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The Fundamental Concepts of Vladimir Bibikhin's Metaphysics (sophia—strangeness—interest)

Abstract

This article attempts to articulate and develop key concepts of Vladimir Bibikhin's metaphysics, as presented in a series of important lecture courses. These concepts form the triad "*sophia*—strangeness—interest," in some ways serving as a "translation" of M. Heidegger's "world—finitude—solitude" (from the subtitle of his *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*) into the hermeneutic language of the Russian 1990s. As is well known, Bibikhin translated the first chapters of this book, as well as a range of other important works by Heidegger. Despite their significant influence upon him, Bibikhin's own metaphysical thought is truly original, since his goal is not the construction of a distinctive system but the reproduction here and now, in concrete historical circumstances, of an original philosophical gesture of seeing – indicating, in particular, his interest in the themes of energy, property, the woods, as well as his constant attention to the idiosyncrasy of Russian reality (beyond "westernizing" criticism and "slavophile" praise). In the concluding section of the article, I show how important the works

of N. V. Gogol are for understanding Bibikhin's thought, as he periodically refers to this author's texts, either explicitly or implicitly.

Key words
Bibikhin, Gogol, Heidegger, interest, law, metaphysics, property, sophia, strangeness

Bibikhin's Thought and the Situation of the 1990s

The history of the 1990s—both political and intellectual—has yet to be written. There's little point trying to guess what place Vladimir Bibikhin will occupy in it. What matters is that all his courses, whatever the declared topic, form a unity, not only because of his immediately recognizable manner, but also as a kind of fundamental gesture. This gesture continuously, from any given place, points toward the necessary operation that all philosophy must fulfill: to harness the unique and the universal—to find in one's own time its inner "untimeliness," the "excess" of time in relation to itself. A "street" concept of philosophy is far more appropriate here than any scholastic or academic one. In the lecture on the concept of energy that Bibikhin read at the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences on January 26, 1993, he said:

> The street perception of philosophy: it's far removed from life, and there's no point asking what philosophy is up to—it's clearly something unnecessary, completely different from what people live by. But this street perception is right about the main thing: it is right about *where* philosophy is, unlike humanities images of philosophy as the thought of life, as dialogue, or as something that the personality elaborates in itself in order to be free. People in the humanities are wrong to think philosophy is made for them. Philosophy is not for human beings. In the street perception there is still memory of philosophy's severity, but those rosy dreams of the humanities about developing the personality, as if philosophy is part of the cultural legacy... Philosophy is stricter than the police, than a notary public, than the state. It is not for human beings; human beings are for it. It is the place of an early encounter with what is stronger than a human being (Bibikhin 2010: 331).

For this reason, first of all, only the concepts of "first philosophy" are allowed, since they strive to grasp the limits of our experience. Secondly, one must attend to the mood (or "attunement," *Stimmung*) that has totally captivated everyone today (and without which it is impossible to "schematize" the concepts of metaphysics). And this means that meta-

physics is possible only in the form of the hermeneutic of a concrete historical situation.

It is clear that Bibikhin is following Heidegger here—most of all the starting point of *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, the first chapters of which he translated. This text may seem strange; after all, instead of an examination of any traditional concepts of first philosophy, what we get is an extensive analysis of human boredom and animal "torpidity" (*otsepenelost'*) or "captivation."[1] But this "strangeness" is justified by the task of transforming the concepts from the terms of a specific discipline ("a specialist in metaphysics" sounds contradictory if you think about it) into genuine *concepts*, i.e., practical *acts of understanding* how things are (*how—things—are*) here and now. Of course, Heidegger considers the entrenchment of metaphysical experience within a specific mood as a universal and necessary condition of experience itself; but the mood in its inescapable specificity all the same is not the specific *quality* of a certain thing or subject—indicated at the very least by its expression (in Russian or German) through impersonal constructions like *trevozhno* ("I feel anxious"), *skuchno* ("I'm bored") and so on. The subject here is not "omitted" because it is self-evident but is, on the contrary, radically problematized. Moreover, the very distinction between our moods presents a problem: which of them most fully expresses the "spirit of the times?" Thus, "angst" from *Being and Time* (1926) gives way to "boredom"[2] in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (1928—as if the (psychologically evident) instability and mutability of moods has negatively born witness to the universal character of our attunement to them: always "somehow or other [*kak-to tak*]," Bibikhin says, practically quoting Gogol's Khlestakov (Bibikhin 2012: 358). One can say that "everything is always somehow or other," and only *in* an attunement of this type is this "everything" realized for the first time, which means that nothing exists (or only as a "transcendental illusion") beyond such a mood. The metaphysical dimension is in principle immanent to mood, since our being gripped (*zakhvachennost', Ergriffenheit*) by it transcends the established boundaries between subjects and objects (which appear as remnants of a "bygone world"). "World," "finitude," and "solitude" are the "fundamental concepts of metaphysics" for Heidegger because they articulate the situation of being gripped by "profound boredom," which in turn reveals the *directly metaphysical* character of human existence—such as it is given in a concrete historical moment. This is how Heidegger's course can be summarized.

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[1]   G. Agamben draws attention to this (Agamben 2012a: 60–61), as does A. P. Shurbelev, who translated the entire text of Heidegger's book (see: Khaidegger 2013: 564).

[2]   Heidegger asks the question "*Has man in the end become boring to himself?*" (Heidegger 1995: 161).

One can say that Bibikhin *repeats* this gesture from inside the Russian 1990s. But we should not forget that authentic repetition is always a radical endeavor: one must repeat exactly *the thing*, tearing it free from what retreats into inauthenticity as "the *same* thing" ("same" refers to the *presence* of what is always a more or less significant similarity, and the degree of significance is determined from some abstract viewpoint: "It is not repeating *the same thing* but the unique *thing* that leads to genuine identity as unity") (Bibikhin 2000: 220). If there is a place for metaphysics in a world gripped *without remainder* by a given "mood," then it is only the place of this very "remainderlessness," which must in some way be seen and registered. Thus, the Russian 1990s are interesting because they revealingly reverse the relationship at the foundation of Heidegger's course—if being gripped by boredom leads literally to the evacuation of the subject from world (completely incapable of finding himself, with boredom as an "effect" of the pressure of beings on a subject who cannot resist them), then in Russia in the 1990s one can see, on the contrary, the ubiquitous *seizure* [*zakhvat*] of "beings" as "property." (Bibikhin ironically illustrates this along the way by saying that even teaching his course is only possible because of having successfully seized a departmental classroom,[3] and he also wittily relates the Russian *khapat* [to grab] to the Latin *capio* from which, among other things, the word "concept" derives [Bibikhin 2012: 46]). In other words, the Russian case shows directly the opposite phenomenon – an escalation of subjectivity.

Thus, "being gripped by the act of seizing" (*zakhvachennost' zakhvatom*) is the fundamental mood of our 1990s[4]—but what concepts can articulate the potential metaphysical character of this mood, on the analogy of Heidegger's triad "world – finitude – solitude"? This is my hypothesis: translated into the language of Bibikhin's contemporary hermeneutic situation, the triad becomes "*sophia*—strangeness—interest."

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[3]   Here is a biographical example, as the real condition for understanding Bibikhin's "philosophy of what is one's own": in the very beginning of the 1990s, on the eve of final exams, my friends and I were gripped by a passion for researching Petersburg (or was it still Leningrad?) rooftops. We had a special enthusiasm for finding ways to the most premium "heights": the roof of the Eliseev Market, the interior of the sphere on top of the cupola of the House of Books, the chariot above the arch of the General Headquarters, the Rostral Columns, etc. When we occasionally encountered the police, we simply had to register our names with them (and no one carried documents, naturally, so they just wrote our names down, taking us at our word). Nowadays paid tours of the Petersburg rooftops are advertised – of course, along "safe" routes that are agreed on by property owners and the administration.

[4]   *Translator's note:* a central motif in this essay is the etymological link between *zakhvachennost'* ("being gripped," a translation of Heidegger's *Ergriffenheit*) and *zakhvat* ("seizure," as in the seizure of land, property, or power). I am consistent in these English renderings throughout, but when disambiguation is necessary, I have included the original Russian in parentheses.

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"*Sophia*—strangeness—interest" as the First Metaphysical Triad

The term *sophia* (wisdom), alongside its general philosophical meaning, has another marked sense, referring to the Russian intellectual tradition (that "other beginning" to which Bibikhin turns more than once, insisting on his own unbreakable link to it) and this tradition's efforts to articulate the metaphysical dimension of its own history. Of course, Bibikhin can in no way be called a sophiologist, but nevertheless, the concept of *sophia* has a positive (and not merely critical) sense in his thought. "The *sophia* of the world" for Bibikhin is clearly not the nostalgically recalled "original immediacy and intuitiveness of contemplation," which "shines forth in the world like the primeval purity and beauty of creation," but which, in its current condition, is only the ruins over which "pure reason," *ratio*, rises—as S. N. Bulgakov writes in his *Philosophy of Economy*[5] (Bulgakov 1993: 168). Bibikhin is probably closer to S.S. Averintsev, whose interpretation of the inscription above the conch of the central apse in Kiev's St. Sophia Cathedral draws attention to the pointedly martial, and not monastic, image of the Orant Virgin, symbolizing the city and its walls raised against the powers of destruction and "external darkness" (Averintsev 2006: 575–576). However, Bibikhin reaches back to an earlier, "pre-ontological" hour: "Ah, the early *sophia* does not languish in the beyond, she is a trickster, a tinkerer, sly and crafty [*khvatkaia*]" (Bibikhin 2012: 25).[6]

At the same time, the moment of our exclusion from "the *sophia* of the world" is also extremely important for Bibikhin:

> Who 'we' are. We have fallen out of nature, out of being, out of paradise, out of somewhere else, something not right [*neladnoe*] is happening with us, we must get back into 'tune' [*к lady*], into 'harmony,' into 'being' or maybe somewhere else? Should we think this way? Or is it unnecessary to think this way about our 'fall'? It's no disaster if we think we've 'fallen,' but it's better if, as in the case of the phrase 'left behind by being, by god,' we hear the *entire* word. We are *left behind*, kept in reserve—precisely this 'we' in quotation marks—we are tolerated. We've 'fallen out' just as we've ended up, as we've turned out (Bibikhin 2012: 348).

