutual identity of these ostensibly different subjects, which echoes Derrida's charge that Lévi-Strauss imposes the Western structural principle of binary oppositions upon archaic cultures. Baudrillard makes it especially clear that such dualistic thinking's capital offence is that it serves the West's monopoly on power (*Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. I. H. Grant [London, New Delhi, and Singapore: Sage Publication, 1993; French original, 1976], p. 86n7).

the world where the hierarchical authority of the centre is completely dissolved in the infinite play of signification, uninhibited by any mooring to a reality that may be independent of this ludic signification itself. At the end of Derrida's argument we find ourselves in a world of pure play that now fully dominates time, space, and any narrative whatsoever, whether mythical, literary, or scientific.¹⁰⁰

In order to arrive at this conclusion Derrida advances several tenets that, it must be noted, are offered in the form of declarations rather than arguments, as though to show that *all* discourse must necessarily be, in the end, mythological. The first such declaration is the assertion that the centre of a structure is nonsensical because, as Derrida quips, it is both inside and outside the structure by virtue of being 'that very thing within a structure which governs the structure while escaping structurality'. As a result, 'The center is not the center'.¹⁰¹ Structure is imagined here as a field with an immobile point in the middle, surrounded by the 'freeplay' of 'substitutions', and 'repetitions'. 'By orienting and organizing the coherence of the system,' Derrida writes, 'the center of a structure, permits the play of its elements within the total form.'¹⁰² Throughout the history of (misguided) Western metaphysics this centre has fulfilled the role of 'the constant of a presence—*eidos*, *arché*, *telos*, *energeia*, *ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, or conscience, God, man, and so forth'.¹⁰³ For Derrida the most important function that it performs is at once to 'allow and limit' the free play of signifiers in discourse. It is this authority that he seeks to dismantle. It remains unclear, though, why a *conceptual* entity, the centre, cannot be rationally thought of as being both within and outside another *conceptual* entity, structure. Derrida seems to presume, in a classic reifying move,

¹⁰⁰ Baudrillard's reflections on myth and modern science paint a similar picture. The modern 'demand of rationality' is 'mythical', he impugns, and what he defines as 'third order simulacra', i.e., the sociocultural order dominated by 'infinite reproduction' of all things as signs that are infinitely removed from their original model, closely corresponds to Derrida's 'infinite free play of signifiers' (*Symbolic Exchange and Death*, pp. 60-61).

¹⁰¹ 'Structure, Sign, and Play', p. 279. Obviously, by 'structurality' Derrida must mean the free play of a structure's elements *in the absence* of a centre, otherwise, if the centre is thought of as an element of 'structurality', one cannot say that it 'escapes' it.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 278-279.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 279-280.

that conceptual entities are similar to three-dimensional solids that are mutually exclusive in space. However, someone like Nicolas of Cusa could point out that in such a purely conceptual entity as a circle with an infinite radius the centre coincides with the circumference (and with every point in between), which, ironically, prefigures the picture that Derrida later rhapsodises in Nietzschean strains as the collapse of metaphysics.¹⁰⁴ An alternative reading of what Derrida means by the non-structurality of the structure's centre may be that, while it is supposed to be something thoroughly simple and devoid of any mediation within itself, the centre somehow (miraculously) generates infinite mediation around itself. So understood, the centre will indeed resemble the absolute of religious myth and theological dogma: immutable and unperturbed, yet creating unceasing change and motion around itself. Still to leap, as Derrida does, from this merely apparent paradox to the conclusion that rational thought as such is equivalent to myth is to overlook the fact that immediacy and mediation are two mutually necessary aspects – moments, in Hegel's terminology – of thinking. Rather than constituting an aporia, the coexistence of an unmediated point and mediating process, centre and margin, stable signified and mutating signification is, in fact, a completely rational dynamic in 'the structure' and 'the structurality principle' – even if to structuralists like Lévi-Strauss the rational nature of this dynamic remained obscure.

