

“The Accidental Family in *The Adolescent* and Wittgenstein’s ‘Family Relations’: The Novel as Model of Meaning,” in: *Aspects of Dostoevsky's Poetics in the Context of Literary-Cultural Dialogues*. Editors: Katalin Kroó, Géza S. Horváth, Tünde Szabó. Volume 3 Dostoevsky Monographs Series. (Sankt-Peterburg: “Dmitrii Bulanin,” 2011), pp. 59-74.

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**THE ACCIDENTAL FAMILY
IN THE ADOLESCENT AND WITTGENSTEIN’S
‘FAMILY RELATIONS’
The Novel as Model of Meaning**

Not one of Dostoevsky’s fictional works conforms strictly to the Realist poetics such as it appeared in the French and Russian manifestoes of 1840 and 1841.¹ Dostoevsky’s characters are not “typical” characters of the nation, they are not represented through how they dress, eat, work and what kind of houses they live in. Dostoevsky’s characters are not “staged” sociological types as

¹ Compare *Curmeur I*. (éd.) *Les français peints par eux-mêmes*. Tome Premier. Paris, 1840. This was followed by *Nashi spisannye s natury russkimi. Vodovoz, baryshnia, armeiskii ofitser, niania, znakhar’, ural’skii kazak*. Vypusk pervyi – vypusk chetyrnadtsatyi. Kniga A. P. Bashutskogo. Izdanie Ia. A. Isakova. Sanktpeterburg, 1841. Compare also: *Okhotin N. G. A. P. Bashutskii i ego kniga: Prilozhenie k faksimil’nomu izdaniu*. Moskva, 1986. This, in turn, was followed by Faddei Bulgarin’s *Ocherki russkikh nravov ili litsevaia storona i iznanka roda chelovecheskogo* (Sketches of Russian Manners and Mores or the Inside and Outside of Mankind). Sanktpeterburg, 1845. There were also numerous “physiologies,” in which writers like Nikolai Nekrasov and Dostoevsky had their *debuts*. All translations from Russian are by Vladiv-Glover unless otherwise indicated.

Dickens' characters are. They are not assigned roles in costumes and set amidst a prescribed historical setting. Yet Dostoevsky's characters are nevertheless "real" or "true" but their "truth" resides in what Dostoevsky has called "realism in the higher sense." This "realism in the higher sense" means that Dostoevsky's characters reside, literally, on "another scene." This is a phrase used by Freud to designate the locus of dreams in the unconscious – *ein anderer Schauplatz*. It was a borrowing from Fechner, whom Freud cites in his own *Interpretation of Dreams*:

"Der grosse G. Th. Fechner spricht in seiner *Psychophysik* [1889, Bd. 2, 520 f.] ... die Vermutung aus, dass *der Schauplatz der Träume ein anderer sei als der des Wachen Vortellungslebens*."²

[The great G. Th. Fechner surmises in his *Psychophysics* ... that the scene of dreams is an entirely different scene to the one of waking conceptual life.]

Freud then adds his own gloss on Fechner's conjecture by calling "the other scene" a "psychical locality" ("psychische Lokalität), which is analogous to a place inside, say, a microscope or a photographic apparatus which serves as "die Vorstufe eines Bildes" – the proto-phase of an image. Freud thus connects the scene of dreams or the scene of the unconscious to the mechanisms of language or concept formation which are connected to a visualisation process. When Wittgenstein speaks of "Bild" – image – in the *Tractatus*, he is on the same wavelength as Freud even if he does not speak about the unconscious.

Just as the scene or setting for Dostoevsky's characters is not the "real" world of objects which might be mimetically reproduced in fiction, so also Dostoevsky's characters cannot be judged as "real people" with real human biographies. They are not characters to whom prototypes can be assigned easily although Dostoevsky scholarship has uncovered many real people after whom Dostoevsky might have fashioned his fictional characters. What matters when one looks at Dostoevsky's characters are *the relations* in which they find themselves. This is nowhere more true than in

² Freud S. *Die Traumdeutung* (1900) // Freud S. *Studienausgabe Band II*. Herausg. Mitscherlich A. et al. Frankfurt-am-Main, 1982. P. 512. All translation from German are by Vladiv-Glover unless otherwise indicated.

Dostoevsky's hermetic penultimate major novel, *The Adolescent*, which carries the subtitle "An Accidental Family."³

The family relations framing the characters in *The Adolescent* are more relations than family. The two terms are not of equal force. The first term – family – is a metaphor or code. But it is an empty code, a name without substance, without a general meaning which might point to an essential category referred to as "the family": hence the attribute "accidental." The emptiness of the general concept "family" is underlined by the fact that nothing about the origin and composition of the characters in Dostoevsky's novel, who are designated by the names "mother," "father," "sister," "husband," "wife" or "aunt" corresponds to accepted notions of familial relations of "relatives" within the social fabric of 19th-century Russia. Dostoevsky's "accidental family" is not a denatured family because of new developments in Russian society, covered by Dostoevsky in the "Environment" column of his *Diary*

