

## CHAPTER 10.

# TWO PATHS DIVERGE IN A FIELD: DIALECTICS AND DIALOGICS IN RHETORICAL GENRE STUDIES

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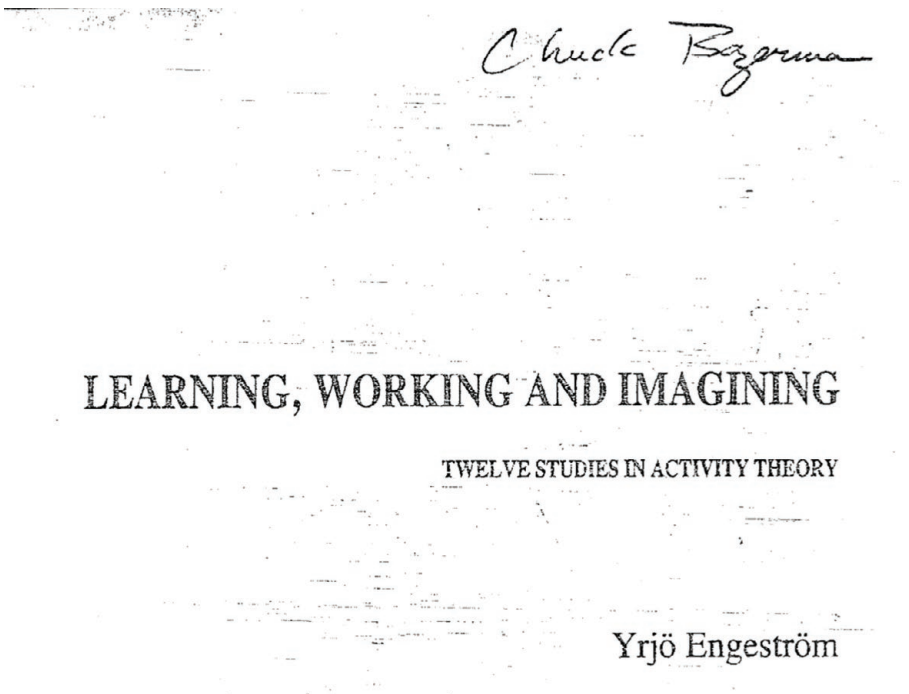
Few have impacted rhetorical genre studies (RGS) more than Charles Bazerman. His careful textual studies and theorization have helped RGS to develop the critical concept of genre, in which writers learn an activity in part through learning genres “Writers find in existing models the solution to the recurring rhetorical problems” of the activity in which they engage, and “[a]s these solutions become familiar, accepted, and molded through repeated use, they gain institutional force,” becoming a “social reality” (1988, p. 8). In learning genres and producing genre instances, writers take up and participate in a cultural heritage, one that involves conceptualizing, orienting to, and applying values to a recurrent situation (cf. Rogoff, 2003, p. 276). Put differently, in genre, the gains of human cultural development are preserved across generations, activities, groups, and cultures.

How are these gains preserved? In his subsequent work (Bazerman, 2004; 2013b), Bazerman draws on a synthesis of Vygotskian and Bakhtinian theory (and has led many of us in writing studies to similarly do so). Yet these two strands of theory are anchored by two (related but different) paths for understanding cultural heritage: dialectics and dialogics. Although they look and sound similar, they have fundamentally different understandings of how meaning emerges. Dialectics understands meaning as emerging through the unification of opposites, leading to a more thickly mediated unity (Wegerif, 2008; cf. Matusov, 2009). In contrast, Bakhtinian dialogics understands meaning as emerging through persistent difference. Ultimately, Bazerman has taken the path of dialectics, approaching genre developmentally, and interpreting dialogics through the frame of dialectics by drawing from Bakhtin’s colleague Voloshinov, who also framed dialogue as dialectical (Bazerman, 2013b, chapter 9).

Here, I retrace the steps of these two paths, dialectics and dialogics, with special attention to how Bazerman has developed his understanding of genre by drawing on the Vygotsky Circle and the Bakhtin Circle, or, as Bazerman styles it,

the Voloshinov Circle (Bazerman, 2013b, p. 151). I conclude by discussing the implications of this underlying tension in Bazerman's work and in RGS more generally, considering the question of whether we might take the other path.

But first, a personal note. When I was a graduate student at Iowa State University in the 1990s, my dissertation director, David R. Russell, suggested I read a research report by a Finn named Yrjö Engeström. He gave me a stack of paper—a photocopied book—and told me I could make a third-generation copy of it. It felt like *samizdat*. I wondered: Where on earth had David gotten it? Then, on the first page of the stack, I saw the handwritten name of the original's owner: "CHUCK BAZERMAN."



*Figure 10.1. One vector of Engeströmian activity theory into writing studies (Engeström 1990, modified by Charles Bazerman, unknown date)*

At the time, writing studies was having a bit of an identity crisis. It was only in the previous decade, the 1980s, that writing studies had truly separated from English and begun to build itself as a distinct field, and it was still trying to establish a research paradigm on which to build empirical studies (see Spinuzzi, 2021b). The quirky Finnish work that had passed from Chuck to David to me—activity theory—was part of a broader sociocognitive paradigm that writing studies would adopt throughout the 1990s and 2000s. That paradigm also

included other frameworks with plenty of disagreements but enough of a family resemblance to interact: Vygotskian theory, situated and distributed cognition, communities of practice theory, actor-network theory, and genre theory. These frameworks were monist, materialist, and focused on providing an account of how human sociocultural efforts were made durable through materials—in other words, how the gains (broadly defined) of human cultural development are materially developed, preserved, and reproduced across generations, activities, groups, and cultures. As Rogoff puts it:

Artifacts such as books, orthographies, computers, languages, and hammers are essentially social, historical objects, transforming with the ideas of both their designers and their later users. They form and are formed by the practices of their use and by related practices, in historical and anticipated communities. . . . Artifacts serve to amplify as well as constrain the possibilities of human activity as the artifacts participate in the practices in which they are employed. . . . They are representatives of earlier solutions to similar problems by other people, which later generations modify and apply to new problems, extending and transforming their use. (Rogoff, 2003, p. 276)

As one leading contender for describing such families of meaningful artifacts, genre theory had already been developed considerably in the previous decade. In 1984, Carolyn Miller wrote the pivotal article “Genre as Social Action,” which theorized genre based on Schutz. Bazerman took up Miller’s conception of genre as social action, applying his own readings of Vygotsky and Voloshinov (see Bazerman, 2004, p. 59) to yield his extended examination of genre in *Shaping Written Knowledge* (1988). In that book—among other cases—he used archives of the Royal Society to examine how the genre of the experimental article developed over long periods of time as a repeated response to a repeated rhetorical situation. In this account, genres *develop* as they are applied repeatedly to similar rhetorical situations, changing in concert with those situations. That is, they exist in a dialectical relationship as part of a larger unity. Their development forms a cultural heritage that presents relatively durable resources for those who pick up these genres: a neophyte who seeks to publish an experimental article can imitate the moves of its genre, producing a successful instance of the genre—even if they do not fully understand the rhetorical moves, their purposes, or how these purposes could be accomplished in alternate ways. Put crudely, the solutions have been embedded in the genre, and the author can tap into them just by taking the genre up. In doing so, the neophyte accepts the consensus and builds on it.