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[5]   However, there is some overlap all the same: by appealing to *sophia* Bulgakov tries to overcome "economism" as the ideological orientation of modern times. "The *sophia* of the world," or, alternatively, "the living machine" of nature, about which Bibikhin says much in *The Woods*, in part embodies the same effort.

[6]   This same motif appears in C. Schmitt's treatment of the concept of *nomos*: not the written law of the already existing city but the original constituent act, the act of seizing land and founding the city (Schmitt 2003: 67–79).

Thus this "falling out" is in no way an "error" that must be corrected but, on the contrary, the condition of possibility for the appearance of truth in this world, the experience of fullness.[7] But if "early *sophia*" is understood as trickiness and slyness, does this mean that we are talking about the transformation of a passive "being gripped" into something active, the subjectivation of relations? In any case, it is clear that if we follow Heidegger in understanding nature, *phusis*, as "the whole prevailing that prevails through man himself, a prevailing he does not have power over" (Heidegger 1995: 26), then *to see* it in this aspect is possible only having always already established some kind of space of relation. The "a-" in "aletheia" points precisely to this release of pressure that makes the very experience of our witnessing possible. Of course, one should not naturalize this position, just as much as one should not attribute to it some kind of "super-worldly" meaning. On the contrary, only a position of being *in* the world preserves the capacity to establish a relation as *semantic*, that is, making visible the concrete historical specificity of subjectivity's *experience of formation* (and for this reason alone it is possible to ask the question "who?").[8]

Let us consider how a certain situation, in which one can only *end up*, becomes the condition for truth. Does this mean that truth is situational, that it is farmed out to chance? The emphasis should probably be different: the *experience* of fullness (not imagined but real) assumes a position

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[7]   Here one is tempted to compare this position to that of A. V. Akhutin, who explains, in his well-known article, "*Sophia* and the Devil: Kant Confronted with Russian Religious Metaphysics," why philosophy is not sophiology. To the question, "But can the uncomfortable homelessness of philosophy really resist the desire for a blissful life in a home built as if by wisdom itself?" (Akhutin 2005: 479), Akhutin answers: "We are related to *all* being, to being *itself*, and not closed off in what beings have been given to us, disclosed to us, because we are ontologically non-identical to the form of this immersion, *we do not coincide* with it and in this sense we are *transcendental*—through being and not through our 'cognitive capacity'" (Akhutin 2005: 475). This is why "philosophical thought—which is ontologically problematic—'distracts' man from falling into the world-myth, does not allow man to engage fully in the *known* world; the more inescapable the world is, the more this *knowledge* is sacred, rooted in *sophia*". (Akhutin 2005: 478). It is clear that Akhutin, just like Bibikhin, is following Heidegger here, *but*— is not the tendency to get *comfortable* in this declared state of "uncomfortable homelessness" intrinsic to philosophy as "dialogics" (with its demonstratively *anti*-sophiological character)?

[8]   G. Vico interpreted the meaning of the mythical Lethe as a burial place for those who, because of their plebeian origins, were doomed to be wiped from historical memory (Vico 1948: 242). In this context, "aletheia" acquires the political meaning of struggle for the right to participate in "genuinely historical" life. Moreover, only through a similar problematization, arising from the experience of actual exclusion from participation, does truth acquire the character of an event for the first time. The *polis* in this sense is not only a "pole," a place of historicity, but also *polemos* (Vico 1948: 225–226), the struggle for hegemony, for the right to appropriate history.

in which one can only "end up," that is, turn out to be oneself, since "everything else," in its own, exclusively "autocratic" fullness, simply *abides*. And only in this *strange* way can we truly (not just "truthfully" but energetically) have experience of "the *sophia* of the world":

> Because we *do not know* how *sophia* is structured, how tricky the world machine is, how it grips us, we honestly cannot say, as theorists of 'consciousness,' that 'we,' humans, are somehow specifically destined to *fall out* of the world machine. This *strange* machine, its *sophia* of *strangeness*, according to Heraclitus, is not a strangeness that has been estranged from 'us' forever, but a strangeness that *preserves* and saves itself. With our strangeness, our falling out, our being left behind, we *belong* to the *sophia* of the world machine; our strangeness, through which we are not ourselves, because of which we our beside ourselves, because of which 'we are strangers to ourselves,' estranged from our own 'own-ness' (*sobstvennost'*)[9]—this is the thing in us that makes us simultaneously fall out of harmony with the 'cosmos,' the 'world' and belong to the *strange sophia* of this world (Bibikhin 2012: 348).

It is important to note how thoroughly Bibikhin protects strangeness from the inertia that would fix it as a certain "quality," on the basis of which one could perform the work of identity. No, strangeness is precisely "the thing," not "the same thing." For this reason it cannot be attached to a fixed subject; from the beginning it *automatically*, always already deconstructs any presumed "identity," making space for *free* acts of "seizing" (*zakhvat*)—a seizing not *exclusively* driven by the lack of "something else":

> We call strangeness that e-strangedness, that e-strangement, that occurs when besides *everything* there is *also something else*. Σοφόν πάντων κεχωρισμένον. I would not rush a definition of this 'besides' to say that in the universe there is, besides everything, also an observer or a consciousness. Consciousness and the observer also need to be defined. I will not define 'strangeness,' or say *what it's like*. It is *strangeness* [*strannost'*], sidedness [*storonnost'*], estrangement, the origin of sides, right-left, and countries [*strana*], space [*prostranstvo*] (Bibikhin 2012: 349).

Does this mean that the subject is removed [*ustranietsia*] entirely and declared not to exist? We do not find this in Bibikhin; such "non-being" would also require definition. More likely, the subject is its own appearance *and* disappearance, its pulsation. This is why it is possible and even neces-

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9   [Translator's note: the Russian word *sobstvennost'* and its morphological derivatives exhibit significant polysemy in Bibikhin's work, including the meaning of physical "property" and the principle of "ownership," but also what is "one's own" or what is "proper" to a given subject or phenomenon.]

sary to invert the opposition established above between the evacuation and escalation of subjectivity, since "profound boredom" can just as well signify the total subjectivation of beings, and the "maniacal seizure of things as property" can signify desubjectivation (through reduction of the subject to a field of action for certain "natural laws"). Still, it must be reiterated that the subject is the extensiveness (*pro-strannost'*) and ur-strangeness (*pra-strannost'*) that also appears in the form of "mood swings."

If we return now to the phenomenon of being gripped, its primary explanation is immediately apparent: one can only be gripped by something exceptionally *interesting* ("gripping" [*zakhatyvaiushchee*] and "interesting" are synonymous). This is why we can say that *interest is strangeness understood as energy, ground, origin:*

> A human being leaves his one-sided 'subjectivity' for fullness, and in being gripped by energy he grows through subjective interest toward interest as such: to inter-esse, not-indifference, differentiation, when he begins to notice the *swing*, a kind of impassable *between* where before it seemed everything was the same, and [it seemed] possible to introduce differences only through his human will. Things are really interesting only when inter-est (difference) is not subjective, not conditioned by consciousness. Rather, a discovery is made that it is *not* the human who decides or ascertains what before him and without him is inter-est (difference) for him and in him, that is, the human *carries* interest in himself, difference between one him and another him, and in this difference is all his interest, inter-esse, being between. The human being is always gripped by interest: he is always in difference, in inter-esse, in 'either-or,' in 'yes-no' (Bibikhin 2010: 343).

The source of this thematization of interest is likely Heidegger's remark on the difference between "what it is merely (inauthentically, ontically) interesting" and interest as the ontological specificity of our existence as precisely being *between*:

> Interest, *interesse*, means to be among and in the midst of things, or to be at the center of a thing and to stay with it. But today's interest accepts as valid only what is interesting. And interesting is the sort of thing that can freely be regarded as indifferent the next moment, and be displaced by something else, which then concerns us just as little as what went before (Heidegger 1976: 5).

An even older version of this idea can be found in the following formulation from Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Crumbs*: "For one who exists, what interests him most is existing, and his being interested in existing is his actuality. What actuality is cannot be put in the language of abstraction. Actuality is an *inter-esse* splitting the hypothetical unity of

abstraction's thought and being" (Kierkegaard 2009: 263). In these formulations the general intention is, of course, plain—to draw out the original sense of "interest" as ontological difference, not reduced to its "improper" (*nesobstvennye*) forms, however they might be named (Bibikhin's "schedule", Heidegger's "publicness," Kierkegaard's "abstraction"). However, it is precisely the "hermeneutic situation" of the 1990s that makes it possible to give this "ontologeme" a sharp and specific resonance. Actually, one should not forget that the original context for the usage of the word "interest" is in fact *economic-juridical*, and only later does its meaning widen (from politics to aesthetics). Is this not why Bibikhin *inevitably* connects his course on first philosophy to the problem of *property* (*sobstvennost'*)?

If we reread one of the concluding chapters of M. Mauss's *The Gift* at this point, it becomes clear how important the connection between ontological thought and economic genealogy is. Here Mauss speaks of the contrast between the "selfless" economy of archaic tribes and "the individualistic economy of pure interest which our societies have had to some extent ever since their discovery by Greeks and Semites" (Mauss 1966: 75). Significantly, our historical reality (including the present) is positioned *between* these two types: "It is only our Western societies that quite recently turned man into an economic animal." Yet, all the same, "we are not yet all animals of the same species" (Mauss 1966: 76). Inter-esse is the situation between "gratuitous and irrational expenditures" and "a sophisticated adding machine." Of course, it is clear that what we have here is the structure of a phantasm, imagining it possible to express full preference for one or the other pole and thus avoid the ambivalence of this "interzone." (For example, one can see that the maxim of political rationality—"only interest never deceives"[10]—retrospectively reveals its hidden motive in Freud's supposition that "the only emotion that does not lie is *anxiety*"). Finally, "inter-esse" as the foundation of *economic ontology* (and, consequently, the horizon of all possible "interests") can already be found in the central thesis of Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, according to which the model household must resemble a "chorus of things," in which even "fair is the space between [the things], as each stands out clear" (Xenophon 1876: 59). Indeed, it is characteristic that a Phoenician ship suggested this metaphor of the "chorus" to Ischomachus – how the dangers of sea travel make it necessary to introduce and maintain order. Thus, the beauty of "being-between" has as its background the same anxious (= "interesting") character of being in the world. Anxiety/terror in this light is a

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[10] This maxim, as is known, comes from the famous essay "On the Interest of Princes and the States of Christendom" by Henri de Rohan (1579–1638). A detailed analysis of the concept of interest in the moral and political philosophy of modernity appears in the well-known work of A. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism before its Triumph* (see: Hirschman 2013).

kind of prime mover of the "world economy": it would seem that all purely immanent interests are constituted in the field of its activity.