Derrida's claim that the centre of a mythical world is what Lévi-Strauss called a 'floating signifier', i.e., that it refers to something non-existent, belongs to the genre of typical modern 'refutations' of myth as fiction or delusion, and as such it provides a good example of what Losev described as the trampling down of one myth by another and I called 'mythomachy' above. However, Derrida deploys this trope not so much to affirm the superior rationality of scientific knowledge – which, as I pointed out above, he equated with mythical belief anyway – as to advance his vision of the new era in discourse, where *all* signifiers are floating. As he puts it, 'The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification *ad infinitum*.'¹⁰⁵ Further, to assert and justify the legitimacy of infinite play Derrida pronounces yet another postulate. 'Play is always

¹⁰⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 292.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

play of absence and presence,' he writes, 'but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence. Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play and not the other way around.'¹⁰⁶ It is anyone's guess why 'thinking radically' is better than, for example, thinking dialectically, i.e., viewing presence and absence, serious activity and play, the signified and signifier, the intelligible meaning and the sensible appearance of a sign, and the finite and the infinite as mutually necessary, mutually determining, and jointly constitutive of the human condition and experience. In other words, Derrida's choice is openly arbitrary, driven by motivations that have little to do with philosophy and, one suspects, everything to do with the infinitist mythology which celebrates here its final triumph. When he paints the broad panorama of the reign of metaphysics yielding to an allegedly devastating critique and, finally, the '*conception, formation, gestation, and labor*' in which 'the as yet unnameable which is proclaiming itself' is taking its shapeless shape 'under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant, and terrifying form of monstrosity', Derrida is being a mythopoeist of sweeping epochal reach, while the tenets he advances in order to reject everything that opposes his view are so many dogmas, i.e., concentrated abstract principles distilled from a particular myth.¹⁰⁷

We started our chronotopic journey with myth as Cassirer described it in its early stages, i.e., before definite figures take shape in the mind of the mythical subject. Now we can say that with Derrida's theory we have come full circle, for in the coming non-world that he describes one finds the same lack of definition. The difference is that the initial mythical state of affairs was fraught, according to Cassirer, with the future history of rational knowledge, *Wissenschaft*, whereas Derrida reverses the course of events to topple this *Wissenschaft* back into its initial mythical state. The original mythical subject lived in a world of unrelieved reality, whereas the Derridian transmutation of this subject exists a world of equally unrelieved play. The time and space of this poststructuralist world are purely ludic but there is no serious version of the chronotope to set off their ludic

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 292.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 293.

nature. This suggests that such an absurd operation on the human world was not undertaken, after all, for the sake of producing a rational result. Rather, it was motivated by the desire of that mythical subject whom Losev portrayed as the force behind modern myth. As Losev and Eliade both point out, the name of that desire is the will to power.

6.

A careful look at the theories examined above reveals a certain sequence of events mediating between the holistic visions of mythical consciousness and the analytic exercises of the metaphysician. Namely, before theory and philosophy make their appearance in the theatre of symbolic forms myth passes from the mythopoet into the hands of the poet. (Since none of our authors pays sufficient attention to it, I omit here the crucial phase prior to the rise of epic poetry in which mythical reality becomes the object of manipulation by the *trickster*.)¹⁰⁸ Epic poetry, as I pointed out earlier, introduces an alternative chronotope to that of myth: it turns the wondrous mythical present into ‘the absolute past’, simultaneously unveiling its own present as the profane opposite of the mythical world. Thus myth is changed from one’s immediate pragmatic life-context into an object of admiring *ekphrasis* from a distance. It is worth noting here that Bakhtin’s reproaches to this world for its closed and fixed nature, for being inhospitable to creativity, and generally for being dead can apply, strictly speaking, to that world which *epic poetry* creates from the mythical world proper, and even then only from an ‘enlightened’ point of view. The mythical world *per se*, as Cassirer correctly notes, is dynamic in its very essence – alongside with the holistic nature of its forms. Further, in dramatic performance, such as Attic tragedy, that arises from this dual epic chronotope the poet openly shows his own reconstruction of the mythical world, leaving behind what faint, nostalgic connection with reality it still retained in epic. Now what used to be first mythical present and then the epic past becomes a frank and open re-presentation, a creation of the human mind and hand. (I leave aside here the question as to whether Greek tragedy was