Also during the 1980s, M. M. Bakhtin's works were translated into English (1981; 1984a, 1984b; 1986). Even though he was a literary critic, his essentially social understanding of genre had direct implications for a sociocognitive approach to writing studies. But genre theory, although a theory of social action, did not in itself offer an account of sociocognitive development. So, as the decade turned, Bazerman was one of the first in writing studies to synthesize genre theory with activity theory (Bazerman, 1997; 2004; Artemeva & Freedman, 2001; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Haas, 1996; Russell, 1995; 1997a, 1997b; Schryer & Spoel, 2005; Spinuzzi, 1996; Winsor, 1999). This genre+activity theory synthesis has sometimes been termed "Rhetorical Genre Studies" (RGS; e.g., Artemeva & Freedman, 2001; 2007) or "Writing and Genre Research" (WAGR; Russell, 2009; cf. McNely, 2019; Read, 2016; Spinuzzi, 2010). Furthermore, Bazerman has sustained his focus on exploring the antecedents and branches of these relevant theories, diving deeply into the works of the Vygotsky Circle (Vygotsky, Leontiev, Luria) and the Bakhtin Circle (Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov; see Bazerman, 2004; 2013b; Bazerman et al., 2003).

Later, Bazerman (2013b) lucidly explained a fact that had become increasingly obvious to many of us who had enthusiastically embraced a genre+activity synthesis over the prior couple of decades: Bakhtin's and Vygotsky's ideas were not entirely compatible. Specifically, Vygotsky applied dialectics as his core account of learning and development. But Bakhtin—Bakhtin had a different view, as he expressed in a terse note in one of his fabled notebooks:

Dialogue and dialectics. Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that's how you get dialectics. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 147)

That is, for Bakhtin, dialectics was not the best way to understand utterances or genre. Bakhtin's perspective was informed by the fact that, like Vygotsky, he had to operate under Stalinism, but unlike Vygotsky, he could not find unity in Stalinism. Living in the USSR, "on this barren ground, under this unfree sky" (quoted in Bocharov & Lupanov, 1994, p. 1012), Bakhtin insisted (quietly, mainly in private notebooks) that *meaning emerges not from unity but from difference*. Rather than understanding genre as dialectical, he understood it as dialogical: genre still serves as a cultural heritage, but one in which "the word is half someone else's" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 293) and meaning emerges from the clash of unmerged voices (1984a, p. 6, 30). In taking up a genre, the individual does tap into the cultural heritage from which it emerged but populates it with their

own intentions. Put another way, genre is not a *thing* that evolves and develops, but a set of cross-referenced *enactments* that evoke, resonate with, and sometimes violate previous ones.

Thus, both dialectical and dialogical understandings of genre understand it as a cultural heritage, but they understand the function of cultural heritage differently. The tensions between these two understandings were not well discussed when they were taken up in writing studies in the 1990s and 2000s, but Bazerman recognized that these two paths diverged (or as Prior put it, this “dual orientation to discourse and development:” Prior, 2009, p. 28) and sought a way to reconcile these competing ideas. He found it in the work of Bakhtin’s collaborator, V. I. Voloshinov (Bazerman, 2004; 2013b). Voloshinov wrote about dialogics far more lucidly than Bakhtin; applied the question of dialogue to language more broadly, not just to literary works as Bakhtin; and, most saliently for our discussion, interpreted dialogics within the frame of dialectics.

A *path* is itself a form of cultural heritage: when you find a path, you find that the labor of others before you have made this way easier than (say) crashing through the woods. You know that the path leads somewhere and that people before you have found it useful to get there. In fact, the pursuit of a path (in Greek: *methodos*) gives us the term *method*: like a path through the woods, method lets us move faster and farther than we could on our own, but at the cost of following someone else’s lead and accepting the destination they have selected. Because Bazerman’s interest has been in learning and development, he selected that destination and trod a path to it: the path of dialectics, a path that has led him in recent years to examine how individuals accumulate competence and expertise in writing across their entire lifespan (Bazerman, 2013a; 2018). We might characterize this latest work as the study of a “mind in society,” to use a phrase associated with Vygotsky (1978): an examination of dialogic possibilities framed within dialectics.

But other paths exist—to recall a certain over-quoted poem by Robert Frost—and unlike Frost’s narrator, we can actually retrace our steps, consider why we took one path, and explore other paths as well. And that is what I’ll do in this chapter: I’ll discuss dialectics, dialogics, Voloshinov’s attempted rapprochement of the two, and how Bazerman takes up Voloshinov’s rapprochement in RGS. I end by proposing how to further address this tension in RGS by exploring the other path: dialogics.

## **PATH 1: DIALECTICS**

Dialectics can be traced back to the ancient Greeks, then through Hegel and Marx, then curdling into the universal rules of Engels and the dialectical

materialism of Lenin and Stalin. The latter two are the most salient for us, since Bakhtin began his work, and Vygotsky both began and finished his work, between the 1917 Revolution and the Great Purge of 1937-1938.

## DIALECTICS IN THE USSR

In his 1938 *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, Stalin glosses the history of dialectics:

Dialectics comes from the Greek *dialego*, to discourse, to debate. In ancient times dialectics was the art of arriving at the truth by disclosing the contradictions in the argument of an opponent and overcoming these contradictions. There were philosophers in ancient times who believed that the disclosure of contradictions in thought and the clash of opposite opinions was the best method of arriving at the truth. This dialectical method of thought, later extended to the phenomena of nature, developed into the dialectical method of apprehending nature, which regards the phenomena of nature as being in constant movement and undergoing constant change, and the development of nature as the result of the development of the contradictions in nature, as the result of the interaction of opposed forces in nature. (2013, p. 139)

Although Stalin's writings are generally propagandic, this gloss is a good starting place for understanding dialectics as it developed from ancient Greek discourse to the Stalinist dialectical materialism that underpinned the Soviet state—and to Vygotsky's theory of mediation and Leontiev's activity theory. See also Dafermos (2018, pp. 244-248), who provides a much fuller list of types of dialectics: spontaneous (naive), Sophistic (eristic), Platonic, Aristotelian, Stoic, Kantian, Fichtean, Hegelian, and Marxian—but not Engelsian or Stalinist.