Bibikhin comments on the meaning of existential terror (*Angst*) in the following way: "You understand that this original and most extensive possibility of presence cannot not be neglected—not because presence is in fact "too small" for *such* an incredibly uncanny world and cannot bear it, but on the contrary because it *was able to* meet it, and the exorbitant world *that was met* as something-nothing showed it things, brought it closer to them" (Bibikhin 2009: 345). "It *cannot not* be *neglected*": this means that any clear identity of things is only possible on the basis of the *always already* obscure situation of their original ontic givenness (identity's "uncanniness" is a central theme in Bibikhin's thought).

Heidegger's *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* and Bibikhin's *Woods*

A principal aspect of the theme of property and ownership is the question of how human and animal ways of being are related. The radical posing of this question occupies a central place both in Heidegger's *Fundamental Concepts* and Bibikhin's *Woods*. A wide range of important works react critically to Heidegger's position on this question, showing its essentially political and juridical (and, consequently, economic) meaning. *The Fundamental Concepts* examines human and animal ways of being within the common horizon of their relation to the world and even, it would seem, their common character of *being gripped* by the world. At the same time, Heidegger emphasizes that any analogy between them *cannot be true*:

> …captivation (*Benommenheit*), as precisely the essence of animality, apparently belongs in the closest proximity to what we identified as a characteristic feature of profound boredom and described as the *entrancement* (*Gebanntheit*) of Dasein within beings as a whole. Certainly it will be seen that this closest proximity of both determinations of essence is merely deceptive, that an abyss lies between them which cannot be bridged by any mediation whatsoever (Heidegger 1995: 282).

Moreover, when speaking of the metaphysical potential of mood, Heidegger speaks precisely of *being gripped* (*Ergriffenheit*) in such a way that, once again, it is not a synonym but an antonym of animal "captivation" (*Benommenheit*): animals are confined to the "circle of instinct" and if they are "captivated" by something, then it is exclusively by their being "taken from" the world (thanks to which they can be defined as "poor in world" [*weltarm*] but not "worldless" [*weltlos*]).[11]

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[11] In the afterword to his translation of the *Fundamental Concepts* A.P. Shurbelev gives a detailed justification for his choice of the formula "captivation by being

In his thinking about property and its "seizure" (*zakhvatyvanie*) in the 1990s, Bibikhin takes his starting point precisely in this "being gripped" that is *only characteristic of the human*. Curiously, though, with his concept of "the seizure of land" (naturally, by human "being-there," "our" Dasein), C. Schmitt uses a word with the same root as the one Heidegger chooses for the character of animality (the German *nehmen* is homonymous with the Greek *nemein*, from which *Nomos* is formed; in his afterword to the translation of Schmitt's book, A. F. Filippov points out that the Russian equivalent *imat'*, in the sense of "to take (*brat'*)," comes from the same root (Filippov 2008: 648). Of course, the issue is not words but the essence of things: the very prefix "meta-" in the concept of "metaphysics," as Agamben writes, refers back to the *act of separating* the "humanity" of the human from the "animality" that is *also within him*, and it is possible that "this overcoming is not an event that has been completed once and for all, but an occurrence that is always under way, that every time and in each individual decides between the human and the animal, between nature and history, between life and death" (Agamben 2004: 79).[12]

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taken from" (*ob''iatost ot''iatiem*) to translate *Benommenheit* as the defining characteristic of animal being's "non-disclosedness" (see: Khaidegger 2013: 576–581). This is an important indication that in Heidegger's thought the dissociation of humanity and animality is less than uniequivocal—that is, analogies between them are not strictly forbidden: "There is, actually, also a kind of intermediary *Benommenheit*, which is related to the human, but its meaning recalls the situation of the animal. Concluding his lectures on German Idealism (*German Idealism: Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling*), which were delivered almost at the same time as the *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, Heidegger analyzes Plato's parable of the cave and writes that the people in the cave 'sind benommen von dem Seienden, in dessen Mitte sie sich befinden,' i.e., 'they are captivated [*okhvacheny*] by the beings in the midst of which they find themselves.' Here, perhaps, this 'captivation [*okhvachennost'*]' is preferable to that 'absorption [*vobrannost'*]' in the self that prevents the animal from [being able to] 'to see' beings as such, but 'being taken from [*ot''iatie*]' is clearly also present (as a parallel between the 'dark' cave and the 'darkness' of the animal)" (Khaidegger 2013: 580).

[12] The "ontological difference" between human and animal ways of being was stated by K. Marx and F. Engels in a similar way to Heidegger's: "Where there exists a relationship, it exists for me; the animal does not 'relate' itself to anything, it does not 'relate' itself at all. For the animal its relation to others does not exist as a relation." (Marx, Engels 1998: 49). However, later, when the "division of labor," "alienation," and the "propertyless" come up, they speak of how some people are transformed into town-*animals* and others into country-*animals* (Marx, Engels 1998: 72). Or, when discussing how the division of labor means everyone acquires "a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape" (Marx, Engels 1998: 53), they invoke an image practically equivalent to Heidegger's depiction of the animal. Of course, *as long as* there is the possibility of rebellion (and, at the extreme, revolution), the ontic analogy is only a mask covering ontological difference. At the same time, the *shift* in "being itself," which occurred in the 20th century, confuses the

If we turn to the *Woods* lectures, we find that Bibikhin makes numerous analogies between human and animal being, *without* declaring them, however, as Heidegger does, to be false—for example:

> Even more interesting is our mysterious blindness before the face of animals, the reason why we can't see, can't notice in the animal world what in our own current, daily life touches, shocks, and offends most often: the iron law of the state, its formalism, ritualism, so-called 'bureaucratism,' absolute indifference to the individual, unwavering norms, strict upbringing, distaste for all that is 'humane,' its own inhumanity in the sense of disdain for the individual (Bibikhin 2011: 390).

My example: roosters will furiously peck at their grain as a substitute for fighting, and an analogy to this 'displacement activity' is eating vast quantities of food, like people in ancient Moscow did in times of stress, or in contemporary Moscow, also from stress and fear, demonstratively eating in restaurants. We can also probably locate nose-picking—also shameful and also observable in similar situations among monkeys—at this same, deep, inherited level of displacement activities under stress (Bibikhin 2011: 414).

Of course, the fact that these analogies are "not false" can easily be attributed to the common *genus* of humans and animals (after all, the theme of *The Woods* is nothing other than living *matter*), but as far as the *species* is concerned, here the difference remains fundamental ("impassable"). As evidence for this, one can cite the commentary Bibikhin makes at one point in the course, recalling the Aristotelian definition of man as a "political" and "logical" animal:

> The evaluation of the entire world in terms of good and bad, how it should be and how it shouldn't. Tears running down one's face and calm, peace, then a smile on the face—humans have such things before speech and upright posture and without speech and upright posture, and it shows their nature, it is *logical* and *political*. At least, such acceptance/non-acceptance of the world in its entirety or evaluation in terms of good/bad, yes/no are not visible in animals, while in humans they appear in plain view. Otherwise, in everything else, humans basically resemble all other animals [...]. When Aristotle says that animals have a kind of language but no speech, by speech he means *logos*, logic, which depends entirely on identity—this uncanny thing I spoke of before, sanctioning the acceptance of basically anything, everything, as long as the human recognizes 'the thing' in it. Animals won't do this, won't risk it (Bibikhin 2011: 138–139).

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relation between "mask" and "face," "animal" and "human" (cf. Agamben's studies of the biopolitical production of "bare life").

All the same, in the structure of *The Woods*, one is struck by how this reduced, miserly, and empty gesture of acceptance or rejection of *everything*—practically the only characteristic peculiar to humans—appears against the background of endlessly diverse scenes of different living forms' "festive suitability."[13] (One recalls the documentary, in which Andrei Tarkovsky, accompanied by Tonino Guerra, is searching Italy for an appropriate landscape for his new film, and he successively rejects all the baroque beauties presented to him until he finally finds the little village where he ends up shooting *Nostalghia*). This is why the issue is not, as it is with Heidegger, "the abyss." A strictly phenomenological description of animal life, in its specific—and in no way metaphorical or hypothetical, but completely unambiguous and categorical—way, takes the form of a *challenge* to humans, the form of a *question* about his *own* (*sobstvennyi*) species. In Bibikhin's course on *Energy* he speaks of the *indefinability* of this extremely important concept in Aristotle's metaphysics. One can only give examples of "energy," but because there is no definition, each example will have the character of a challenge—"are you capable of thinking a being satisfied with itself, happy with itself?" (Bibikhin 2010: 337). Metaphysics in this case looks like an attempt somehow to answer this challenge, which every animal casts to humans through the immediate "physicality" ("naturalness") of its being. The "living machine" arises, "the *sophia* of the world," within which animals end up strangely and paradoxically included (through the rational calculations of our "schedule") because of their extraordinary "wastefulness" (in Bataille's sense), their "*amechania*":[14]

> …Aristotle is right that nature plays a high-stakes game, mating turns out to be necessary for nature and *sophia*, so this extreme, strictly speaking, life-or-death game can exist, and not the other way around. If we speak in Pushkin or Leontiev's terms, this is not the 'blooming of complexity' in life, but on the contrary, life as a pretext, a reason for the 'blooming of complexity.' In a sense, nature *was not interested* in having cloned sheep; it organized the game of the docile ewe and the stubborn ram. For some reason scientists still find it interesting (Bibikhin 2011: 147).