³ The first seminal study on *The Adolescent* was produced by Gerigk H.-J. Versuch über Dostojevskijs "Jüngling": Ein Beitrag zur Theorie des Romans. München, 1965. Gerigk's study ends with the path-breaking insight in Dostoevsky research that *The Adolescent* transcends the tradition of the picaresque novel, to which it pays tribute, through the representation of the adolescent psyche as a snapshot in time of a "presence" or a given state of affairs (*Zuständlichkeit*), which sets in train the tradition of Modernist representations of adolescents by Robert Musil, James Joyed and Jerome D. Salinger. Compare Gerigk H.-J. 1965. P. 193. However, Gerigk does not pursue the phenomenological insight which forms the end-point of his analysis of genre. The present study is an attempt to continue where Gerigk's study breaks off. No major studies on *The Adolescent* have appeared in Dostoevsky scholarship since the publication of Gerigk's monograph some forty years ago. However, in the wake of a rising interest in Dostoevsky and psychoanalysis, which started with Bem A. L. Dostoevsky: Psikhоanaliticheskie etiudy. Prague, 1938; some interesting studies have appeared, including a seminal one by Susanne Fusso on *The Adolescent: Fusso S. Dostoevsky's Comely Boy: Homoerotic Desire and Aesthetic Strategies in A Raw Youth*. Evanston, Northwestern UP, 2006., as well as her article: *Fusso S. Secrets of Art and Secrets of Kissing: Towards a Poetics of Sexuality in Dostoevsky // The Dostoevsky Journal: An Independent Review*, Vols. 3–4. 2002–2003. P. 47–59. The early studies on Dostoevsky from a psychoanalytic perspective belong to the Russian Formalists: Bem A. L. Dostoevskii: psikhоanaliticheskie etiudy. Praga, 1938; *Lapshin I. I. Obrazovanie tipa Krafta v Podrostke // Bem A. L. (ed.) O Dostoevskom: sbornik statei. T. 1. Praga, 1929. P. 140–144; Chizhevskii D. Dostoevsky psikholog // Bem A. L. (ed.) O Dostoevskom: sbornik statei. T. 2. Praga, 1933. P. 51–72. A good bibliography of these early studies can be found in Kravchenko M. Dostoevsky and the Psychologists. Amsterdam, 1977.*

of a Writer, it is denatured because it is not meant as a natural family but as a virtual family. The “family” which is *meant* here is a family of concepts or signs which together constitute a complex relational structure called sense or meaning. Dostoevsky’s coinage “an accidental family” is thus a complex and extended metaphor reminiscent of the one used some decades later (in 1945) by the Modernist philosopher of language, Ludwig Wittgenstein, who spoke of “family relations” (“Familienähnlichkeiten”) as the distinguishing feature of all concepts, whose borders are by definition unbounded, open-ended and polyvalent. Concepts are the building blocks of sense or meaning and the fact that concepts do not lend themselves to strict general definitions imparts fluidity to all sense or meaning. Mikhail Bakhtin spoke of Dostoevsky’s novel as being dialogic in the context of the “unfinalisable word” (“nezavershennoe slovo”). Wittgenstein, before Bakhtin, defined the dialogicity of all concepts through a critique of “general concepts,” taking the concept of “games” as his example to illustrate the non-essential and differential quality of meaning or sense. Wittgenstein used the analogy of “family resemblances” to establish the proposition that “things that are called by one name – things of a kind – do not always have one unique thing in common...That is, it is not a necessary truth that things subsumed under a general name – ‘unicorn,’ ‘chair,’ ‘game’ – must have some essential property that makes them things subsumable under that name or that makes them things of that kind.”⁴ This critique of essentialism in language embodies Wittgenstein’s attempt to define what language – or sense – is. Since he uses “language” to include “meaning,” it is perhaps better to call “language” by another name – namely, discourse. Thus for Wittgenstein, meaning (sense) or discourse is a *relation* constituted by many different concepts related through similarities and differences. A general concept, such as “games,” makes senses as a “whole” or a totality, in the same way that a “family” constitutes a whole or a totality. A general concept thus conceals many nuances of meaning which are in constant interaction (Bakhtin would say that concepts are in a “dialogic” relation with one another) and in a shifting relation which resembles that of family members inside a functional “unity”

⁴ Suter R. *Interpreting Wittgenstein: A Cloud of Philosophy, a Drop of Grammar*. Philadelphia, 1989. P. 27.

called a “family.” Like family resemblances amongst family members, concepts have no strict borders, they become meaningful through (subtle) differences and similarities with other concepts inside the network of relations forming a totality called meaning. Thus the “family” becomes, in Wittgenstein’s analogy, a code word for “sense” or the structure we call “meaning”:

“Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all, – but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways. And it is because of this relationship, or these relationships, that we call them all ‘language.’ I will try to explain this.

66. Consider for example the proceedings that we call ‘games.’ I mean board-games, card-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all? – Don’t say: ‘There *must* be something common, or they would not be called ‘games’ – but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all. – For if you look at them you will not see something that is common to *all*, but similarities, relationships, and a whole series of them at that. ... Look for example at board-games, with their multifarious relationships. Now pass to card-games; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ball-games, much that is common is retained, but much is lost. – Are they all amusing? Compare chess with noughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball-games there is winning and losing but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared. Look at the parts played by skill and luck; and at the difference between skill in chess and skill in tennis. Think now of games like ring-a-ring-a-roses; here is the element of amusement, but how many other characteristic features have disappeared! ...

And the result of this examination is: we see a complicated network of similarities, overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.

67. I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than “family resemblances [Familienähnlichkeiten];” for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament etc. etc. overlap and criss-cross in the same way. – And I shall say: ‘games’ form a family.”⁵

⁵ Wittgenstein *L. Philosophical Investigations*. Second Edition. Trans. G E M Anscombe. Oxford and Malden, Massachusetts, 1998 (First 1953). P. 31–32.

In Wittgenstein's analogy between discourse and family relations, the family members become metonymies of each other: they have certain common features which are substituted by uncommon ones. Wittgenstein's "family relation" (meaning) is thus a structure of *difference*. Members of that relation – concepts – are defined not only by what they have in common but by what they do *not* share. As members of the structure called "a family" they have a "shared" identity (meaning) only through the other members of the "family." The *relationship of difference* is not a typology – it is non-hierarchical. Instead of being related through "tables" or forming a typology, concepts ("family members"), represented by signs (images, portraits), appear side-by-side, as contiguities, forming a *topology*. This echoes Freud's idea of the psyche as a *topology* – a surface of relations between various elements of the psychic apparatus whose function is to produce "meanings" for the subject.

The Adolescent as a Topology of Language

What Dostoevsky's novel shares with Wittgenstein's conception of language as a relation is that it is itself structured like a topology or a giant *tableau vivant* (living picture). What "moves" on the surface of this picture is the *mind* or *spirit* ("Geist" – as in Hegel's formulation in *The Phenomenology of Spirit*) of the narrator-hero, Arkady Dolgoruky. Arkady's family name – Dolgoruky – is the first characterological feature privileged in the text of the novel. His name is false if not misleading: Dolgoruky is the name of a prominent aristocratic clan of the Russian nobility of the 19th century but Arkady is the son of a former serf. Instead of "essence" to support it, Arkady's name is empty, without significance, without signifying the "general concept" that everyone mistakenly assumes it to be.