For the ancient Greeks, dialectics was an approach to establishing truth through discourse among opposing sides. This approach was exemplified in the Socratic dialogues, in which the interlocutors advanced opposing ideas and queried each others' propositions until arriving at a truth. As Matusov argues, these Socratic dialogues were dialectical, but not in a Hegelian sense: they did not address unities with mutually constituting oppositions (2009, p. 19). For Hegel, dialectics provided a way to discuss the question of unity in change. As Beiser argues, for Hegel, "the point of the dialectic will be to remove contradictions by showing how contradictory predicates that seem true of the same

thing are really only true of different parts or aspects of the same thing” (2005, p. 162). Beiser adds:

The dialectic arises from an inevitable contradiction in the procedures of the understanding. The understanding contradicts itself because it both separates things, as if they were completely independent of one another, and connects them, as if neither could exist apart from the other. It separates things when it analyzes them into their parts, each of which is given a self-sufficient status; and it connects them according to the principle of sufficient reason, showing how each event has a cause, or how each part inheres in a still smaller part, and so on ad infinitum. Hence the understanding ascribes both independence and dependence to things. The only way to resolve the contradiction, it turns out, is to reinterpret the independent or self-sufficient term as the whole of which all connected or dependent terms are only parts. (Beiser, 2005, p. 164)

For Hegel, dialectics detects how development involves opposing elements, leading to the disintegration of the current state and the creation of a relatively stable new state (Singer, 1983).

Marx adapted Hegel’s idealist dialectic into a materialist method, particularly in using the notion of contradiction in opposition to formal logic (Wilde, 1991, p. 277). As Wegerif argues, “a key feature of dialectic in both Hegel and Marx is that it attempts to integrate real dialogues and struggles into a logical story of development, leading to unity either in the ‘Absolute Notion’ of Hegel or the truly rational society under global communism of Marx” (2008, p. 350).

Yet Marx alluded to and applied dialectics rather than explaining the method thoroughly (Wilde, 1991). It was Engels who most influentially codified the method—changing it drastically: “In writings published after Marx’s death in 1883, Engels extended the dialectical method to encompass nature and in doing so transformed dialectic into a set of three ‘laws.’ This work had nothing to do with Marx’s own dialectic, which . . . was quintessentially a social scientific method” (Wilde, 1991, p. 291).

Engels’ three laws included: “The law of the transformation of quantity into quality and vice versa,” “The law of the interpenetration of opposites,” and “The law of the negation of the negation” (Engels, 1954). Engels insisted that these were not “mere laws of thought” but rather “really laws of development of nature, and therefore are valid also for theoretical natural science” (1954, pp. 26-27). That is, dialectics was a materialist science of development and interconnections, one that established unity in difference, and its laws were universal. According to Engels,

“objective” dialectics, which “prevails throughout nature . . . [is] the motion of opposites which asserts itself everywhere in nature, and which by the continual conflict of opposites and their final passage into one another, or into higher forms, determines the life of nature” (1954, p. 280). This science of interconnections provided a unified theory that would explain the dynamic workings of people, economies, societies, biology, physics, and chemistry with equal insight, predicated on the continuous interactions among parties rather than on rigid cause-effect relations or essentialist understandings of things-in-themselves.

Engelsian dialectics fit the bill for Vygotsky, who was attempting to develop a psychological theory that would transcend other theories and become universally applicable (1927). According to Cole, “When Engels’ *Dialectics of Nature* appeared in 1925, Vygotsky immediately incorporated it into his thinking” (in his epilogue to Luria’s biography: Luria, 1979, p. 204). But Dafermos argues that Vygotsky did not realize the difference between Marx’s understanding of “dialectic as the peculiar logic of the peculiar object” and Engels’ “dialectic as a general world outlook” (2018, p. 252).

*Dialectics of Nature* also influenced Stalin, whose 1938 *Dialectical and Historical Materialism* (as a chapter in the *Short Course*) was made mandatory reading in all schools and universities in the USSR (Toassa charges that Stalin “quotes Engels, but sacrifices these interactions for the sake of a purely ‘progressive’ dialectic;” 2019, p. 5.). In this work, Stalin lays out the four major tenets of what he characterizes as Marxist dialectics, characteristics that all sanctioned theory in the USSR had to follow:

- **“Nature Connected and Determined:”** Marxist dialectics understands each phenomenon as part of a dynamic system that must be understood as a whole (2013, p. 9).
- **“Nature is a State of Continuous Motion and Change:”** (p. 9) “The dialectical method therefore requires that phenomena should be considered not only from the standpoint of their interconnection and interdependence, but also from the standpoint of their movement, their change, their development, their coming into being and going out of being” (p. 10).
- **“Natural Quantitative Change Leads to Qualitative Change:”** (p. 9) Citing Engels, Stalin argued that Marxist dialectics understands change in terms of incremental (quantitative) changes that reach a tipping point, resulting in qualitative changes. “The dialectical method therefore holds that the process of development should be understood not as movement in a circle, not as a simple repetition of what has already occurred, but as an onward and upward movement, as a



transition from an old qualitative state to a new qualitative state, as a development from the simple to the complex, from the lower to the higher” (pp. 10-11).

- “**Contradictions Inherent in Nature:**” (p. 13) “Dialectics holds that internal contradictions are inherent in all things and phenomena of nature” (p. 13), specifically contradictions between past and future versions of a phenomenon undergoing continual development. “The dialectical method therefore holds that the process of development from the lower to the higher takes place not as a harmonious unfolding of phenomena, but as a disclosure of the contradictions inherent in things and phenomena, as a ‘struggle’ of opposite tendencies which operate on the basis of these contradictions” (p. 13).

Stalin used this account of natural interconnected change, proceeding inexorably from lower and simpler to higher and more complex, to justify the inexorable progression from capitalist to socialist and communist economic organization (cf. Lenin, 1987). To the members of the young Soviet Union, this claim of certainty was heartening: they were on the right side of history, and nature herself was their ally.

This claim of certainty was bolstered by Stalin’s insistence that Marxist philosophical materialism implies an objective reality whose laws are fully knowable, yielding objective truth (2013). Individuals may have different *perspectives*, but through continued dialectical engagement, they should develop a *unity* converging on objective reality. White (2014) characterizes this tendency as “a quest for one-ness” (p. 222), while Wegerif (2008) argues that dialectics strives toward a more complexly mediated unity (p. 350).

To return to RGS for a moment, we can consider how dialectics has influenced Bazerman’s understanding of how writing competence and expertise accumulates (2018, p. 327), as do repertoires and strategies (2013b, p. 421), across an individual’s lifetime. More broadly, we can see how a genre (the term being used as a noun, a thing) develops over time by similarly accumulating repertoires and strategies, rhetorical solutions that generally work: a path that develops by being traversed over and over by generations of writers, shaping the written knowledge of participants (Bazerman, 1988).