Any attempt to "rationalize" life, to structure it according to a "schedule" as a way for society to realize its "interests" (for example, construct-

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[13]   Bibikhin suggests replacing "Darwinian fitness in the sense of adaptability with the term *godnost'* (suitability), which has felicitous neighboring words (here we can list *goditsia* [it will do] and *po-goda* [the weather]; in Slovenian there is a word with the same root that means *the right time, ripeness, festival, anniversary*, in Latin *to strike the mark, to obtain*, in Lithuanian *honor, glory*, the German "gut" and English "good", the Greek ἀγαθόν (good). The suitability of living things is not necessarily their adaptability for something, it can be their festival, their glory" (Bibikhin 2011: 7–8).

[14]   *Translator's note*: *amechania* is Homeric Greek for "helplessness."

ing a specific regime of law and order that automatically reproduces mechanisms for the "honest" accumulation of wealth) is of course an endeavor that is "human, all-too-human" (not forgetting that Nietzsche defined humans as "*interested* animals"). But a number of examples from Bibikhin's *Woods* demonstrate that the *living* machine necessarily includes a moment of "festive *amechania*," precisely in the sense of its "suitability," which *grows through* all our attempts to define it unequivocally. The behavior of "new Russians" ("intensified eating in restaurants") is not an accidental excess but a symptom—*just like* the cloning of sheep and administrative-juridical regulation—all these are phenomena that can be understood only through the profound indeterminacy of this *species* of living matter, which takes the form of "humanity."[15] This is why any real social-political order will only be a *potential* embodiment of that "energeticness," which is designated Inter-esse—a concept that expresses all the "strange *sophia*-ness" of our being gripped (*zakhvachennost'*) and our seizing (*zakhvat*) of things (strictly speaking, the active and passive here are not given; they are set as a task—the subject-object relation is suspended as an empty form which is forever subject to "realization").

The Hermeneutics of Russian History: The Theme of Byzantium and the "Higher Right of the Viewer"

The question of property (*sobstvennost'*), of "one's own (*sobstvennyi*) interest" (especially when the philosopher asking this question is simply registering everyone's mood) indicates a persistent entanglement, almost to the point of indiscernibility, of the economic-juridical and the existential-philosophical, of the ontic and ontological "aspects" of a single existence, of *the one*. Bibikhin points out the unusual ontological advantage of the Russian language with regard to this crucial word in first philosophy:

> The same word that is *in* in Russian—the German 'eins', the English 'one,' the indefinite article 'an'; all with the meaning of *one*. In everyday Russian the common Indo-European root *in* slipped from the meaning of *one* (*odin*) into the meaning of *other* (*inoi*). The language repeats in its development what we always involuntarily do with a unity: we separate it from

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15   R. Girard shows how every animal species has its own inner mechanism for regulating intraspecific violence, and only human society is always open to the possibility of social suicide. Heidegger, as already mentioned, insists on the irreducible difference between two forms of being—the human's openness and the animal's captivation by instinct. One can say that Bibikhin's *Woods*, despite reproducing this thesis of irreducibility, potentially contains a reference to another ontology—for example, a Deleuzian one, in which one would speak of being as becoming, no longer dooming the relation between the human and the animal to produce mere pseudo-similarities of mimesis, but to form instead a kind of "monster" or "machine."

everything else. This separation does not, however, merely bring the *one-unity* to the outside. The semantics of the *one-other* are quite unexpected in fact. *The other* does not mean a mechanical separation of the one from the many; it opens a perspective on *the whole*. Only through *the other*, the unique, strange, comic, idiotic, and illegal (an *inok* is a "brigand"), through exclusion from the norm, do we arrive at the whole. *The other* is the key to it, and apparently the only one (Bibikhin 2005b: 140–141).

Separation and exclusion are operations producing the instance of *one who gazes*. As mentioned above, Bibikhin (in his courses on *Property* and *Energy*) opposes the enthusiasm of being totally gripped by the act of seizing (*zakhvachennost' zakhvatom*) to Heidegger's "boredom." Clearly, one was rarely bored in the "wild" 1990s. And this is symptomatic because boredom *returns* in the 2000s, the years of "stabilization," when Bibikhin begins his course, *Introduction to the Philosophy of Right*. Moreover, it returns precisely as an expression of a *higher law*, which Bibikhin calls the right of the "one who gazes," the *observer*:

> Although the observer does not formally declare his rights, things can, for example, become boring for him. Then everything that no longer interests him essentially, in the final analysis, also stops existing for him; that is, it becomes equivalent to nothing. Things might not be boring for the observer at first, but then he discovers that his interest was artificially created, that he was seduced. He then takes revenge by forgetting the thing that seemed to occupy him. What is forgotten again falls into nothing and slips out of being. In principle only what has held the gaze of the observer has a chance to remain in being. In this sense, history is similar to theater; if the public loses interest it leaves, and the production ends either immediately or after a time. Everything depends on whether the viewer likes it or not. In this sense, strictly speaking, the observer has all the rights or the most important right. Meanwhile he is not a legal entity fixed by any specific law. Socialist or communist civilization was almost complete; the Soviet person was formed, but he became boring to himself, as if to his viewer, and he stopped making an effort to sustain himself (Bibikhin 2005a: 81–82).

Here we must remark on several things. First, the sequence of Bibikhin's narratives is itself symptomatic: from the existential drive, suffusing the theme of energy and property's seizure (in the lectures at the beginning of the 1990s)—through the theme of living matter and the animal kingdom of festive "suitability," but also the departure for the woods (*The Woods*, 1997)—to the problem of law and its foundations (*Introduction to the Philosophy of Right*, 2001). Heidegger's sequence of narratives is different: from the analysis of boredom—through the analysis of the animal's way of being ("torpidity" and "poverty of world")—to the theme of world, the "as-

structure" that is always already subject to disclosure by an apophantic *logos*. Clearly, the ability (according to Heidegger, peculiar only to humans) to separate something out *as such* emerges as the basic form of actualizing an original *interest*—since the exposure of beings (of one kind or another) in the aspect of their "as-suchness" always assumes as a preliminary the givenness of the world as a system of references of significance, thanks to which any judgment of identity has a certain "plan" behind its pronouncement—the universal involvement of our existence. And, of course, the correspondence between Heidegger's appeal to the "logical" theme of judgment (in the last chapter of the *Fundamental Concepts*) and Bibikhin's appeal to the "socio-historical" theme of law is plain. Apart from the clear semantic overlap, it is plain that these thinkers are striving to reveal a sore point in the articulation of our original *openness* to the world—and mechanisms of reducing this openness to one or another form of "property," guaranteed by the "positivity" of scientific knowledge and legal norms.[16]

Bibikhin often emphasizes that the goal of philosophical work is "simple" phenomenological vision, registering "what occurs," showing and demonstrating "how things are." The triad of concepts I have emphasized (*Sophia*—strangeness—interest) is called on to mark out the metaphysical trajectory of the historical epoch (whether called post-Soviet or something else): from the alethetic event of the original "enclosure" (the demarcation into blocks of material and spiritual property, the inheritance of earlier epochs)—through the "strangeness" of the success of some and the failure, "estrangement," and "deprivation" of others—to the situation of a certain final display, a spectacle, the acquisition of a *specific appearance* (as a nation, a state). Precisely at this last point, Inter-esse as the original difference, the swing of moods, must be actualized in its fullness. Will the subject of law be *recognized* in its rights, will the historical event *grip* our attention (or will it be yet another simulacrum that soon becomes boring)?[17]

Of course, the situation connected with the transition from "the troubled Yeltsin years" to "Putin's stabilization" requires thinking Bibikhin's metaphysics from a certain historical distance. But even from a superficial perspective it is clear that, say, a reader's interest in thinkers of an existentialist bent (Heidegger, Sartre, Bataille, Berdyaev, Shestov, etc.), characteristic for the 1990s, gives way to interest in the problems raised by the late Foucault and Deleuze, and also Agamben, Negri, and others; that is, problems connected to the study of new techniques of domination (dispositifs of power) as forces that radically question the possibility of

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[16]   In this connection G. Agamben notes the juridical meaning of procedures of "sacralization" and "profanation" (Agamben 2009: 17–18).

[17]   In a story devoted to how an at first seemingly insignificant event causes an endless litigation—i.e., precisely a legal procedure—Gogol ends with the line, "it's boring in this world, gentlemen!"

"one's own existing." Roughly speaking, for a long time the conceptual hero of our present has not been the charismatic "outlaw" in a red jacket but the faceless bureaucrat-lawman in a gray suit (the movement captured in Aleksei Balabanov's film *Blind Man's Buff*, yet another variation on the theme of "From whence came the Russian land?").

There are places in Bibikhin's lectures on the philosophy of right where the coordinates are given for conceptualizing just how such a situation can develop. For example, following that tour-guide through Russian self-consciousness, the Marquis de Custine, Bibikhin logically comes to the topic of Byzantium and "Byzantinism":

> The old *polis*, which preserved personal integrity, physical courage, the skill and enterprise of united citizens, had by the third century BCE, already yielded to the position of social engineering, relying on scientific expertise and the elegant management of social passions. The air of Hellenic states and late Rome was saturated with metaphysics. Leaders were surrounded by a divine cult. Such was the allure of late antiquity, to teach and lead peoples, to submit millions to consensus (Bibikhin 2005a: 181).

And further on:

> Diocletian ended the diarchy around 284 BCE. He not only became the princeps but the *dominus*. The Senate basically remained as a formality: the imperial *constitution* passed through it without corrections and became law. Diocletian also took control of the Supreme Court, *ending the separation of powers*. But this was also the end of Rome. The principles of law were limited to such an extent that Rome could either be a legal state or none at all. It was already Constantine the Great, the successor to Diocletian, who considered Roman soil unsuitable for a one-man ideological Empire and moved the capital to Constantinople (Bibikhin 2005a: 197).