Arkady's "existence" is literally *in the word*, his written word: his *Notes*... which he says he is writing "for himself." Arkady's "Notes" are solipsistic in the same sense in which Wittgenstein defines solipsism as a function of language, as a limit of language. Thus according to Wittgenstein, meaning and the subject (the "I" who *means*) are one. The subject (the "I") cannot be divorced from

his (its) language but is *in* this language which is his (its) *world*. Thus, according to Wittgenstein,

“[T]here is no such thing as the subject that thinks or entertains ideas.

If I wrote a book called *The World as I found it*, I should have to include a report on my body, and should have to say which parts were subordinate to my will, and which were not, etc., this being a method of isolating the subject, or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject; for it alone could *not* be mentioned in that book.” (5.631)⁶

Here the same point is made about the subject as the one made earlier about concepts. Like a concept, the subject comes into being only in a relation, this time as a *limit* of the world:

“...The self of solipsism shrinks to a point without extension, and there remains the reality coordinated with it.” (5.64)⁷

Wittgenstein’s subject, whom the American artist Joseph Kosuth later comes to compare to a punctuation mark,⁸ is the metaphysical subject of language who is identical with language and sense and shares all the characteristics and logical presuppositions of sense:

“The philosophical self is not the human being, not the human body, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world – not a part of it.” (5. 641)⁹

This relational subject, who shares the metaphysical world of representation with words, is self-referential or tautologous, just like propositions in language. For again, according to Wittgenstein,

“[T]he propositions of logic are tautologous.” (6.1)

⁶ Wittgenstein L. *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Trans. Pears D. F. and McGuinness B. F. London and New York, 1989. First published in German in 1921, first English translation in 1922. The numbers in brackets refer to paragraphs in the *Tractatus*.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Compare Kosuth J. *The Play of the Unsayable: A Preface and Ten Remarks on Art and Wittgenstein* // *Art and Design Magazine* 34. 1994. P. 66–69. What Kosuth says is: “The *self* is grammatical – it punctuates.”

⁹ Wittgenstein L. 1989.

And:

“The fact that the propositions of logic are tautologies *shows* the formal – logical – properties of language and the world...” (6.12)

Wittgenstein’s theses about the structure of language and meaning reverberate in the structure of the plot and characterisation of Dostoevsky’s *The Adolescent* and hence can be used to decode a meta-level of meaning of the novel. The “accidental family” represented in the novel is the structure of a relation, like the “scaffolding” of logic deployed by Wittgenstein in order to explain the essence of language and thought in the *Tractatus*. This structure reveals all manner of facts as potentialities, as possible states of affairs which make up propositions of sense. Sense or the structure of meaning is both form and content of plot and character. Thus there is really no plot and no character – there are no “types” and no *caractères*.¹⁰ There is ultimately *no subject*, for Arkady can never emerge “objectively” from his own “Notes,” he can never be independent of his own word. As is the case for Wittgenstein’s subject of language in the *Tractatus*, Arkady’s word is his world.

This does not mean that the word of Arkady, the narrator, is monologic. The technique of “erlebte Rede” (experienced speech) is used consistently in this novel as in all other Dostoevskian novels. What it means is that the “world” of the novel is locked in Arkady’s *word* (discourse) or “concept.” This “world” as Arkady’s concept is the world as *inscription* – the inscription of impressions, memories, emotions and desires. Arkady’s inscription forms an entire genealogy of sentiment – the sentiment of an adolescent poised to step into the life of the nation but who has not done so yet at the moment of the completion of his *Notes* which remain in the realm of potentialities, just like a proposition in language.

The Adolescent as a Topology of Desire

¹⁰ Compare Jules Janin’s introductory article to *Les français peints par eux-mêmes, Tome Premier*, where he points to the tradition in French letters, established by La Bruyère, of portraying types or typical “characters” of an epoch, national types at a particular time in history. *Curmeur I.* (éd.), 1840.

Arkady's narrative is motivated by strong emotions which are not easy to decipher at first glance. Arkady masks his emotions by a lot of talk – babble. He is one more of Dostoevsky's "babbling" narrators, almost an *ingénu* (artless) narrator who blurt out "truths" despite himself. Arkady's *Notes* call for an active reader who will supplement Arkady's omissions and occult story. This is the story of an adolescent's *desire* or of adolescent desire as such. It is about sexuality as a function of language and the formation of an individual as a self-consciousness.

As we know from Hegel, self-consciousness *is* desire – and desire is desire for recognition or *the desire of the Other*.¹¹ Arkady's desire is for the *Father* (Versilov) and for the Father's desire – the woman, Katerina Nikolaevna. Arkady's *Notes* are full of contradictions, inconsistencies, and exaggerations. They contain information obtained by ridiculous or unlikely means of "witnessing." One example is the conversation between Katerina Nikolaevna and Tatyana Pavlovna which Arkady "witnesses" when he hides behind the curtain in Tatyana Pavlovna's bedroom and overhears details about the "letter" Katerina Nikolaevna fears!¹² This is only Arkady's "second" meeting with Katerina Nikolaevna, who relates his blushing first encounter with her, not knowing that her unkind and unseemly report is overheard.

Katerina Nikolaevna's character is constructed through the expression of attitudes. Like Arkady, she has strong likes and dislikes which come to almost violent expression in the plot of the novel but which are not motivated by the plot. Or if they are, this motivation is perfunctory because Katerina Nikolaevna's expressivity is constituted on "another scene."