This developmental orientation is evident in Vygotsky and Leontiev, whose work underpins activity theory’s account of development.

## Vygotsky

Vygotsky argued that thought is not just internalized speech, speech is not just expressed thought, and they meet their potential when they enter a predictable,

developmental, dialectic relationship. At that point they irrevocably change each other's character, though they never entirely merge. Lower mental processes become higher mental processes by becoming verbal, by being mediated with signs.

Vygotsky explained that concept formation happens in three stages. The first is when the child solves problems by placing items in unorganized heaps: "At this stage, word meaning denotes nothing more to the child than a vague syncretic conglomeration of individual objects that have somehow or other coalesced into an image in his mind. Because of its syncretic origin, that image is highly unstable" (2012, p. 118). The second stage is what he calls "thinking in complexes:" "In a complex, individual objects are united in the child's mind not only by his subjective impressions but also by bonds actually existing between these objects. This is a new achievement, an ascent to a much higher level" (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 120). He adds: "In a complex, the bonds between its opponents are concrete and factual rather than abstract and logical" (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 120). Vygotsky and his colleagues identify five types of complexes: associative, collections, chains, diffuse, and pseudo-concepts (2012, pp. 121-128).

The pseudo-concept is termed a "germinating seed" that leads to the third stage, the concept: a unifying theme (Vygotsky, 2012, p. 132) that allows the language user to transcend complexes and transcend the given language to form her own understandings and groups. Complexes, Vygotsky says, characterize not only children's thought but also the thought of "primitive people" as well as in etymologies of common words; he posits a "ceaseless struggle within the developing language between conceptual thought and the heritage of primitive thinking in complexes"—a struggle that is not so ceaseless after all in terms of individual words, since the concept usually wins (2012, pp. 138, 140, 141). In Vygotsky's understanding, development systematically leads from specific uses to general principles (though some peoples may not get all the way to the abstract stage of concepts).

Compare Vygotsky's discussion of concept formation with his discussion of dialogue: "Dialogue implies immediate unpremeditated utterance. It consists of replies, repartee; it is a chain of reactions. Monologue, by comparison, is a complex formation; the linguistic elaboration can be attended to leisurely and consciously" (2012, p. 257). In other words, dialogue is unfinished, not well thought out, rough-hewn, reactionary; monologue is in comparison finished, detailed, and *higher*. For Vygotsky, as we've seen, complex formations are preferable to simple ones and abstract, general concepts are preferable to associative chains; monologue is more developed than dialogue. Dialogue is the raw source that becomes refined in monologue. No wonder Vygotsky saw monologue as the true form of inner speech: "Written and inner speech represent the monologue; oral speech, in most cases, the dialogue" (2012, p. 254).

Not that dialogue is to be shunned. Vygotsky found it to be interesting as well. He used Dostoevsky's story of "a conversation of drunks that entirely consisted of one unprintable word" to illustrate his statement that "dialogue always presupposes in the partners sufficient knowledge of the subject to permit abbreviated speech and, under certain conditions, purely predicative sentences" (2012, p. 255).

### Leontiev

Similarly, Leontiev used the concept of *crystallization* to describe how the development of psychological functions could be passed along, not just biologically, but culturally: once society developed, progress in the sphere of man's psychological abilities was established and transmitted from one generation to another in a unique form, one that was esoteric, that expressed itself through the phenomena of objective reality. The new form of accumulating and transmitting phylogenetic or, more precisely, historical experience emerged because of certain features which are typical of human activity—namely, its productive, creative aspect, which is most apparent in the basic human activity that work represents. (Leont'ev, 1960/1969, p. 425)

Here, Leontiev's discussion of crystallization sounds a bit like the cultural knowledge that is shaped and accumulated in genres: "By effecting the process of production, both material and cultural, *work is crystallized or assumes final form in its product*" and thus "the conversion of human activity into its product appears to be a process whereby *man's* [sic] *activity*, the activity of human qualities, is *embodied in the product produced*. The history of material and cultural development thus appears to be a process which, in its external objective form, gives expression to the growth of human abilities" (1960/1969, p. 425, my emphasis; cf. Leontyev, 2009b, p. 116). Thus the use of tools and instruments "can be thought of as expressing and consolidating the gains man has made with respect to the motor functions of the hand" (1960/1969, p. 425). Like a well-worn path through the woods, this cultural heritage transcends individuals (1960/1969, p. 425). In this way, Leontiev collapsed Vygotsky's distinction between physical and psychological tools (i.e., labor tools mediating the object of labor vs. signs mediating the self). As Leontiev argues elsewhere, a tool is a "*social object*," "*a socially developed means of action, namely the labour operations that have been given material shape, are crystallised, as it were, in it*" (2009b, p. 192, my emphasis; cf. Leontyev, 2009a, p. 102). Here, crystallization is a dialectical process: Over time, labor operations are "given material shape," a shape that is "developed socially in the course of collective labour" (Leontyev, 2009b, p. 192), allowing for the "accumulating and transmitting" of "historical experience" (Leont'ev, 1960/1969, p. 425) within that collective labor. That is, we could develop a

cultural heritage, one that transcended individual development because it was invested in tools. And these tools developed dialectically, with new iterations incorporating new and modified operations (i.e., proceeding from simpler to more complex tools), while standardizing (i.e., developing toward unity). In taking up tools, humans could also take up their cultural heritage, benefiting from the dialectical development of their predecessors.

## DRAWBACKS OF THE DIALECTICAL ACCOUNT

As I alluded earlier, we can see how the Vygotskian dialectical account links to early RGS, and especially Bazerman's work. Here, scholars were concerned with how individuals—often students—*learned* their disciplines by learning the genres at play in them (e.g., Artemeva & Freedman, 2001; Bazerman, 1997; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Freedman et al., 1994; Haas, 1996; Russell, 1995; 1997a, 1997b; Winsor, 1999). Traversing this path gets us to a certain destination: we can examine development and learning over time. This path helps teachers (and managers) to understand how those individuals develop, taking on prescribed cultural knowledge as well as the objectives implied in that knowledge, *accumulating* it as they more effectively inhabit their roles within a cultural system. The path slopes upwards, moving learners to a higher level of cultural functioning, and studies on this path often focus on key transitional moments such as classroom simulations (e.g., Freedman et al., 1994; Paretto et al., 2007), internships (e.g., Artemeva, 2008; 2009; Winsor, 1996; 1999), and undertaking new jobs and careers (e.g., Schryer & Spoel, 2005; Spinuzzi, 2008). Perhaps these are weighted to the concerns of pedagogy and the population (students) to which their authors had most ready access.