On the level of philosophy, the issue here is the procedure of desubjectivation, which is a condition of possibility for the synthesis of the "imperial monad." Bibikhin in this connection unexpectedly switches our attention from questions of right to the sphere of pure aesthetics (both as the sphere of artistic creativity and as a form of sensibility):

> One must enthrall, not engage. Not show something to the eye but produce an operation on the eye itself, stop it slipping into intangibility, enchain the spy. Mosaic faces look directly at us—there are few images in profile, and they are strange, as if half the face is still looking at me with one eye, as if the second half has been hidden. The frontal image of the face calls to me, takes my gaze into it, fuses it with its own. My gaze is closed up with this gaze, bound to the one gazing at it, and it has no time to formalize itself as an independent observer (Bibikhin 2005a: 202).

One gets the impression that, in this ontology, the subject—the subject of right—is in principle denied a place. Some remarks of Bibikhin look in general like typical liberal-democratic complaints about our "primordial Byzantinism," that is, the historical unreceptiveness of "this country's" inhabitants to "authentic" legal consciousness:

> The character and tone of Russian law changed in Byzantium and even more—in our East, where Russian law came via Byzantium. The direction of this change: law became not independent, not a form of life, but an instrument, a tool for the implementation of power. Such a relation to law continues today (Bibikhin 2005a: 227).

> The main defect of Byzantine law is its ideology, its moralism. Besides submission to the law, the emperor speaks of *the utility of the legal state and with his own hands takes custody of the law* (Bibikhin 2005a: 230).

But, of course, Bibikhin's position is hardly liberal critical philosophy. More likely, one can see that the case of Byzantium is important to him precisely as a symptom of what can be called the *amechania* of law—as a counterbalance, correspondingly, to the legal *automatism* that has taken hold in one way or another in the West. In other words, it is as if there is a certain *chance* (comparable to Hölderlin's "but where the danger is, also grows the saving power"). And, of course, we again find a clear analogy with Heidegger, who is not occupied with the reduction of the subject in his fundamental ontology but with the deconstruction of its specific historical formation, the framework that transformed it into an automatically functioning device (occupied, for example, with the production of consciousness). Thus, Byzantium can radically distort Roman law only because it is able to shake it to its foundations. This is why Bibikhin calls for a strict distinction between original and derivative conditions "as two acts, two beats." A condition, "whether inside or outside the body," is first of all "*pure openness and, for now, not at all what ideology and the state want in the sense of citizens' consensus.*" The distinction between, on the one hand, the Gospels (and the Bible as a whole), which at their foundation "are not the harmonization of consciousness but more likely its purifying storm," and, on the other hand, "church organizational ideology," which "as a system, administration, and structure, resting on agreement and establishing agreement, *serves as a cushion, a connecting gear* for interpretation in the spirit of harmony and only the harmony of that fire with which it warms itself" (Bibikhin 2005a: 206).

The danger lies in the fact that the very distinction between "the living spirit" and "the dead letter" (law, ritual, organization, etc.) is exclusively ideological. Interpreting Eusebius, Bibikhin suggests "distinguishing the extraction of human being from the usual condition, its removal as if from a noose to lift it up into the abyss of freedom—and risk, danger,

and, it follows, organization and manipulation." But here he also warns: "it's an illusion to think this is a simple difference" (Bibikhin 2005a: 207). The following statement is key:

> Only in this way is it possible to save, in its ambivalence, our difference. Vertigo, the loss of one's bearings, deliberateness, the abyssal feeling created, for example, by the architecture of San Vitale, is not a sickly or marginal condition but one that is *free* and worthy of the human. The author of these manipulations on the self turns out, first of all, above all, and for the most part, to be the human itself, to the degree that he is not used to this freedom, cannot bear it, fears it, and seeks a way out of it. He automatically falls out of it into what is not his own and, correspondingly, submits to the structure offered, which is in turn rootless and never harmonious. The difference turns out not to be between freedom and agreement but between freedom, in which there is real agreement, and decadence, falling out into a structure not one's own (Bibikhin 2005a: 207).

Does this mean that the opposition between developed and undeveloped legal culture is not so important? The imperial machine of total de-subjectivation and the liberal network of "effective institutions," producing a well-structured and controlled multiplicity of possibilities for subjectivation in various spheres of activity, turn out to be similar—or, more precisely, they turn out to be regimes that mutually assume one another. What they have in common is what Bibikhin calls "automatically falling out into what is not one's own." The regime of this automatism is the "perfect tense *apriori*," which always puts us before a false choice—*these* institutions or *that* empire.

Thus, in a situation of lawlessness (or "permanent revolution"), registered universally by western and "pro-western" observers, Bibikhin tries at his own risk to find a sign for what he calls *free law*: "ontically" appearing as a source of uninterrupted "law-creation" and, simultaneously, as a slippage from all written laws into the sphere of "unwritten rights." In other words, while constantly indicating the lack of an authentic justification for life as it is, this freedom "ontologically" also affirms an excess of law and order. "Fragility" and the absence of legal "guarantees" in fact guarantee everyone the higher right to be totally laid bare, completely exposed in their specific appearance, visible with no remainder.[18] Thus, the meta-

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18   Cf. "We appeal to permanent revolution as the law of Russian history in an attempt to understand its nature or existence. This nature is linked with the certainty that the order that should exist (as in paradise) does not exist; this is the defining mood of the country. One can define it as the close intimacy of a foreign paradise. Its convincing, inhumanly reliable inaccessibility breaks down all our attempts at organization. It also establishes our organization according to unwritten laws. Our fundamental support is the certainty that we have arrived late to the creation of the world. We firmly know that what has been given to us will never let us down" (Bibikhin 2005a: 65).

physical "idiosyncrasy" of the Russian historical situation hardly makes it the ideal ground for realizing any kind of pure phenomenology – not as a theoretical enterprise but as a real, practical set-up, negatively announcing itself in the tendency of any necessary "enterprise" to "break down"! Taking into account the fact that, at its limits, what sees and what is seen have one and the same "face," one should not ignore the need for a specific image of how someone acts when he knows he is in the field of vision of a nonsomnolent eye. (Heidegger suggests that in "truth," "non-truth" and "concealment" are just as important as the persistence of beings and "earth," which are drawn into the horizons of "world." Bibikhin also emphasizes that phenomenology should not be an exercise of seeing *in vitro* (Bibikhin 2012: 175). Thus, from a material resource, for example, "the woods" reveals itself as a place of existential experiment (from vagrancy, drug addiction, and tobacco use to the human acquisition of "bestial" habits, testing the limits of their "species" [*vid*, also "appearance"].

Since the pure vision of the one who looks has its place here, then there is—there must be—a corresponding *demonstrability* of the visible as something indicative and exemplary (permanent revolution as continuous demonstration):

> The only sensible, justifying, and redeeming way to escape surveillance is for the living [note the word *living*—not "human." — *A.P.*] to *show* itself in its best and strongest aspect, giving account of itself before the one who gazes. Ceremonial court ballet, clothes, and the preparation of the body, especially the tsar's or the female body, were displayed this way before the watching emperor, who in turn showed himself and all this organization to Europe. The higher inspector [*revizor*] could be appeased only by displaying all the very best (Bibikhin 2005a: 85).

This exhibition for viewing, as already noted, is primary in the relation of those always defensive, responsive, but at the same time somehow "authored" manipulations that the human applies to himself, in this way "automatically falling out into *what is not his own*." But—and this must be emphasized—Bibikhin uses *the same* image of "falling out" in its opposite sense as an openness, an act:

> We think we are superfluous people because everyone has something to do, while we stay idly behind, falling out of the groove. No, we lag behind without *thought*, and this is why we miss the risk-fraught danger and the possibility to stumble into an act (Bibikhin 1998: 15).

"To fall out" and "to stumble" are synonyms, but here they are clearly used as antonyms. The same thing appears in the course on *Energy*, where thought, as pure vision, appears as the only authentic energy. Everything else (the economy, politics, industry) is a breakdown in this activity, stop-

ping it: "Vision *excludes* stopping, fixing on something that is seen, it assumes continuation, not for the achievement of some result but only for vision, for its fullness. [...]—And the most important thing, it must be reiterated, is not vision *for* something, but energy in itself" (Bibikhin 2010: 329). But, from another perspective, this very vision is defined as the capacity of the mind for "*schole*," that is, for *coming to rest*, "like when someone who was busy with something looks up from his work to gaze at the earth, the sky, the horizon (he is able to look away, after all, he is human), and he asks what all this is for, why is he busy with this work, for what, how" (Bibikhin 2010: 311). Is this not a crisis, when an identical operation is called on to realize the opposite situation? Or is this a kind of *sign* that orients the application of one's strength in the right direction?

Below I will show how the possibility of such a sign assumes a critical attitude to the postulates of Heidegger's "fundamental ontology," the possibility of which is revealed, at least indirectly, in Bibikhin's use of the works of N.V. Gogol.

Gogol as the Key to Understanding Bibikhin's Metaphysics

As already mentioned, in his *Introduction to the Philosophy of Right*, Bibikhin invites us to look at Russia with the eyes of a "viewer" like the Marquis de Custine—who, among other things, correctly notices the Russian tendency not to protect their bodies, observing how Petersburg house-painters work without precautions: "There were never many house-painters in France, and they weren't nearly as daring as the Russians. People everywhere value their life exactly as much as it is worth." After this observation, Bibikhin gives a footnote where he writes that in these years Gogol was giving readings from his play *The Marriage*, including scene XIV: "*Podkolesin:* [...] Aren't the Russian people bold. *Agafya Tikhonova:* In what way? *Podkolesin*: Well, they work hard. They stand on the very rooftops... I was walking by a house, and the plasterer was working up there, not afraid of anything" (Bibikhin 2005a: 90).