¹⁰⁸ I deal with the trickster phase in this process in my book *The Orpheus Myth* (pp. 20-21) but it deserves closer attention than I gave it there.

art in the modern sense of the word or was rather a civic-religious practice, an amalgam so typical of many pre-modern cultures.)¹⁰⁹ This new artistic chronotope further enhances and intensifies the duality that first became apparent in epic: in it the ludic time-space of the stage is sharply contrasted with the serious and real time-space of the artist and the spectator. The significance of this conjunction goes even farther than Bakhtin proposed regarding epic as a genre. The dialectic of play and reality, the ludic and the serious, constitutes an ontologically necessary condition not just for epic, where it is merely nascent, but for art as such, where it eventually comes fully to the fore.¹¹⁰

The sophist who follows the tragedian is a peculiar hybrid, a cross between the artist and the trickster: he uses the *techne* of the poet to the pragmatic ends of advancing himself in the world of human affairs. However, as the art of the sophist evolves, it becomes clear that the divide between substance (the argument) and form (the rhetoric) is unsustainable and that the pursuit of proximate pragmatic ends is possible only on the condition of faith in the universal order of things that is hospitable to the trickster's aspirations. Finally, as the old Parmenides passes the torch to the young Socrates, sophistry sheds its pragmatic motivation and becomes philosophy, i.e., the focus of consciousness, now armed with shrewd scepticism and a critical attitude, shifts away from proximate gain, *kleos*, precisely to the universal order of things. But neither myth nor epic nor tragedy disappear from the theatre of consciousness and cultural practice. Rather than supplanting them, philosophy reabsorbs all these prior stages, transmuting them into what I have proposed to call *mythosophy*: a peculiar amalgam of the philosophical quest for truth and the mythical-poetic articulation of this quest.¹¹¹ Mythosophy is the mode of articulating philosophical meaning inaugurated by Socrates, refined by Plato, and established thereafter as a venerable tradition on whose authority Derrida

¹⁰⁹ One such culture is examined in Clifford Geertz, *Negara: The Theatre-State in Nineteenth-Century Bali* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1980).

¹¹⁰ I discussed this theme in my paper 'The Dialectic of the Serious and the Ludic', in Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (ed.), *Analecta Husserliana: The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research, vol. XCVII: Beauty's Appeal: Measure and Excess* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2008), 173-80.

¹¹¹ See my book *The Orpheus Myth*, pp. 34-39 and passim.

implicitly relies for his own mythopoeic exercises. Given the nature of his message, however, Derrida is closer to the novelist than a mythopoeist; one could call him a mytho-sophist.

In a parallel sequence, one can trace the following conceptual phases in the unfolding of the forms of time and space in these 'symbolic forms'. In myth one finds the so-called 'sacred time' whose key feature is the interconnectedness of all temporal moments, their mystical resolution into eternity, i.e., immediate simultaneity of the past, present, and future. Spatial relations follow a similar logic as they collapse in the non-spatial beyond during miraculous events typical of mythical narratives (such as instantaneous transfer of objects and persons across vast spatial and temporal distances). Bakhtin shows how the epic chronotope is produced by the splitting of mythical time and space into, on the one hand, 'the absolute past' (*tempus illud* in Eliade's parlance), which retains the features of the mythical chronotope and, on the other hand, the present, which represents a fall from that past and is radically disconnected from it. From the epic point of view, the wondrous things and events that were possible *in illo tempore* are no longer possible in the present. The interconnectedness of all temporal moments and spatial relations, the immediate proximity of the here and now to eternity and the beyond remain in the past and are lost to the fragmented and inherently incomplete present. It is this unfinalisable present that gradually emerges, as Bakhtin so perceptively notes, as the time of the modern novel. The infinite present of the novel fully corresponds to the infinite time and space of modern science and philosophy, although to call either of them 'infinite' is misleading because they are both conceived in strictly immanentist terms: neither the present of the modern novel nor the time and space of modern science have any transcendent counterpart, which is indispensable to the definition not only of time and space in myth and epic, but also, in the negative sense, to the definition of novelistic time. Further, for Bakhtin the here and now of the modern novel are not self-enclosed, but inflected towards the future: their unfinalisability is, in fact, the typical modern celebration of the idea of infinite progress.