Yet we do not just *master* cultural systems; we also *resist* them, and (perhaps this is another way of saying it) we inhabit and help to enact different cultural systems simultaneously. Thus, although the dialectical account seems plausible in closely bounded activities, outside those stage-managed bounds, it encounters problems. For instance, we find that the same artifact can be mobilized in very different ways across activities and cultures (cf. Rogoff, 2003, p. 6). Similarly, artifacts must often be localized in order to make sense in a given milieu and to avoid the missteps of colonialism (Sun, 2020; cf. Escobar, 2017). That is, accounts of crystallization typically do not discuss *whose* cultural heritage is crystallized and reproduced—a symptom of the cross-cultural blind spot to which Engeström (1996) alluded in his discussion of Leontievan activity theory. This question was not especially pressing to Leninists and Stalinists, who expected to move toward a unified world in which Communism would eventually sweep across all nations, yielding a unified (monological) future (Reed, 1919;

McAuley, 1992). But in the post-Soviet, post-Cold War era, we are instead coming to grips with a culturally, politically, economically, and professionally diverse world—one in which a single master ideology is no longer on the horizon and in which the withering away of the state seems utterly implausible. In this world, we must recognize the *double consciousness* that W.E.B Du Bois evocatively described (1897) and that Wertsch (2002) explored in the wake of Soviet-era internal exile. In this world, we are generally suspicious of the prospect of development toward a more complexly mediated unity—even in education (see Young, 2002).

Consequently, we turn to a different path: Bakhtin's competing understanding of dialogism, which offers an account of cultural heritage based on difference.

## **PATH 2: DIALOGICS**

As mentioned earlier, dialogics is often either subsumed under dialectics (e.g., Engeström, 1987/2014; Roth, 2009) or characterized as coexisting with dialectic (e.g., Daniels, 2008, pp. 123-124). Bazerman draws on Voloshinov (1973) to validate this move. But others argue that they are fundamentally different, resting on different premises of how meaning emerges. For Bakhtin, utterances gain meaning in relation to each other, in difference rather than in unity (as dialectics would have it). In this section, we will review dialogics; trace the discussion of dialogics and genre in activity theory and related areas; and examine the limits of genre as an account for cultural heritage.

### **DIALOGICS ACCORDING TO BAKHTIN**

Bakhtin was Vygotsky's contemporary, born one year before him. As Vygotsky rode the wave of the Revolution, rising from marginalized Jewish atheist to respected psychologist, Bakhtin was dragged under. Born into a minor aristocratic family, and a Christian, he initially was excited about the possibilities of the Revolution. But in 1929, just as his book *Problems of Dostoevsky's Art* was published, Bakhtin was arrested and sentenced to ten years in a labor camp. On appeal, he was instead sentenced to exile in Kazakhstan, where he served as a bookkeeper for six years (meanwhile writing essays, including his now-famous "Discourse in the Novel;" Bakhtin, 1981).

Like Vygotsky, Bakhtin was trained as a literary scholar, and like Vygotsky, he focused on language and its role in consciousness (not as a psychologist or educator but as a language philosopher and literary theorist). He spent much of his life thinking through this issue, developing many pieces of writing, the majority of which were left unpublished until long after Stalin's death. Yet

Bakhtin was skeptical of dialectics as a mechanism for understanding how people develop meaning. Indeed, Morson and Emerson argue that “Bakhtin’s contempt for dialectics was a constant, and appears in writings of the 1920s as well as of the 1970s” (1990, p. 57). Across Bakhtin’s life works, he expressed the concern that Hegelian dialectics ultimately implied a single authoritative consciousness, one in which disagreement and difference could not survive. As Matusov argues, for Bakhtin, *dialectics* implies monologism, in which a final word could silence disagreement (2011)—a final word such as the scientific concept that Vygotsky describes as the highest stage of development (Vygotsky, 2012). In contrast, *dialogics* implies that no final word is possible. This difference can be graphically illustrated in the two scholars’ visions of human development. Vygotsky sought, through educational revolution, to develop the New Man, who would exceed the capabilities of contemporary humans just as humans exceed the capabilities of apes (Vygotsky, 1994). Bakhtin, on the other hand, examined prosaic change rather than revolution, finding meaning in daily life and everyday disagreements among ordinary people (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 280). As Matusov (2011) argues, a dialogic approach is characterized by *interproblematicity*:

It involves the participants’ genuine interest in the problem here and now . . . genuine interest in what the other participants have to say about it (i.e., their dialogic interaddressivity); seriousness about their own contributions; readiness, if not desire, to hear other participants’ judgments of them (i.e., their responsibility); persuasiveness based on the discourse rather than an authority, tradition or prejudice (i.e., internally persuasive discourse); and acknowledgement of equal rights for the participants to define the problem and engage in and disengage from the communication about it (i.e., mutual respect). (Matusov, 2011, p. 104)

Dialogics can be understood as Hegelian dialectics inside out. Whereas Hegel sought unity in difference, Bakhtin sought differences even in superficially identical utterances: meaning proceeds from relationships (1986, p. 125). As Wegerif (2008) argues, in dialectic, meaning is grounded in identity, so contradictions are to be overcome; in dialogue, meaning is grounded in difference, so it makes no sense to overcome the difference. This is a different path indeed, with implications for how we understand genre.

Bakhtin contends that “dialogue is possible only among people, not among abstract elements of language” (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 131). These people jointly own the dialogue. Like dialectics, dialogue is an interactionist

understanding of concrete interrelations; but in contrast with dialectics, dialogue is value-laden and allows infinite shades of meaning (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 132). Bakhtin tells us that “In Dostoevsky’s world even *agreement* retains its *dialogic* character, that is, it never leads to a *merging* of voices and truths in a single *impersonal* truth, as occurs in the monologic world” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 95, his emphasis). Even when two people accept the same logical proposition, they accept it within their own orientations and social worlds. This is why no two utterances can be considered the same (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 183)—a position that denies dialectic unity because it takes away the abstract unity of a statement.