 This is not just a fortuitous association, more or less accidental. Although Bibikhin does not have a separate course on Gogol, he periodically turns to him: in the important article "Kierkegaard and Gogol," in the course *Know Thyself*, where he devotes several central pages to an analysis of "The Nose," and in the *Introduction to the Philosophy of Right*, where one of the lectures is titled "The Government Inspector." Bibikhin is not only interested in Gogol's texts but in the existential drama of his life—and clearly the object of interest is first of all the metaphysical implications of Gogol's worldview, however closely tied it is to artistic form and ideological content. Thus, from the perspective of this essay, it is not superfluous to dig deeper into Gogol's plots, testing an assumption that it is precisely in this writer's work that the interrelation of "*sophia,*"

"strangeness," and "interest" acquires the systematic meaning I have been analyzing in Bibikhin's thought.[19]

Using *The Government Inspector* to explore the phenomenon of right, Bibikhin reminds his students that he is discussing a play that, in its author's words, forced people "to fix all eyes [*vzglianut' vo vse glaza*] suddenly on themselves and take fright at what they saw." He then comments on this phrase:

> To fix all eyes suddenly on themselves,' i.e., having seen themselves entirely, linked with the conjunction *and*, to *take fright*. It follows that each is equally as powerful as the other. The fact that I am not living the life I should be living is obvious. What rights can I have in this case, what law am I allowed to live by, if I drown in the feeling of my own guilt as soon as I pay any attention to myself? None. To a large extent my right to life is contingent, a play-thing, given to me as a comedy, a joke; it belongs to me no more than to Khlestakov, brings me joy for a time and sooner or later is taken away by the first person I meet. I rush greedily for this comic, contingent right to live, fearing my own faultiness, like a drowning man grasping at straws (Bibikhin 2005a: 73).

Strictly speaking, the function of the government inspector is to reveal in the place of the "transcendental subject" that very "being-in-between," Inter-esse, that immediately problematizes any "constitution" of beings as experiential coherency (and, it follows, "ownership" [*sobstvennost'*]). True inspection requires a corresponding demonstration. Bibikhin follows this principle in his discussion of "The Nose" (in the course *Know Thyself*):

> What could be more monstrous than trying to pray in a church and going up to another worshiper, yet not saying to him, *you are my brother, you are my neighbor, you are as dear to me as I am to myself*, but instead, *you are my nose*? We thought that, having recognized himself in the other, the man would find himself in openness to the other as if to himself. But the opposite occurs: with recognition the man loses himself, for he has departed, slipped away, detached from himself, and he sees himself taken away from himself, not his own (Bibikhin 1998: 133).

Of course, the surreal situation of "The Nose" recalls those "sinister ecstasies" of the morning, described by P. Berger and T. Luckmann, when one does not recognize oneself in the mirror (and one also suspects one's wife and kids are mysterious interlopers). The *unreality* of this situation appears automatically, as soon as the experience of the lonely subject so-

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[19]   Below I will say more about "strangeness" and "interest." As for "*sophia*," here one can refer to the fundamental study of M. Vaiskopf: *Gogol's Plot: Morphology, Ideology, Context* (Vaiskopf 2002), where this topic is explored in all its detail.

lidifies into the ceaseless, coherent activity of the intersubjective apparatus (Berger, Luckmann 1966: 169–70). However, even for Major Kovalev the situation is no more than a scandal, something "indecent." Upon reuniting with his nose, the only thing Kovalev does is "return from a temporary, scandalous duality to his normal, unnoticeable one" (Bibikhin 1998: 137). Thus, the "reunion" here is the same as the (temporary) calm the officials in *The Government Inspector* achieve by bribing Khlestakov (who is only taken for the real inspector because he optimally embodies the "common banality" [*obshchee mesto*] of human nature). Following Bibikhin, one can define this operation as the *privatization of interest*. Significantly, the sweep of such privatization can take on a global character; even categories like "universum" or "all-unity" [*vseedinstvo*] risk being corrupted:

> ...individuality, in order to acquire the necessary and defining forms in which individuality consists—simplicity, indivisibility, coherency (not the coherency Gogol's Major Kovalev wanted restored for his *private interest* [emphasis added. — *A.P.*], only noticing the absurdity of his existence when his nose started riding around Petersburg separately from him in carriage, serving in the academic department as a state councilor, and praying in the Kazan Cathedral, but that full totality that Gogol defends, in a fight to the death, in his Major Kovalev, and which Dostoevsky lost and could not find in *The Double*)—has nothing to lean on but the whole and, in the final analysis, the universal. They will say here we are approaching the problem of *all-unity* [*vseedinstvo*] or perhaps *conciliarism* [*sobornost'*]. This will not clarify our situation but only shows how dangerous it is. We risk slipping into a deep, rutted path, from which sooner or later we will have to pull ourselves out, so we had better do it right away (Bibikhin 1998: 148–149).

Is Bibikhin's turn to Gogol simply one illustration of his thesis about the "full" universality of the philosophical gesture (in light of which, for example, the opposition of Athens and Jerusalem becomes false[20])? Once again, the content of this gesture is the possibility and necessity of full, uninterrupted vision, capable of achieving an experience of the original inter-esse beyond any individual, private interests—"*sophia*," *but* exclusively as being gripped by the "strangeness" of the world. One gets the impression that the issue here (perhaps only in part) is a certain secular

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[20]   "*...in general it is good* to be able to note the unity of Athens and Jerusalem because the superficial effect of their opposition, as in Shestov, or in Horuzhy, requires a narrow understanding of Athens and Jerusalem for its support, i.e., misunderstanding them. The ability to see the full—and very old, much older than the Gospels and even Socrates—connectedness of what at first appear to be poles is never useless, is always worth it, and *only* on this path will the search not be exhausted, not force us to save ourselves with schemas, will always again and again open up *the present* and not simply examples for our surprising constructions" (Bibikhin 2012: 205).

version of an utterly apophatic discourse, when everything acquired on the plane of immanence reveals its inauthenticity, lack of unity, fictiveness: Khlestakov is *not the real* inspector, Kovalev may be a collegiate assessor even with his nose, but all the same he isn't real either (perhaps he is "from the Caucasus")—and isn't everyone and everything like this? Still, earlier I discussed how performing this gesture is possible only as the hermeneutic of a concrete historical situation; consequently, in order not to become an abstract trope of "scholastic" philosophizing, it is necessary all the same to look at what is specific, what emerges as the condition of possibility for the *actual* disclosedness of the contemporary situation for a fullness of vision. It is possible that in the interest of this fullness the experience of turning precisely to Gogol should not be interrupted.

If there is any work in which the tension between the empirical seizure (*zakhvat*) of property (*sobstvennost'*) and metaphysically being gripped (*zakhvachennost'*) by what is "one's own" (*sobstvennyi*) is taken to its limit, then it is clearly *Dead Souls*. Indeed, the biography of Chichikov is an experimental thematization of a fully gripped character, and gripped by nothing other than that form of energy that is also most characteristic for our times—*the energy of a "business undertaking."* The fact that business, according to Bibikhin, is a "breakdown into what is not one's own," and what is "one's own" is exclusively philosophy—this is precisely an argument not *against*, but *for* business. True philosophizing is accessible only as a rising above, realized *within* full involvement with "what is not one's own," and not some kind of "superiority", supposedly guaranteed by the availability (in fact, residual) of certain "places" (like the Institute of Philosophy in the Russian Academy of Sciences—and recent events surrounding the ownership of its building are symptomatic), where some kind of humanities, spirituality, higher values, and so on are cultivated.

Chichikov is connected to the function of the inspector in an essential way. He realizes his "interest" precisely in the time *between* the submission of old "inspector tales" and the submission of new ones (a business undertaking as such can be defined, at its limit, as a certain global synthesis made possible by truly abiding in a situation of inter-esse). For this reason, the dead souls are in their way a symbol for untapped productive possibilities (untapped precisely because of their spectrality and marginality). In reaction to Manilov's words that they are "in a way complete rubbish," Chichikov remarks that they are "very much not rubbish" (Gogol 1953: 38). Moreover, Chichikov's travels are also an analysis of entrepreneurial talents (Manilov's dreaminess, Nozdrev's recklessness, Sobakevich's solidity, etc.), seen from the perspective of a synthesis of *the ideal* entrepreneur (and if Pliushkin, who ends the novel's "first circle," is a senseless collector of all sorts of rubbish, then at the end of the "second circle," Kostanzhoglo derives income from every kind of rubbish; Chichikov is interesting because of his literal situation *between* them—we even learn his biography at a moment of rupture and crisis in the narrative).

As already mentioned, for Bibikhin the experience of being achieves its "*sophiac*" fullness in a "strange" moment of *amechania*. But Chichikov falls into *amechania* precisely at the peak of experiencing the successful completion of his voyage, when, having counted up the list of souls he has acquired, he suddenly begins to imagine each of their individual fates: "He was overcome with a strange feeling, incomprehensible even to him. Every one of the little papers seemed to have its own particular character, and through them it seemed as if the peasants themselves received their own character" (Gogol 1953: 140). The words he says after he seems to have come out of his stupor (Bibikhin's "being gripped"):

> Ha, ha! Twelve o'clock!' said Chichikov finally, looking at his watch. 'How did I dig myself in so deep here? It'd be all right if I was doing something productive, but I'm neither doing one thing or another; first I started talking in circles [*zagorodit' okolesinu*] and then I got lost in thought. What a fool I am, really![21] (Gogol 1953: 144).

Is this not an example of how, beyond "our" private interest, interesse *proper* makes itself known—the dissociation of being, the coming to rest of everything in it that claimed the character of "property" or "what is one's own"?

But what proves the importance of this episode in the text of *Dead Souls*? The "inserted" story of Captain Kopeikin can serve as a reflexive confirmation of its role; after all, the city officials who tried to guess Chichikov's identity are equally "wasting time," first listening to a useless, superfluous story about an officer who lost an arm and a leg in the 1812 campaign, vainly tried to secure the necessary relief, but in the end, after a scandal in the general's office, was forced to become a brigand. Just as Chichikov calls himself a fool, the postmaster who tells this story calls himself "calf-meat" (since Chichikov is not, after all, missing any limbs). We know that Gogol was prepared to make any concessions to the censor, so long as he could keep this episode. We can thus discern its central, pivotal role—but what role exactly?