¹¹ Compare Hegel's definition of what is "essential" to self-consciousness and his conclusion that "self-consciousness is *Desire* in general." *Hegel G. W. F. Phenomenology of Spirit*. Trans. Miller A. V., with Analysis of the Text and Foreword by Findlay J. N. Oxford, New York, Toronto, Melbourne, 1977. P. 105. (Paragraph 167 of "B. Self-Consciousness, IV. The Truth of Self-Certainty). Jacques Lacan and the poststructuralist theorists of desire have elaborated on Hegel's definition to come up with the formula of "desire as desire of the Other." Compare *Lacan J. The Subject and the Other: Alienation // Lacan J. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Edited by Miller J-A., translated by Sheridan A. New York, London, 1981. P. 203–215.

¹² Compare *Dostoevsky F. M. Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh*. Tom trinadtsati: Podrostok. P. 127 (Part One, Chap 8, iii).

Arkady's "parents" – the former serf girl and the aristocratic Versilov – also have strong emotions but these are held back or repressed. The strongest emotion of Arkady's "Mother" is *abjection*.¹³ Her "life" is one of total and absolute *submission*. She in fact only exists as self-negation.

Arkady's "Father" – Versilov – is said to have gone through several inheritances and squandered them all. He is thus set in a relation of exchange or *dépense* – expenditure. Other than being covered by these abstract characteristics and endowed with some unsubstantiated "typical" class features (not enacted on the stage of the novel, in the diegetic space of the action), Versilov is not "real." He is a function of Arkady's desire. He is Arkady's Other, woven entirely out of Arkady's *wish* to meet with his "biological" father, a wish which in itself signifies a quest for origins.¹⁴ For all the reader knows, Arkady's *Notes* may be a figment of the narrator's imagination. None of what the writer of the *Notes* says in them may have ever happened. All could be the "language game" of a frustrated "adolescent," Arkady's equivalent of the *fort-da* game of Freud's grandson,¹⁵ through which Arkady overcomes his "passive" situation of unpleasure (Freud's "Unlust"-- , occasioned by loss and lack of recognition, and turns it into an "active" and pleasurable search for mastery.¹⁶

The plot of the novel is pure melodrama or the stuff of dreams. In the end, "nothing happens." No one is killed – all the "drama" of

¹³ On the concept of the abject and its significance in the constitution of the subject of language, compare *Kristeva J. Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York, 1982.

¹⁴ The quest for origin is associated by Freud with the death drive – itself a negativity in the psychic apparatus which functions as the groundless ground of language in the unconscious. Compare *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920) // *Freud S. Psychologie des Unbewussten*. Studienausgabe Band III. Herausg. von Mitscherlich A. et al. Frankfurt am Main, 1975. P. 246–48.

¹⁵ Freud observed his grandson at play when the mother of the child was absent. The game the child played was to throw a wooden reel with a string tied around it out of the cot, uttering a sound like "o-o-o-o" and then pulling it back into view with a joyful "da". This has become known in the Freudian psychoanalytic tradition as the "fort-da" game, or the game of absence/presence, interpreted as the basic structure of meaning. Compare *Freud S. Beyond the Pleasure Principle* // *The Freud Reader*, e d. by Gray P. London, 1995. P. 594–626. See also: "Jenseits des Lustprinzips" (1920) // *Freud S.* 1975. P. 213–273.

¹⁶ Compare *Freud S. Beyond the Pleasure Principle* // *Freud. S.* 1995. P. 600.

expressivity and strong emotions ends in an anti-climax. It is as if Arkady's violent emotions had to be covered over, masked, censored in order not to get the better of him. The action, instead, is a phantasmagoria of desire. Through it, an attempt is made to represent the *unrepresentable*. In this, Dostoevsky led the way for the Modernist generation to follow. Andrei Bely's 1918 novel *Petersburg* is a prominent legacy of Dostoevsky's phantasmagoric realism.

If one takes away ("brackets out") the melodramatic elements of the plot, what remains is a "phenomenological reduction"¹⁷ or a phenomenological space. This is the space of the *unconscious* which is transcendental, not materialist, positivistic or essentialist. Dostoevsky's novel is a drama of/in the unconscious – Freud's "other scene" which is a nowhere and which does not unfold in linear time.¹⁸

Is it possible to historicise this space? Is it possible to historicise a phenomenological reduction? What is the "historical" context of Dostoevsky's novel?

To answer these questions, let us turn to Nikolai Berdiaev's critical opinion about Dostoevsky's characters in general and those of *The Adolescent* in particular. As the leading philosopher and critic of Russian Symbolism, Berdiaev is representative of the Dostoevsky reception by the generation of Russian thinkers, artists and writers of the *fin-de-siècle* and the early 20th century. In a 1918 article, entitled "The Revelation about Man in the Creativity of Dostoevsky," Berdiaev offers an interpretation of Dostoevsky's art which is consistent with a conception of subjectivity provided by Freudian theory of the time, even if Berdiaev does not mention Freud:

¹⁷ Compare Edmund Husserl, whose phenomenological theory excludes or parenthesizes all that can be perceived and cognized or posited in the "natural attitude": the whole natural world, which is "there for us," to arrive at "pure consciousness" with its "pure mental processes" and its "pure Ego." See *Welton D.* (ed.) *The Essential Husserl: Basic Writings in Transcendental Phenomenology*. Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1999. P. 66–7 (based on *Ideas, I*, Sections 33–36 and 41–46).

¹⁸ Freud declares that the unconscious is "timeless" and that linearity or temporality appears only in the system W-Bw (*Wahrnehmung–Bewusstsein*, Perception–Consciousness). Compare *Freud S.* *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1920), and *Notiz über den "Wunderblock"*, (1925[1924]) // *Freud S.* 1975. P. 238 and 369.