Thus, two speaking subjects may say the “same” thing while conveying very different meanings. This, Bakhtin says, is a dialogic relationship. And he contrasts it with the clash between two different statements—thesis and antithesis—that can “be united in a single utterance of a single subject, expressing his unified dialectical position on a given question” (1984a, p. 183; cf. Bakhtin, 1986, p. 125). A dialectical statement does not contain an argument; it fits neatly into one consciousness, one utterance, and one position. As Eun summarizes, Bakhtin and Vygotsky:

differed in that Vygotsky sought to organize the incoherent nature into a system by means of the dialectical method, which results in one prevailing truth (although this truth is born of rational discussion rather than by force), whereas Bakhtin preferred to leave things as they are, namely, messy and disorganized. The chaotic multiplicity of consciousness that forever refuse [sic] to merge is what Bakhtin saw as the essence of human consciousness.” (2019, p. 10)

Morson and Emerson argue that “Bakhtin considered it conceptually disastrous to think of dialogue after the model of the script . . . where one speech simply follows another” (1990, p. 138). When Vygotsky discussed the spoken dialogue of the drunks in Dostoevsky (2012), he interpreted the dialogue as a chain of reactions, inferior to the more finished and unified monologue that can be found in “complex formations” such as written and inner speech—complex formations that reflect the abstract monologism of dialectic. But this understanding of dialogue as a chain of reactions misses the point, in Bakhtin’s understanding: “The complexities created by the already-spoken-about quality of the word, and by the listener’s active understanding, create an *internal dialogism* of the word. Every utterance is dialogized *from within* by these (and some other) factors” (Morson & Emerson, 1990, p. 138). Dialogue does not become more abstract or evolve into a complex formation that can be summed up in a single utterance by a single consciousness.

That is, unlike dialectic, dialogue is unfinalizable. To revisit a quote above, dialogue “never leads to a merging of voices and truths in a single impersonal truth, as occurs in the monologic world” (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 95).

This contrast extends beyond the phenomena of speech and writing. Bakhtin sees dialogue as internal as well, that is, thought itself: “But again we repeat: *the thinking human consciousness and the dialogic sphere in which this consciousness exists*, in all its depth and specificity, cannot be reached through a monologic artistic approach” (1984, p. 271, his emphasis). That is, our very consciousness is dialogic—a striking contrast to Vygotsky’s understanding of scientific concepts as a dialectically formed, finished monologue. So, although Wertsch is correct in noting that Bakhtin and Vygotsky both understand thought as a form of inner speech (1991), they conceived of this inner speech as having different ends.

To sum up: In Bakhtin’s analysis of Dostoevsky—and, it appears, in his analysis of language as a whole—a permanent, necessary gap exists between speakers, resulting in a permanent dialogue, a permanent array of differences that are discussed and negotiated but never finalized, synthesized, or eliminated. Oppositions are never canceled out; they are not seen as contradictions to be overcome; every utterance expects an answer; differences are taken seriously. The truth, he says, is born between people searching for truth—it is not ready-made and waiting to be discovered: “Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence” (1984a, p. 252). The “voices of the mind” (Wertsch, 1991) are voices of different participants interacting, perhaps never coming to a permanent agreement that would produce a unity of consciousness (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 30). These voices are best understood as enactments, performances, that gain meaning in tension with other performances.

Where does that leave the genre+activity theory synthesis that our field adopted in the 1990s and 2000s, and that Bazerman seeks to strengthen in *A Theory of Literate Action, Vol. II* (2013b)? Eugene Matusov argues that a tension exists between dialogue and activity: “activity is responsible for the monologicity aspect of discourse” because “joint collective activity is about accomplishing something.” In activity,

the subject of such an activity is a unified, shared, common understanding—one consciousness, as Bakhtin would say. A joint activity becomes problematic when shared understanding is not achieved, partially achieved, or achieved about wrong things. Although heteroglossia can be viewed as a productive force in the activity at its initial and intermediary stages, at the final phase, it has to be eliminated. From this point of view, activity is essentially anti-dialogue (anti-hetero-



glossic). However, as Bakhtin showed, this unifying, centripetal force is an important aspect of any discourse defining one's voice, the recognized unity of consciousness. The problem starts when the other complementary and necessary aspect of discourse—namely dialogicity—is either ignored or attempted to actively exclude from the analysis (and design) or eliminate from the discourse, when a voice becomes the voice. In the latter case, there becomes a tendency to establish a regime of excessive monologism. (Matusov, 2013, p. 383)

Yet

Monologicity has to be appreciated and recognized as an important and necessary aspect of discourse. For example, although Bakhtin criticized dialectics in many of his writings, he also acknowledged that dialectics can produce “a higher-level dialogue,” “dialectics was born of dialogue so as to return again to dialogue at a much higher level (a dialogue of *personalities*)” (Bakhtin et al., 1986, p. 162) [The] activity approach has to be complemented by focus on dialogicity (Engeström et al., 1999). (Matusov, 2013, p. 385)

But this leaves us with the question of how to preserve dialogism if activity is ultimately monologic. How can cultural heritage be conveyed in a dialogical world? One answer that Bakhtin provides is that of *genre*.

## GENRE ACCORDING TO BAKHTIN

Bakhtin discusses the notion of genre in several publications across his scholarship, but most specifically in his late essay “The problem of speech genres” (1986). There, he argues that although “each separate utterance is individual . . . each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types* of these utterances,” which he calls “*speech genres*” (1986, p. 60, his emphasis). Such genres include not only literary genres (Bakhtin's interest), but also military commands, business documents, social commentary, and scientific statements (1986, pp. 60-61). These genres can be characterized as primary (which are “simple” and “have taken form in unmediated speech communication”) and secondary (which are “complex” and “ideological,” having taken in primary genres and interrelated them (1986, p. 62).

At the base of speech genres, Bakhtin argues, are “spheres of human activity” (1986, p. 65). Speech only exists in the form of concrete utterances

performed by real, individual speakers (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 71). These utterances typically follow a “speech plan” (Bakhtin, 1986, p.77), a cultural heritage that underpins the enactment. And by using relatively stable, recognizable, normative patterns of speech—speech genres—we can reveal and implement our individual speech plans (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 80). He adds: “Genres correspond to typical situations of speech communication, typical themes, and consequently, also to particular contacts between the *meanings* of words and actual concrete reality under certain typical circumstances” (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 87, his emphasis). In providing relative stability, genres allow their users to draw on cultural heritage while still producing unique utterances. As Bakhtin argues elsewhere, “a genre lives in the present, but always *remembers* its past, its beginning” (1984a, p. 106; cf. 1984a, p. 121). A genre possesses its own organic logic (Bakhtin, 1984a, p.157). Language, he argues, is never unitary, but represents a multitude of concrete worlds; these worlds are stratified through genres, in which “Certain features . . . will knit together with the intentional aim, and with the overall accentual system inherent in one or another genre” (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 288). This stratification includes professional stratification (“the language of the lawyer, the businessman, the politician, the public education teacher and so forth”), and these often correspond to the stratification of genres (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 289).

For Bakhtin, then, genre is understood as fundamentally dialogic. In providing relatively stable, and thus recognizable, patterns for utterances, genres represent a stratified worldview within which individuals can arrange their speech plans and relate their unique utterances. That is, genres represent cultural heritage; in taking up and *enacting* a genre (understood as a verb, not as a noun as in Leontievan crystallization), individuals ground themselves in that heritage. In this view, we do not *acquire and produce* a genre; we *do* genre.