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[21]   We should take the word "to dig oneself in deep" (*zakopat'sia*) literally. Chichikov basically confirms Korobochka's idea about his intention to raise the dead from their graves. A. Sinyavsky notes the *resurrective* function of Chichikov's "foolishness" (Abram Terts [A. Siniavskii] 2009: 492–498). As for "talking in circles," this is precisely how A. Bely characterizes the activity of Chubarov, the listless horse in Chichikov's *troika*: "The *troika* of horses that rush Chichikov across Russia are his entrepreneurial talents. One of them doesn't take him where he needs to go, making the movement of the *troika* veer to one side, lifting the wheel [*okolesina*]…" [Translator's note: Here Bely is playing on the origins of the phrase *gorodit okolesinu*, meaning to "talk gibberish." The verb *kolesit'*, the root of which is *koleso* ("wheel"), can mean to ride in a carriage and diverge from one's path, riding in circles. The metaphor for senseless (circuitous, stray, etc.) speech derives from this meaning of the word.]

In order to answer this question, a small digression is necessary. We know what significance *onomatopoeia* has for understanding Gogol's works. A simple example: *Dead Souls* opens with what seems to be an empty discussion between two peasants about the wheel of the cart in which Chichikov appears—that it can probably make it to Moscow but not to Kazan—and after many pages we learn (precisely when Chichikov "falls" into his musings on the fates of the souls he has bought) that on the serfs' surnames is *Make-it-don't-make-it* [*Doezzhai-nedoedesh'*]. It is as if just this unproductive stoppage and misfortune in the undertaking are the real interest and goal of the hero's travels. Indeed, Chichikov's attention to proper names is constantly emphasized. He is surprised by the Latinate ending on the Greek name of one of Manilov's sons; he declares Korobochka's name and patronymic "charming"; the theme reaches its apogee when he is looking for Pliushkin, whom a peasant he meets on the road calls "patched up":

> There was a noun added to the word 'patched up,' very appropriate, but unacceptable in a high-class conversation, so we will leave it out. Still, one can guess that its expression was felicitous, since Chichikov was still laughing, sitting in his cart, even though the peasant had long since disappeared from view and was traveling on far ahead. The Russian people aren't afraid to express themselves! And if a Russian bestows an epithet on someone, it will attach itself to all his kin and offspring, dragging along with him to work and in retirement, in Petersburg and at the edge of the world (Gogol 1953: 113).

It is significant that Pliushkin completes the series of landowners that Chichikov visits in the first volume, and the author lets us in on his hero's biography only after this meeting. We learn of the almost *paternal* feelings that Pliushkin unexpectedly feels for his uninvited guest; from Chichikov's biography we learn that his origins were "dark and humble," and he was born resembling "neither his mother, nor his father, but a young man who had been passing through"; finally, we learn that one fine day his father sent him off to study without shedding a single tear, giving him "half a copper for expenses and sweets" (Gogol 1953: 233–235). No less important is the fact that Chichikov turns out to be enthralled not by Pliushkin's proper name but his *sobriquet* – not an abstract, completely effaced gesture of naming but the indication of a concrete "characteristic that turns out to describe you from head to toe."[22] But then what should

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22   One of Bibikhin's remarks on the function of the Father from the afterword to his translation of Freud's "Moses and Monotheism" comments on the situation under discussion here with remarkable precision: "In connection with this one can note that the norm of naming with a patronymic, which exists, it seems, only in Russia, implants the institution of the Father in our quotidian experience in such a way that occurs nowhere else in the world. In the same way, according to the "principle" of ambivalence, our abusive language, the most basic and widespread formula of which an-

Chichikov's sobriquet be, or, more precisely, what is his *metaphysical-proper* name? His school friends called him "money-grubber" when he only gave a tiny sum to help an old teacher—but, in acting this way, he was faithfully following the *paternal command* (and also prohibition), given to him upon his departure:

> ...and most of all keep track of and save your kopecks [*kopeika*]: this is the most reliable thing in the world. A comrade or a friend will scam you and be the first to give you up when trouble comes, but a kopeck won't give you up no matter what trouble you're in. You can do anything, break your way through anything with a kopeck (Gogol 1953: 235).

Is it not obvious that *Kopeikin* is "Chichikov's" real, fundamental name (or patronymic?), the memory of which is repressed by the logic of the business undertaking and access to which is possible only in reverse (strictly speaking, the absurdity of the content and inserted character of the tale is used to confirm precisely this truth)?

Of course, this is not the place to stop in any kind of detailed way on the theme of "Gogol and Psychoanalysis," although it is clear that in one way or another it is not alien to the horizon of Bibikhin's thought. The turn to *Dead Souls* aims to show the possibility, so important for Bibikhin (and Heidegger), of metaphysics as an experience of concrete historical hermeneutics. The fact is that the figure of Captain Kopeikin "physically" embodies that "nothing," which once again completely defines Chichikov's business project though the uncanny feeling (or anxiety) it inspires. It has been said that because *Dead Souls* was unfinished, Gogol managed to avoid a *final* note of ideological falsity. Bibikhin's "*amechania*" also dangerously approaches a kind of universal metaphysical trope (in the manner of expenditure for Bataille or Nietzsche's "festival for the gods"). The final appearance of the real inspector, the famous "mute scene," which Bibikhin discusses in his *Introduction to the Philosophy of Right*, tempts us to seek a "conservative revolutionary" solution and confirm a kind of fundamentally "Byzantine" verticality – however, miraculously, without "onticizing" it.

But the real lesson of *Dead Souls* consists, perhaps, in the fact that the *true inspector appears not at the end but in the middle*—in a kind of interval between acts. In his terrible exactingness and despite the obvious fact that he is disabled, this is Captain Kopeikin's place – not the "highest" place but "any" place at all. This image incarnates what has been bracketed by the business undertaking, becoming visible only when the uninterrupted entrepreneurial vision breaks down. The continuity of Chichikov's project is

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nihilates paternity (the one who pronounces the formula declares himself simultaneously to have taken the father's place and consciously rejects any paternal responsibility), also turns out to be an exclusively Russian particularity, surrounding the institution of the Father with an uncanny feeling" (quoted in Freid 2014: 362).

constituted precisely by this "blind spot" *from which* he sees his own movement; and this is precisely why this perspective is incapable of producing the "surplus value" of sovereign favor. It can turn only to what cannot be blessed with the attention of any power, however sovereign. (Unlike Major Kovalev, Captain Kopeikin loses not his nose but his hope of integral being in the world—this is why his brigandage is a sign of despair rather than "courageous decisiveness"). Does Captain Kopeikin (like his anagrammatic brother Akaky Akakievich from Gogol's "Overcoat") demand attention to his being-so (*Sosein*) in a struggle for his rights as an individual? No, more accurately we can say he *demonstrates* the "seamy side" constituted by the borders of these "rights" ("the woods" are also the madness beyond the walls of the *polis*). Bibikhin writes of "court ballet" as an expression of the will to "appear at one's best" before the judging viewer—but Gogol's characters (as if "amechanically" frozen in the space between a scandal and an uprising) show the part of us that constructs the very position of this gaze, investing energy in its place. Thus, Nicholas I allowed *The Government Inspector* to be shown, since the absolutism of his power ideally corresponds to the "mute scene" of its ending. But the ghost of Akaky Akakievich is no longer mute; despite the "underdevelopment" of his speech, he dares to contradict the "important personage." Captain Kopeikin does not interrupt his motion at all; he breaks a contract, makes any ending impossible, any "final cause," and thus also the "*arche*" of the Sovereign.

The Human's "Own": Monstrosity and Disability

Thus, the metaphysical "underbelly" of the contemporary Russian situation will be to reveal, beyond all "seizures of property (*zakhvaty sobstvennosti*)," the absolute "enunciatedness," "indicativeness" of one's being as what is *authentically one's own* (*sobstvennoe*) —an almost defiant rejection of all "rights" for the higher right of the *observer*—which, of course, is "ontically" fraught with the "*amechania*" of activity, automatically following one "interest" or another. And if here one can speak of *manipulation*, then its author, Bibikhin suggests, is (or perhaps must be) not someone else, but *we ourselves*—although again, "it is an illusion to think this is a simple distinction." But who are *we ourselves*?

The given problem (where is "manipulation" after all, and where is "falling out into the act," when we present ourselves to the rulers of "things themselves"?) forces us again to recall the theme of the human and the animal—a theme that both unites and divides Heidegger and Bibikhin. In his well known "transitional" course *What is called thinking?*, Heidegger says that thought is "handiwork" (*ruchnaia rabota*) and, correspondingly, only humans have a *hand* (*ruka*) (in no way comparable to an animal's paw). Moreover, he *is* this hand, the hand as an organ of being in the world, a sign of the capacity of dealing with beings *as such*. The hu-

man, in other words, is the one who is always being ruled (*rukovodstvovat'sia*), led by the hand (*ruko-vodim*) —by an understanding of being that is excessive in relation to the grasping, "pawing" of one thing or another (and in this case the latter cannot even be considered a thing). Here Hölderlin's "a sign we are, without meaning" ("Ein Zeichen sind wir, deutungslos") emerges in turn as the formula leading Heidegger's thought.

In his analysis of the text of these Heideggerian "transitions," J. Derrida emphasizes how Heidegger speaks of a singular hand, and, making use of the idiomatic potential of the French translations of Hölderlin's "Mnemosyne" (where *Zeichen* is rendered as *monstre*), he brings into the field of visibility the *monstrous* character of Heidegger's understanding of the human. Perhaps in part incriminating Heidegger's gesture as fьhrer-like, Derrida for his part (responding to Heidegger's definition of thought as "handicraft" or "handiwork") asserts a preference for the "multi-handed" and "multi-tongued" work of a typewriter, automatically disseminating the univocacy of any pure call or summons (indeed, the theme of manipulation arises in this context for both Derrida and Bibikhin). The human's being gripped by the "hand," the main function of which is *giving* for Heidegger, the ability to give away or hand over (Bibikhin picks up on this motif in his reading of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* with his idea that property only achieves full consummation in alienation) is placed by Heidegger clearly beyond any "zoology" as a kind of exclusive "manner" of Dasein. Derrida, though, discerns a purely dogmatic solution here, as if the difference between "to give" (*geben*) and "to take" (*nehmen*) has the character of a pure opposition—as if the gift, giving, is always already devoid of any possible strategic trick, enabling a more effective seizure (*zakhvat*) (Derrida 1987: 175–176). Derrida ironically remarks that "a monkey *without* a hand" turns out to be the background or even the cost of this "single-handedness" of the human (and the human turns out to be a member of the species of a rather strange, monstrous "humanism") (Derrida 1987: 174).