“In the novels of Dostoevsky there is nothing, save for mankind and human relationships. This has to be apparent for anyone, absorbed in the reading of these spirit-gripping anthropologic tracts. All the heroes of Dostoevsky only but visit with one another, they converse with one another, and they are drawn into the miring abyss of tragic human fates. The sole serious vital deed of the people of Dostoevsky is their mutual-relations, their passioned attraction and repulsion. It is impossible to find any other sort of ‘deed,’ any other vital array in this immense and endlessly manifold human realm. Always there is depicted some sort of human centre, some sort of central human passion, and everything rotates, revolves around this human axis. There is depicted a whirlwind of passionate human relations, and into this whirlwind is drawn everything, everything somehow turns round in a frenzy. The whirlwind of impassioned, fiery human nature pulls down this nature into the mysterious, enigmatic, unfathomable depths. It is there that Dostoevsky discloses the human infinity, the bottomlessness of human nature. But even in the very depths, and in the light of day, and in the abyss man remains, his image and countenance do not disappear. We take delight from the novels of Dostoevsky. In each of them is revealed an impassioned entry into inexplicable depths, a human realm, in which everything exhausts itself. Within mankind is revealed infinitude and fathomlessness, and there is nothing except man, there is nothing interesting besides man.

Here for example is the ‘Adolescent’ (‘Podrostok’), one of the most genius-endowed and as yet insufficiently esteemed works of Dostoevsky. Everything revolves around the image of Versilov, everything is saturated by an impassioned relationship to him, by the human attraction and repulsion of him. The story concerns an adolescent, the illegitimate son of Versilov. No one is occupied by any sort of work, no one has an otherwise organic place in the established order of life, everything is off the beaten track, off the paths of orderly life, everything is in an hysteria and frenzy. Yet all the same there is the sense that everyone is at some immense deed, infinitely serious, and that they will resolve very important tasks. What indeed is this deed, what is this task? About it fusses the adolescent from morning till evening, whither it is that he hastens, and why has he not a moment of respite nor rest? In the usual sense of the word the adolescent – is a complete idler, as is also his father Versilov, as also are almost all the active personages in the novels of Dostoevsky. But all the same, Dostoevsky gives the impression that an important, serious, Divine deed is transpiring. Man for Dostoevsky is higher than any deed, he is also himself the deed. There is posited the living enigma about Versilov, about man, about his destiny, about the Divine image within him. The resolution of these riddles is a great deed, the greatest of deeds. The adolescent wants to

discover the mystery of Versilov. This mystery is hidden within the depths of man. All sense the significance of Versilov, all are struck by the contradictions of his nature, for all there is thrown into their gaze something deeply irrational in his character and in his life. The enigma of the complicated, contradictory, irrational character of Versilov with his strange fate, the riddle of an extraordinary man is for him a riddle about man in general. The whole complicated plot, the complex intrigue of the novel is but a means for the revealing of the man Versilov, for the revealing of complex human nature, about the antinomies of its passions. The mystery of the nature of man is disclosed most of all in the relations of men and women. And about love Dostoevsky happened to reveal something unprecedented in Russian and world literature, he had a fiery concept of love. The love of Versilov and Katerina Nikolaevna pulls in such an element of fiery passion, as nowhere and never existed. This fiery passion was concealed beneath an outward appearance of calm. At times it seems that Versilov – is the Vulcan of yore. But this impresses upon us also all the more sharply the image of Versilov's love. Dostoevsky shows the contradiction, the polarity and the antinomy in the very nature of this fiery passion. Such a most intense love is unrealisable upon the earth, it is hopeless, desperately tragic, it begets death and destruction. Dostoevsky does not like to take man in the set living order of the world. He always shows us man in the desperately hopeless and tragic, in the contradictions, leading to the very depths. Such is the utmost type of man, manifest by Dostoevsky.”¹⁹

It is clear from Berdiaev's comments that Dostoevsky's Modernist readers understood that his novels transcended ordinary realism and that they were not mimetic reproductions of “the spirit of the age” or of Russian “manners and mores.” For Berdiaev, Dostoevsky's novels are of cosmic significance and create characters that are larger than life. However, Berdiaev fails to historicise Dostoevsky's characters as myths about humanity which emerged under particular cultural conditions and as a result of new relations in the life of European Man in the age of capitalism. Instead, Berdiaev works on the basis of a vague model of “human

¹⁹ The Russian original text of this English extract is in *Berdiaev N. Tipy religioznoi mysli v Rossii*. Paris, 1989. P. 71–77. The original essay was published in *Russkaia mysl'*, 39, 2 (mart–aprel' 1918), P. 39–61. The English translation by Fr. S. Janos was found on the Berdiaev website. No published version of the translation could be found. I am grateful to June Pachuta Farris, bibliographer for Slavic, East European and Central Eurasian Studies, University of Chicago Library, for her kind assistance with these citations.

nature” which does not give any clues about the historically grounded modern European subject, and uses an equally unhelpful general model of “tragedy” outside the context of its Greek poetics.

There is no model of “tragedy” as defined in classical aesthetics (in Aristotle’s *Poetics*) encoded in the structure of Dostoevsky’s novel. Nothing “tragic” takes place with the characters in *The Adolescent* in the sense in which a classical tragic hero of Antiquity would be torn between “duty” and “love” or duty to the Gods and duty to the King. There is no “tragic mistake” – a deed perpetrated by the tragic hero whose causality is not in his character flaws but in a space outside causality. There is no tragic denouement in *The Adolescent*. In Arkady’s *Notes* all ends in a most prosaic manner.

However, Berdiaev had a feeling for the “unreal” representation of “love” in Dostoevsky’s novel. He did detect that the “love” between Katerina Ivanovna and Versilov is fraught with what he calls contradictions. While he does not find the historical context in which to explain his findings, we can assist his interpretation by historicising these “contradictions” through the theory of alienation and the “split subject” provided by 20th-century psychoanalysis. The “love” of Versilov and Katerina Ivanovna follows a model of relations which is true for all the other characters of *The Adolescent*. This love is closer to caprice and wilfulness than to the traditional (Christian) notion of “love” which is giving and forgiving. The capricious nature of “loving” alienates both the loved and the loving Other. Yet alienation is precisely the point of the relation: without it there would be no relation and there would be no “contradictions.”