Those who turn to Derrida's and more generally poststructuralist thinking in the hopes of attaining a non-hierarchical mode of envisioning, if not the present, then perhaps a desirable future, should look elsewhere,

although they would do better to stop looking for such a mode altogether. For there is no such thing as thinking that does not arrange itself into a stratified set of values. The postmodern mythical subject demonstrates this with especial clarity. In the postmodern order the non-hierarchical principle applies only to the object, while the subject holds hegemony over it even more imperially than the modern mythical subject did. In this sense the postmodern subject merely fulfils the dynamic that was already inherent in its modern predecessor. This dynamic has to do with the strict hierarchy of the subject's faculties: at the top of this hierarchy is the will to power, at whose service the instrumental intellect stands permanently ready, and at the bottom is the incoherent, inanimate, will-less, and entirely passive object over which the higher two faculties exercise their unlimited control. This should be recognised as the *eidos* of both modern and postmodern subjectivity and, accordingly, all hopes of deriving from it a just, equitable, and genuinely critical perspective on the human condition should be abandoned. I further propose that this hierarchy of human faculties should be replaced with a different one, where the faculty of willing in general and the will to power in particular assumes its proper, subordinate place and receives its meaning from the faculty of reason.¹¹² The latter, in turn, should be viewed as possessing not merely instrumental, but irreducible intrinsic value.

Important as the category of the chronotope may be, it is the narrative itself and, above all, the person who narrates (alongside the persons of whom and for whom she narrates) that create the chronotope, rather than the other way around. Instead of being mere forms in which the chronotope manifests itself, the authors, characters, events, and actions *create* the chronotope, bring it into being; they form the world of which the chronotope is only a part. It is a part, however, whose historical transformations make especially evident the changes that occur in the narrative, i.e., in the whole to which it belongs. The fact that these changes can be rationally understood and that various symbolic and cultural forms can be brought into rationally comprehensible relations with one another suggests that the driving force behind their evolution is not the blind and insatiable will

¹¹² In proposing such a rethinking of the relation between will and reason I follow the example set by Giorgio Agamben in his 1994 book *The Man without Content*, trans. G. Albert (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1999).

to power, but ideas. Even the desire to set will over and above reason is driven, in the final analysis, by the idea, wrongheaded though it may be, that such *is* the order of things, as well as the order of words. The trajectory of the chronotopes traced in this paper shows, however, that the sort of self-annulling ‘order’ to which the modern chronotope comes in the end is neither necessary nor inevitable nor philosophically compelling – to say nothing of being the only possible one. Far from being the closing chapter, it eloquently demands, by its very deficiency, a symbolic form that will articulate a new chronotope: an alternative to the infinite expansion of the here and now. Eliade was right to turn to modernist literature itself for signs that our culture is dissatisfied with the condition to which the modern logic of things has brought it. One can point to the magic realism of Mikhail Bulgakov, Thomas Mann, and Gabriel García Márquez as evidence of a quest for an alternative type of narrative that will transcend the modern novel. But while aesthetic, ludic mysticism may find a comfortable place in art and literature, it may be just as stifling for philosophy as the immanentist infinitism of the modern outlook has been – unless it is set in relief and balance by a non-ludic and non-mystical yet holistic way of telling our story of the world.

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