Unfortunately, a Bakhtinian approach does not give us a satisfactory understanding of development. Yes, genres may be understood as cultural resources that have developed over time, but Bakhtin is uninterested in this development: he is more concerned with the fact that the word is half someone else’s, that people use these cultural resources in tension with their own unmerged voices to produce meaning through difference. This approach is suitable for understanding instances of language use, and especially differences and resistance in language use, but not for understanding how genres provide a developing cultural heritage. Whereas the path of dialectics slopes upwards to greater heights of development, the path of dialogics does not really slope at all, instead meandering through a level field; it did not lead to the concerns that were critical to Bazerman and others in RGS. Thus Bazerman (2013b) turns to another member of the Bakhtin Circle: V. I. Voloshinov.

## BAZERMAN'S PATH: DIALECTICS AND DIALOGICS IN VOLOSHINOV

Up to this point, we have discussed the diverging paths of dialectics and dialogics, and we have alluded to how Bazerman followed the former path, framing dialogics within dialectics. He followed this path, in part, by way of V. I. Voloshinov, who was a member of the same circle as Bakhtin and whose two books (1927/1976; 1929/1973) are sometimes attributed in part or whole to Bakhtin (cf. Clark & Holquist, 1984). Unlike Bakhtin's books, Voloshinov's two books are well-structured and lucid, and they are explicitly positioned as language philosophy rather than literary criticism (see Prior, 2009 on this point). For these and other reasons, Bazerman actually characterizes the Bakhtin Circle as "*Voloshinov and his circle*" (2013b, p. 151, my emphasis) and praises Voloshinov for his more *sociologically* oriented understanding of genre compared to that of Bakhtin, who focused specifically on *literary* questions. Ironically, in 1929, the same year Voloshinov (1973) was originally published, sociology was banned in the USSR (Osipov, 2009, p. 83).

For those who prefer the destination of a developmental, dialectical understanding of genre, like Bazerman, Voloshinov has a lot to offer. Critically, he neatly characterizes dialogics as a kind of dialectics—a stance that provides a rapprochement between these two lines of thought. This rapprochement comes as a relief to researchers who want to draw on both lines to support a genre+activity theory synthesis. Specifically, Bazerman prefers Voloshinov's account of dialogics as "grounded in human interchange" and responding to prior utterances (2013b, p. 152). Utterances are thus co-produced: actively produced and actively received. Voloshinov's account has direct implications for genre, since "genre, by shaping the roles . . . also frames the addressivity of those texts that realize the genre" (Bazerman, 2013b, p. 155).

Yet Voloshinov and Bakhtin were not quite on the same page. As Morson and Emerson argue:

Voloshinov changes Bakhtin's theories by accepting his specific descriptions of language but then accounting for language so described in historical-materialist terms. Bakhtin describes language as not systematic; Voloshinov agrees, but argues that this asystematicity only leads us to look for an external system to explain it. That system is Marxism as Voloshinov understood it. Indeed, the reformulation of Marxism was central to Voloshinov's whole enterprise, as it was not for the non-Marxist Bakhtin. (1990, p. 125)

In terms of system, Voloshinov focuses on structure and process, and looks for an ideological system with ideological laws that govern language (1973, pp.

33, 38, 96-97). And, like Vygotsky, he frames language development as a dialectic generational process in which modern language emerges from primitive ones—although he manages not to be as teleological as Vygotsky sometimes sounds (1973, p. 106). As Morson and Emerson argue, “Voloshinov’s ultimate purpose is to link a dialogic approach to language to a dialectical view of history, a purpose completely at odds with Bakhtin,” and this was done through the sign (1990, pp. 162, 207). For Voloshinov, the sign is given, but “changeable and adaptable” (Voloshinov, 1973, p. 68); as Bazerman comments, the “individual when confronted with an actual communicative situation adapts and improvises to convey a meaning directed toward the addressee” (2013b, p. 153). Prior states that while Voloshinov is concerned with signs and semiotics, Bakhtin—whose concerns are narrowly literary—is simply not (Prior, 2009, p. 19, 20).

Thus, unlike Bakhtin, Voloshinov and Vygotsky both explore the sociocultural question of how such signs are developed internally (mediating the individual’s own behavior) and externally (mediating their interactions with others). Both postulate a “sea of inner speech” (Prior, 2009, p. 20, referring to Voloshinov), a well of signs that are dialectically transformed through being internalized and externalized (Vygotsky, 2012). That is, both understand these signs as originating culturally, then being taken up and transformed by individuals operating within that culture, then being enacted again in a social setting. Vygotsky (1978) provides a classic example of how internalization and externalization work: an infant reaches vainly for an object that is then handed to her by a parent. Eventually the infant’s attempt to control the environment directly becomes *pointing*, a sign that directs the parent’s actions. The sign thus qualitatively transforms the character of the child’s activity, and in learning and taking up a culture’s mediators, the child becomes acculturated (Luria, 1976). This dialectical understanding of signs, explored so well in Bazerman’s 2013 book (chapter 2), connects directly to his account of Voloshinov’s understanding of signs (chapter 9), on which Voloshinov builds his interactionist, reciprocal understanding of genres.

Yet despite their similarities, Voloshinov and Vygotsky do part ways in terms of dialogue. To illustrate: Voloshinov uses the same example Vygotsky does in *Thought and Language*—Dostoevsky’s drunks—but Voloshinov rereads the dialogue in terms of active reception involving value judgments (1973, p. 103). As he argues, “*Multiplicity of meanings is the constitutive feature of word*” (p. 101, his emphasis). Whereas Vygotsky thinks of dialogue as a chain of reactions, Voloshinov understands it as always occurring, even when the person is not speaking. Thus, they part ways when it comes to written language, which Vygotsky sees as monologic and Voloshinov sees as “vitiating dialogue” (p. 111). Monologic utterances, in Voloshinov’s understanding, are vitiating (spoiled) because they do not allow an active response (p. 78; cf. p. 117). He regarded “the finished monologic

utterance” as an abstraction (p. 72). For Voloshinov, true understanding is dialogical, involving a word and a counterword (p. 102).