The concept of alienation, used in psychoanalytic theory, does not have the negative connotations which Marx had given it when speaking of “alienated labour.”²⁰ Alienation is the condition – in the unconscious – of the modern subject of language. It is a condition resulting from the fact that the subject and its language are not one. On the contrary, language is said to “split” the subject, to remove it

²⁰ Compare Marx K. Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts. 1844, reprinted in Marx’s Concept of Man. Transl. Bottomore T. B., Ungar F., ed. by Fromm E. 1961. P. 93–109. // Thompson K. and Tunstall J. (eds.) Sociological Perspectives: Selected Readings. Harmondsworth, 1971. P. 51–62.

from Nature and to place it in Culture or the Symbolic Order.²¹ While Freud did not use the term “alienation” (“Entfremdung”) in this technical sense, he describes the phenomenon of a subject’s entry into language using the example of the *fort-da* game played by his one-and-a-half-year-old grandson in the absence of the mother as a means of combating the lack which the child experiences when separated from its primary object.

For Freud, the observation of the function of language as an overcoming of displeasure at the loss of the object (the mother) leads to the discovery of the repetition compulsion and the death drive – that which is beyond the pleasure principle, which can explain the dualistic or split nature of the affects of sadism and masochism:

“It would be in contradiction to the conservative nature of the instincts if the goal of life were a state of things which had never yet been attained. On the contrary, it must be an old state of things, an initial state from which the living entity has at one time or other departed and to which it is striving to return by the circuitous paths along which its development leads. If we are to take it as a truth that everything living dies for internal reasons – becomes inorganic once again – then we shall be compelled to say that ‘the aim of all life is death’ and, looking backwards, that ‘inanimate things existed before living ones.’”²²

Freud – the genealogist of modern psychic life – denies that there is “an instinct towards perfection at work in human beings, which has brought them to their present high level of intellectual achievement and ethical sublimation and which may be expected to watch over their development into supermen.”²³ Instead, the psychic apparatus functions as a *topography*, on which the *dual* instincts of the libido – the ego-instincts and the sexual instincts (revised as the life-instincts and the death instincts) – co-exist as equal forces, while the sexual instincts subdivide further into the polarity “between love (or affection) and hate (or

²¹This is the sense in which the term “alienation” is used in post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory, pioneered by Jacques Lacan, who is a careful reader of Freud. Compare *Lacan J.* 1981.

²² *Freud S.* 1995. P. 613.

²³ *Ibid.* P. 615

aggressiveness).”²⁴ Thus the sexual instinct has a “sadistic component,” whose companion, masochism, is sadism “that has been turned round upon the subject’s own ego.”²⁵

It is clear by now that we are using the term “alienation” as something of a metaphor which encompasses the Freudian model of the split subject of language with its negative or contradictory emotions of “love” and “hate.” The term “alienation” in our discussion is on a par with Wittgenstein’s term “family relation” – both terms refer to the structure of the relationship of the subject to the Other which is not so much an embodied person as a position of meaning in the unconscious. This relationship is “phantasmic” or forged out of the material of fantasy: the Other is a “fantastic” projection of the subject who invests this fantasy with absolute faith in its reality. What drives this investment is a force psychoanalysis calls not “love” but *desire*. Desire is the ground of “personality” or “character” in all of Dostoevsky’s novels which thus become models of modern subjectivity as defined by the new scientific ideas of the 19th century, the science of psychoanalysis in particular.

Dostoevsky constructed this new model of subjectivity in keeping with the scientific knowledge of his time and in some ways going beyond this, anticipating the new knowledge to come in the 20th century.²⁶

In accordance with this new and historically grounded perception of Man, Versilov is not “real”: he is mysterious, limp, ambivalent, indeterminate, undefined, sketched like a grotesque shadow rather than a fully drawn portrait. Arkady invests him with power and prestige but Versilov never shows himself in any acts of power. He spends his evenings meekly in the company of his “wife,” Arkady’s enigmatic mother who alienates the reader, her equally alienating “husband,” Makar Ivanovich Dolgoruky, his daughter Liza, a doctor, the unreal “aunt,” Tatiana Pavlovna, and

²⁴ Ibid. P. 621.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ James Rice has pioneered the study of the rise of psychoanalytic thinking in Dostoevsky’s 19th-century Russia and has also provided innumerable insights into Dostoevsky’s connection with the science of psychoanalysis of his time, such as his interest in C. G. Carus during his Siberian period. Compare these two excellent studies: *Rice J. L. Freud’s Russia: National Identity in the Evolution of Psychoanalysis*. New Brunswick and London, 1993.; *Rice J. L. Dostoevsky and the Healing Art: An Essay in Literary and Medical History*. Ann Arbor, 1985.

even the cook, Lukeria (whom he invites to join the group and sit down, which she flatly refuses since she “knows her place.” Part III, chap 3, sub-chapter iii). This entire unreal group listens to Makar Dolgoruky’s “uplifting” outpourings and stories which are a mixture of preaching and something non-didactic. His way with words is “creative” (when he spoke he was “neskol’ko khudozhnik”, 13, 312),²⁷ but his words are not “all his own.” He is interested in “facts” but does not understand concepts such as “communism” which he is accused of preaching. His expressivity is a folksy “sentimentality” which is called “umilenie” – a kind of excess which is partly covered by the psychoanalytic term of “jouissance,”²⁸ a sentiment which, according to Versilov, is invested with “the religious feeling” of the Russian people. When Makar’s words are quoted verbatim (as in Part III, chap 3, sub-chapter vi), they belong to *skaz* narration: his speech is stylized and quoted by the narrator-hero as he heard them. Makar is said to be “not a peasant” but “a house servant” (“dvorovyi chelovek”),²⁹ “born a servant,” and “born of a servant” (“byvshii sluga, rodivshiiisia slugoiu i ot slugi”). This propels Makar Dolgoruky, on the metaphoric plane, into the orbit of Hegel’s Master/Slave dialectic and gives one more indication that he belongs to the analytic of the unconscious which is that “other scene” on which Dostoevsky’s characters are situated as pure egos, engaged in the dialectic of discourse and power. Concomitantly, Makar’s language

²⁷ Dostoevsky F. M. Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh. Tom trinadtsati: Podrostok. P. 312. This volume is the source for Russian quotations taken from the novel.