To Heidegger's hand as a sign of a certain *arche* (of speech as the power of gathering) Derrida opposes, of course, the *other* hand (or even "the other of the hand") —not as an instrument of grasping but as a sign of a kind of "poliarchy," the impermissibility of sole command. (This is the source of the reference to Heidegger's characteristic neglect of presence's sexual aspect, marked, according to Lacan, by the logic of "not-all," and also the theme of the caress, as explored by Levinas.[23]) The other hand is a never singular hand of writing in its function of disseminating, deconstructing any speech, any meaningful sense that might be deemed "proper" or "one's own" (*sobstvennyi*) (for example, the interpretations of Hölderlin's "sign without meaning" as a sign whose "absent" meaning is being, which appears, of course, as "the nothing of beings").

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[23]   Bibikhin similarly criticizes Vladimir Soloviev's treatment of sexual love (Bibikhin 2012: 303–320).

This theme of power, the hand, and the gesture is also relevant to Agamben's lecture "What is a commandment?", where, instead of Derrida's "democratic" reading of Heidegger, a possible anarchist version is offered—a kind of ontology of the pure "showing" —an abduction or moving away of any mandate (*poruchenie*) or guarantee (*ruchatel'stvo*). Bartleby the scrivener with his formula "I would prefer not to…" (the negativism of which is "beyond all negation" (Deleuze 1998: 71)) will be the conceptual character to personify this ontological project (Agamben 2011).

Among the characters showing some kinship to Bartleby, Agamben lists Akaky Akakievich (Agamben 1999: 243). His conversation with the "significant personage" is, of course, nothing but a repetition of Captain Kopeikin's own challenge to power. The relevance of this link is clear: Kopeikin has only one hand (as a "human" should), and at the same time he is missing a hand (and in this he can be identified a "monkey"). What is this a sign of? Is it a sign (not) without meaning, a sign that is not only a "monster" but also *disabled*?[24]

In Mark Chagall's cycle of illustrations to *Dead Souls*, there is one where Captain Kopeikin is depicted standing next to Napoleon (the second version of Chichikov's identity suggested by the officials of the provincial city of NN: might Chichikov not be Napoleon escaped from his island exile? Chichikov's position, it follows, is also *between* Napoleon and Kopeikin). It is telling that while Kopeikin is depicted as one-armed (*odnorukii*), Napoleon is single-armed (*edinorukii*), characteristically holding his arm behind his back. Here two things should be recalled: first, Napoleon's *monstrosity* (reflected in one of his own sobriquets: "the Corsican monster") and, second, his "metaphysical" mission as a *sign* of the "end of history" (in Hegel's narrative). Against this background, Captain Kopeikin's *disability* clearly signifies a bad infinity of produced and reproduced *rejects*, "human scraps" to use a phrase of M. Surya's (Surya 2002)— an infinity that stains the "ideality" of completion. Yet, one should not

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24   S. Žižek titled his preface to the second edition of *The Ticklish Subject* "Why Lacan is not a Heidegarian." Strictly speaking, this "non-Heidegerrianism" is motivated precisely by the problem of the sign orienting the relation of the human subject to his own being: "Lacan's point, rather, is that Heidegger misses the properly traumatic impact of the very 'passivity' of being caught in language, the tension between the human animal and language: there is a 'subject' because the human animal does not 'fit' language; the Lacanian 'subject' is the tortured, mutilated, subject. [...] The gap that separates Lacan from Heidegger is here clearly discernible precisely on account of their proximity; in particular, on account of the fact that, in order to designate the symbolic function at its most elementary, Lacan still uses Heidegger's term 'being': in a human being, desires lose their mooring in biology, they are operative only insofar as they are inscribed within the horizon of Being sustained by language. However, in order for this transposition from the immediate biological reality of the body to the symbolic space to take place, the subject has to live with a mark of torture inscribed onto his or her body, that is, his or her body has to be mutilated" (Žižek 2008: xvi).

identify him with those many *conventional* signs of "life's injustice," which only signal the necessity of certain "additional measures" that the system itself can take to give the appearance of greater moral solidity.

In the last section of *The Fundamental Concepts*, Heidegger makes the statement more than once that "this board is badly positioned," illustrating that being in the world has the character of a plan, always already disclosed in any utterance. One should somehow separately consider the relation of "apophantic *logos*" and the "logic of preference," the symbol of which is the formula used by Melville's Bartleby. Here it is important to recall that Akaky Akakievich's speech is also marked as completely idiosyncratic:

> One should know that Akaky Akakievich expressed himself for the most part in prepositions, adverbs, and, finally, those particles that definitively lack all meaning. If things got really difficult, he would even sometimes not finish his sentences at all, and quite often would begin with the words, "This, it's true, is completely, uh…"—and then nothing would follow, and he himself would forget, thinking that he'd already said everything (Gogol 1952: 137).

However, the "uh" in his speech is not simply a "sign without meaning" ("a completely meaningless particle") but the operator for an essential problematization of meaning or, better yet, not meaning as conceptual intelligibility but its *real* role. "Uh" suspends the intention and turns it from the predicate to the conjunction, from the thing to its being (and here it is worth mentioning that the copula is traditionally left out in Russian speech). And this turning radically changes a statement's meaning, when one finally gets to it—the judgment "secretaries are, uh… an unreliable folk" is clearly not the same as "secretaries are an unreliable folk." One could say, using F. de Saussure's distinction, that this modification occurs not only at the level of the sign's meaning but also its *value*—the "revolution of values" when a "disabled" person reveals that he can contest the "abled" character of power and its monopoly on ordering value along a single scale.[25]

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[25]   R. Barthes writes somewhere that the most radical revolution occurs at the level of grammar—t hus, Fourier writes the word "fairy" in both feminine and masculine genders, putting the inviolability of linguistic rules in doubt. Akaky Akakievich is perhaps still far from this—but nevertheless! While from "our" perspective seeing a new overcoat as the love of one's life is a clear sign of "regression," one should not forget what "presence of spirit" Akaky Akakievich needed to get to the end of the sentence that expressed all the consequences of his inability to mend his old overcoat: "'But, your excellency,' said Akaky Akakievich, trying to gather up a whole fistful, not very large, of that presence of spirit within him, and feeling at the same time that he had broken into a sweat in a terrible way, "I dared to disturb your excellency because secretaries, uh… are an unreliable folk…" (Gogol 1952: 153). One can say that the *Heideggerian* "moment of vision" (*Augen-*

Heidegger speaks of a "project"—but doesn't being in the world, the situation of abandonment ("thrownness") at a more fundamental, original level represent something like an *interjection*?[26] Gogol does not mention the *interjecto* in his description of Akaky Akakievich's manner of speaking, but if it is not fitting in a grammatical sense, ontologically, this term is more than appropriate. And, clearly, this is not *intersubjectivity*, when the space "between" is always already ascribed to certain established subjects. On the contrary, the latter's status is contested (for example, in Akaky Akakievich's head "even the bravest and most daring thoughts flashed: maybe he should use marten fur for the collar?" [Gogol 1952: 142]; on the other hand, higher ranking officials point to the inappropriateness of both his and Captain Kopeikin's "manner," considering their rank—thus, indicating their formal *riotousness* [*beschinstvo*, lit. "lack of rank"]).

Conclusion

In the end it will not be superfluous to reproduce once again Bibikhin's key statement about the metaphysics of the *one* and the *single*:

> The semantics of the *one-other* are quite unexpected in fact. *The other* does not mean a mechanical separation of the one from the many; it opens a perspective on *the whole.* Only through *the other*, the unique, strange, comic, idiotic, and illegal (an *inok* is "a brigand"), through exclusion from the norm, do we arrive at the whole. *The other* is the key to it, and apparently the only one (Bibikhin 2005b: 140–141).

Sophia strangeness interest: these are the fundamental concepts of Bibikhin's metaphysics, growing out of the hermeneutic situation of the

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blick), as the time of Akaky Akakievich's "decision," is here *not unrelated* to that *Lacanian* "crippledness" of the subject, mentioned above. Akaky Akakievich performs a genuinely political act (in Rancière's sense). He speaks when no one has thought to give him this right. And, of course, the overcoat is a libidinously charged object.

[26]   In his *New Science* G. Vico relates the concept of the monster to the original differentiation of society into nobles and plebeians. The children of the latter were named this way, since their marriages were illegal by definition; at the same time, in Vico's hermeneutics the Cyclops (Derrida refers to this character throughout his essay on Heidegger's Hand) is a metaphor for the first cultural human, since his single eye symbolizes the clearing of the primeval forest (a practical gesture of "*aletheia*" or "*nomos*"—the seizure of land). And, finally, *A-letheia* itself: as already mentioned, the procedure of leaving for the unconcealed turns out first of all to be political ("Lethe," according to Vico signifies the burial of the plebeians, deprived of their rights to leave their name in history). So Heidegger's assertion that "there can be no quarrels in the sphere of essential thought" is here contrasted with the inescapably polemical character of truth. Unity is problematized, political, and thus polemical through and through: "monstrousness" is in fact the condition of possibility for the human "norm"—but unity and singleness (of a hand or eye) are here devoid of any sacred meaning.

1990sbut poetically "pre-comprehended" much earlier, as a minimum already in Gogol (the characters discussed above are these same *others*). The most important conclusion that follows from this consists in the fact that instead of *Sophia*, as some kind of mythical transcendental "fullness of being," we have an immanent experience of *the sophia of the world* (Bibikhin uses precisely this term), and this "*sophia*" turns out to be fully synonymous with those "worldly" phenomena like "strangeness" and "interest." And, perhaps, this is the moment within Bibikhin's thought that resists any attempts to inscribe it unequivocally into a *conservative* category—even in spite of the author's intention.

Translated by Jonathan Platt

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