Voloshinov also diverges from Bakhtin’s understanding of dialogue in several ways. First, he understands utterances as agreeing with or negating each other (Voloshinov 1973, p. 80)—a stance that Bakhtin rejects in *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, where he subtly critiques dialectics for conceptualizing utterances as simply agreeing or disagreeing, theses and antitheses. In Bakhtin’s understanding, utterances can be identical yet diverge in meaning and import; that divergence is usually partial or in shades, not opposed. As Morson & Emerson argue, “whereas Bakhtin celebrates intense dialogization and double-voicing, Voloshinov, writing as a Marxist, describes such phenomena disapprovingly” (Morson & Emerson 1990, p. 124). Second, as we’ve seen, Voloshinov speaks almost entirely of the sign, something that Bakhtin rarely mentions. Like Vygotsky, Voloshinov sees the word as an inner sign (1973, p. 14), and he sees every outer sign as engulfed by inner signs (1973, p. 33); as Morson and Emerson (1990) argue, sign is a way for Voloshinov to bridge dialogue and dialectics by framing the responsive interactions of dialogue within dialectic’s developmental understanding of signs.

In short, we can see why Voloshinov offers a dialectical path for Bazerman, who attempts to “recover Voloshinov from Bakhtin” (1994, p. 54) to develop an understanding of genre. Since Voloshinov’s understanding of genre (and dialogics more generally) is grounded in dialectics, it provides a ready account of genre development, one that integrates well with broader theories of human and cultural development such as the work of Vygotsky, Leontiev, and Luria. This upward-sloping path gets us to the destinations that many of us in RGS, including Bazerman, have set out to reach: developmental understandings of how people join and enact durable activities, how they learn and develop the cultural resources that sustain such activities, and how they accumulate repertoires and strategies throughout their lives so they can navigate those activities with competence and expertise. As Prior says, North American versions of genre theory have oriented to both discourse and development (2009, p. 28), and Voloshinov’s (and Bazerman’s) path allows us to have both by framing discourse (dialogue) within development (dialectics).

And yet this elevated destination implies a trust in the activities—really, the *institutions*—we envision people joining. But as the *annus horribilis* of 2020 made manifest, institutions should not always earn our trust. For all its virtues, the upward-sloping path we have taken, in focusing on *developing and accumulating* repertoires, has not prepared us well to examine the *contrastive* meaning-making that emerges from tensions within, across, and outside of such institutions.

## RETRACING OUR STEPS: UNDERLYING TENSIONS IN RHETORICAL GENRE STUDIES

Earlier I noted that Matusov identified a tension between Bakhtinian dialogism, which finds meaning in difference, and the monologic tendency of the Vygotsky-Leontiev approach, which presupposes that the activity's participants strive for unity. This underlying tension remains in RGS. In using genres, we learn the orientation and cultural logic (see Sun, 2020) of the sphere of activity in which we participate. Yet, as discussed above, we can also bring in different orientations and cultural logics, partially because a genre evolves through its performances (i.e., we take up and enact genres). This distrust of unidirectional development has begun to reassert itself in genre theory, especially as we have grappled with another concept that Bazerman discussed early on: *genre systems* (Bazerman, 1994; cf. Andersen et al., 2014; Prior, 2009; Spinuzzi, 2004), in which multiple genres that have developed in different cultural milieux become associated with each other. In such situations, *cross-genre development cannot be understood unidirectionally*, since genres and their relationships tend to develop multidimensionally, in relation to each other (and each others' cultural heritages) as well as to a rhetorical situation (or collection of interdependent rhetorical situations). Activity theorists have argued that learning is not a linear arrow but more like a spiral; but in learning and applying multiple genres from multiple source activities to a target activity, we may find that learning takes multiple directions at once, oriented toward many activities and many lines of development. Russell (1997a) illustrates this point well in an early discussion of how students participate in multiple activities, often not in alignment, and mobilize genres grounded in each of them. That is, these situations are more multiply oriented than the teacher-student dyads that Vygotsky, Luria, and Leontiev often investigated, in which the learning institution validated and underwrote a specific line of development.

That multiple orientation is not unique to RGS. More broadly, as activity theory has been applied to inter-individual, inter-organizational, and public cases, fewer mechanisms exist for enforcing or incentivizing agreement (Spinuzzi, 2020). For instance, Engeström's Change Laboratories methodology is designed to host dialogues across different people with a special focus on higher-level epistemic questions such as "why" and "where to?" (Engeström, 2007; Engeström et al., 2006; cf. Bødker & Iverson, 2002; cf. Bødker, 1997, the "why," "what," and "how" layers). Yet the tension between dialogue and dialectics remains, since Change Labs are meant to eventually develop a consensus solution, i.e., a unity on which an institution can agree (see Engeström & Sannino, 2021; Spinuzzi, 2021b). In subordinating dialogue to dialectics, activity theory research has

tended to presuppose that the goal of dialogue is to develop a synthesis. Thus, we see what is sometimes characterized as a managerial approach, one that acknowledges multiple perspectives but uses interventionist methodology to foster mutual agreement across actors.

When Vygotsky characterized development dialectically, in terms of height (as we saw earlier), the metaphor was unidirectional, reflecting the teleological Marxist-Leninist understanding of history. In contrast, Bakhtin understood forces of language as centripetal and centrifugal (1981, p. 272), i.e., as being tugged between a centrist monologism vs. flying away from it in all directions. Others who have criticized dialectics in the intervening years have used other metaphors to escape its monologism, such as rhizomes and lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) or translation (Latour, 2006).

In RGS, we have similarly started to think of genre assemblages in terms of enactments or networks in which differing cultural heritages compete or engage in dialogue without merging (Edenfield, 2016; Jones, 2016; Hashimov & McNely, 2012; Read, 2016; 2020; Spinuzzi, 2008; Swarts, 2010). And that question of multidimensional development becomes even more pressing when considering intercultural communication. For instance, Sun (2020) draws on rhetoric, practice theory, social justice theory, and decolonialist methodology to analyze how social media design has been taken up differently in North America and Asia, attending to the ideological and discursive affordances required by different users in different positionalities, situations, and cultures. Beyond helping us to understand cross-cultural social media use, Sun argues for better designing and localizing social media by sensitively attending to the ideological and discursive affordances required by different users in different positionalities, situations, and cultures. To address these issues, Sun moves away from activity theory's dialectical developmental approach in favor of dialogism, heteroglossia, and epistemic diversity (2020, pp. 52, 71-72). Similarly, Fraiberg examines translinguistic and transmodal practices across regimes of practice in Israeli soldiers and entrepreneurs (Fraiberg 2013; 2017a; 2017b).

In short, the question of cultural heritage becomes more fraught when we have to ask: *whose* culture? *Whose* heritage? How do different cultures intermingle and when do voices need to remain unmerged? What have we accepted as cultural "gains" that are not really gains to our interlocutors (e.g., Hawkins, 2016, which makes uncomfortable reading next to Luria, 1976)? The dialectics of Vygotsky, Leontiev, Luria, and Voloshinov is poorly equipped to answer these questions, questions that were central to the dialogics of Bakhtin. Although the path we have followed has taken us a long way, and has provided tremendous insights, it has also led us away from such questions. Perhaps it's time to retrace our steps and take the other path as well.

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