²⁸ For a sense of the term “jouissance” as it is used by Lacan in the complex structure of the subject of language, compare *Lacan J. The subversion of the subject and the dialectic of desire in the Freudian unconscious // Lacan J. Écrits: A Selection*. Trans. Sheridan A. New York, 1977. P. 292 ff. *Jouissance* is more than *joi de vivre* because it is part of the unconscious structure of the psyche of the subject. If desire is the mainspring of the subject – the essence without essence which underpins the libido – then *jouissance* is the pleasure/pain of desire which is the reason for the subject’s existence and dynamism. *Jouissance* is not a “sentiment” because it is, like the sacred, unrepresentable. It is associated with the death drive – the subject’s movement towards stasis and return to an inanimate state. The reason it is compared here to the Russian concept of *umilenie* is because the entire plot of *The Adolescent* is situated in the space of the unconscious according to the present reading.

²⁹ Dostoevsky F. M. Polnoe sobranie sochinenii v tridsati tomakh. Tom trinadtsati: Podrostok. P. 312.

is “the discourse of the other” which constitutes the subject’s (Arkady’s) unconscious.³⁰

Versilov has a happy expression as he “listens” to Makar Dolgoruky’s stories and stylized speeches. It is as if Makar Dolgoruky were the embodiment of Versilov’s primary unconscious – according to Freud the “deepest” layer of the psyche and the site of primal memory. If this is the case, then Versilov’s primal memory is connected with ancient Russian religious texts on whose pathos and verbal expressions Makar Dolgoruky’s speeches are modelled. This stylized language, performed as speech, points to the origins of psychic life in the unconscious which operates “like a language.”³¹ The ground of subjectivity as well as the ground of national identity³² is one and the same ground: it is the language of the unconscious. Dostoevsky represents the historical source of this language as the language of the Russian medieval religious tradition. However, this could be interpreted in two ways: that the unconscious is historical (grounded in the “oldest” national cultural memory) or that the “Russianness” of this unconscious is a metaphor. If the latter is taken as true, then the metaphor indicates that the unconscious is inalienable – it is one’s own, indeterminate, subject only to the force of *umilenie – jouissance* – which is *desire*. Or both theses could be combined in a single thesis in which case the unconscious is both historical and indeterminate, inalienable and one’s own – “native” – i.e. given from birth, through one’s culture. This would mean that according to Dostoevsky’s novel, the unconscious is a historical, cultural formation.

³⁰ According to Lacan, “the unconscious of the subject is the discourse of the other.” *Lacan J.* 1977. P. 55.

³¹ According to Lacan, “the unconscious is structured in the most radical way like a language.” Compare *Lacan J.* 1977. P. 234. Thus the unconscious is “transindividual” because, as Jonathan Scott Lee points out, it is outside the control of the individual because, as Lacan says (quoted by Lee), “language and its structure exist prior to the moment at which each subject at a certain point in his mental development makes his entry into it.” *Scott Lee J.* Jacques Lacan. Amherst, 1990. P. 46.

³² The connection of the psychoanalytic theory of the unconscious with the question of national identity is not a wild card. James Rice accords the question of (Freud’s) national identity a central place in the evolution of Freud’s psychoanalytic thinking, citing Freud’s essay “The Future of an Illusion” and the 1928 essay on Dostoevsky as important signposts in the development of Freud’s science. Compare *Rice J. L.* 1993. P. 170–171.

Arkady's Rothschild Idea and the "historical" Unconscious in Dostoevsky's *Adolescent*

In keeping with the analytic of *umilenie* or *jouissance*, Arkady's plot life develops under the sign of *excess*. The excess is embodied in his Rothschild idea. Arkady's "idea" is described as a "feeling" rather than a "thought" (Part One, Chapter V, sub-chapter i) and is born through "forging at high temperature." This is the idea that he can become anything he wants, anything that his caprice dictates to him, provided he has "perseverance" and "continuity" – in other words, willpower. That is, an "idea" – of which the "Rothschild idea" is a kind of structural template or "model," is something that is forged "red hot" in the crucible of the will. While protruding into consciousness and appearing to be manipulated by consciousness and intention, this will is not a simple wishing, willing or wanting. Rather, like the Ego,³³ it has its roots in the unconscious which is revealed through the subject's fanatical and maniacal adherence to the "idea." Arkady's Rothschild idea operates like an *idée fixe* – an obsession – which he only seemingly controls through conscious willpower. In reality, his "idea" is the by-product of *desire* and arises from the unconscious in the form of a substitution or metonymy: Arkady's *Notes*. Willpower, which could potentially mark Arkady as a *caractère* – a character of Realist fiction – belongs, instead, to the dialectic of unconscious drives and is not will that belongs to Freud's conscious ("das Bewusste") but a drive called will-to-power, sustained by the desire for recognition. Hegel was the first European philosopher to define desire as a function of the modern phenomenological subject and its identity. Hegel formulates desire in terms of "the essence" of self-consciousness or of "what is essential" ("wesentlich") to it in its quest for unity with itself or *identity*. He finds that the "identity" of the subject is

³³ Freud contends that "much of the ego is itself unconscious, and notably what we may describe as its nucleus; only a small part of it is covered by the term "preconscious."” *Freud S.* 1995. P. 603.

constituted by “difference” (from the “other”) and that self-consciousness *is* desire (“Begierde”) – or the groundless ground of identity as difference.³⁴ Arkady is thus not a caractère straight out of the Realist manifestoes of the 1840s, and hence not a Russian but a universal or European man of modernity, defined by Hegel as the subject of desire, by Nietzsche as the unstable identity of genealogical research, and by Freud as the pathological subject of the unconscious grounded in the death drive as the will to self-denial.

This will to self-denial is the expression of desire as the will to power but also as the freedom of self-overcoming. This is illustrated in Arkady’s attempts to “fast” and to “save” in a violently ascetic manner in order to sustain (“prove”) his “Rotschild idea”. He compares his effort to “feats of monastic self-discipline,” (cf. 13, 84) which connects him with the tradition of the Russian *skhima* and *skhinnichestvo* – the highest monastic rank, requiring the fulfilment of cruel ascetic rules. However, unlike the quest for spiritual self-perfection of the Russian monastic tradition, Arkady’s quest is not for perfection but for mastery over the Other which leads to the attainment of freedom (cf. 13, 94). Arkady’s Rothschild idea is thus not a quest for money, and not even a pursuit of power, but a search for freedom which is attained in the consciousness of one’s own “superior strength,” allowing the Ego the necessary illusion of mastery over all others. Desire is accompanied by transgression: Arkady’s transgressive, lewd street behaviour and subsequent shame or repression. Thus Arkady wants to be alone, to brood: “Yes, I am morbid, I constantly close in upon myself.” (Part One, Chap V, sub-chapter iii). Arkady also notes that in order to engender “his idea,” he needs his own “corner” (“ugol”). Thus an “idea” is a spatial object,³⁵ but the space and the object are not material. Instead, they are phenomenologically reduced and virtual.

³⁴ Hegel G. W. F. 1977 (*Phenomenology of Spirit*). Compare also footnote 11 above.

³⁵ In his logical grid of language as an organising structure for sense (propositions), Wittgenstein identifies the “object” (the thing) as a major building block. However, this “object” is not a material object but a spatial, virtual object – one that can be imagined and “envisioned” in the mind, that is, in the phenomenological space which subsumes the Freudian unconscious. Thus Wittgenstein: “Each thing is, as it were, in a state of possible states of affairs. This

Arkady's feeling of superiority issues from the fact that he *has* money – a fact which is never explained on the plot level. The mysterious presence of money, which marks Arkady as an agent of capitalism, allows him to indulge in acts of great generosity: he rescues an abandoned baby girl, paying for her to be breast-fed by a foster-mother. When the baby dies, Arkady regrets not having taken a photo of the dead baby.

This peculiar wish, expressed by Arkady, resonates with his Father's aesthetics: Versilov has a life-size photograph of Arkady's "Mother" in his study – a "secret" flat which is separate from his "home" with Sofia Andreyevna – his own "ugol" in which his ideas or Versilov as "an idea" – an unconscious – come into existence. The "photograph" in Versilov's study transforms the space of the study into a kind of "archive" of modern "ideas" – one of which is the photograph, a technological advance on the daguerreotype illustration of the Realist manifestoes of 1840–1841. The photograph, in turn, transposes the "object" in the "world" into an "object" (image/sign) in phenomenological space. The Mother's photograph and the dead baby's (unrealised) photograph thus play a crucial role in the structure of Dostoevsky's novel. They are like the key to a new model of culture which Dostoevsky encoded in the unconscious structure³⁶ of the poetics of his text. The photograph announces the advent of the virtual in European culture to come. The novel is set in the 1870s. The photograph was invented in the

space I can imagine empty, but I cannot imagine the thing without the space." (2.013) *Wittgenstein L.* 1989.

36 Poststructuralism appropriates Michel Foucault's notion of the "unconscious of the text" which alludes to the Structuralist model of the narrative text and the level of meaning identified as that of the Abstract (Implied) Author. It is the level which requires an active reader who will interpret the text as a totality of relational positions of meanings interacting to produce a potential total (but never final or finalisable) meaning of the text. Compare the Structuralist model of the narrative text in *Vladiv S. B. Narrative Principles in Dostoevsky's Besy: A Structural Analysis*. Bern, 1979. P. 3–34, which the author adapts from *Schmid W. Der Textaufbau in den Erzählungen Dostoevskijs // Beiheft zu Poetica*, ed. *Maurer K.* Heft 10. München, 1973. On the appropriation of the term "unconscious of the text," compare *Jameson F. The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. Ithaca, N.Y., London, 1981. Compare also *Foucault M. The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences*. Routledge, 1992. Originally published as *Les mots et les choses*, Paris, 1966. P. XI Preface.

mid-19th century, starting with a process by which daguerreotype illustrations (1837) were produced, such as those featured in the physiological sketches of the French and Russian Realist manifestos. The invention of the photograph changed European aesthetics and led to the spread of popular or mass culture. Dostoevsky's novel is set in a still feudal Russia, albeit one in which the emancipation of the serfs had already taken place in 1861. The novel is populated by princes and aristocratic figures – some, like Arkady, aristocratic in name only – but these aristocrats mingle with the plebs and even “intermarry.” This is not a historically accurate detail. It is a metaphor. The “elite” here is a “virtual” elite, constituted as a figure of speech which stands for the will-to-power in the structure of the unconscious with its “faculties”: reason and feelings/ideas. This “virtual elite,” who no longer has an *essence* or essential value and who revolves around the empty centre of money and capital – the plot is framed by intrigues around money sums and inheritances – engages in games of power and prestige, set in the alienated landscape of desire whose origins are in the unconscious.

The historical or political unconscious of Dostoevsky's novel is this: Russia was in transition between feudalism and modernity since Peter Great's reforms in the 17th century. By the mid-19th century, this old Petrine Russia (still extant in old texts, the trace of which is embedded in Makar's speeches) was vying for supremacy with a new Russia of Capitalism, and new social relations, based not on God or essence or value but on the will to political power vested in an exchange economy of money and words. This is expressed in Makar Dolgoruky's peculiar politics: he “preaches” Communism without knowing what he is doing. The rumblings of the Russian Revolution to come punctuate the text of Dostoevsky's novel like a repressed content. History is forged, like Arkady's “Rothschild idea,” red-hot, through convictions, like those of Makar, which are engendered in unconscious desire constituted historically as the will to power over an Other.

This is Dostoevsky's genealogy of his time: a Russia poised on the brink of European modernity, with the repressed memories of a national religious past representing essential value now emptied of content; a nobility which has lost its “essence” to capitalist exchange and a common people who will embrace Europe only through utopian idealism and revolutionary asceticism – the

“Rothschild idea” of Russia’s near future. With his model of Russia’s transition to European modernity, Dostoevsky points the way to a similar phenomenology of “transitional societies” to come, following the wars and revolutions of the 20th century.