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phenomena that are causally related to shifts in social structures (e.g., deindustrialization and the decline of manufacturing jobs and semi-skilled work).

Rather than basing research on a definitive “master-ontology,” Cruickshank wants to advance a domain-specific metatheory. He makes available specific generalizations about the social reality in question, but then proceeds to evaluate these precepts on the basis of how they actually play out in social life. One can easily see a parallel between Cruickshank and symbolic interactionists such as Blumer, whose methodology did not reject the idea of a “real world,” although, consistent with Mead’s directives, did emphasize that how this world appears to humans depends on how they carve it out throughout the course of their everyday practices, experiences, and interactions.

Overall, Cruickshank’s book is definitely worth reading, especially for those who are interested in a valuable critique of mainstream renditions of ontology and epistemology, as well as a detailed attempt to develop an agenda for social research that seeks to overcome the problems associated with determinism and relativism. Nonetheless, Cruickshank’s own position is not bereft of possible problems. Quite frankly, I was not convinced that his realist position is not reifying social reality, for his research directives pertaining to emergent properties and immanent critiques presuppose a reality *sui generis*. Indeed, the “meta” part of his “domain-specific *meta* theory” is assumed to transcend human contingencies, an assumption many post-Wittgensteinian writers, including Rorty, would find to be untenable. In this sense, the critical thrust of Cruickshank’s proposed research agenda can be interpreted as being circumscribed within pre-established ontological contours that streamline the research process, thereby falling easily into the logic of immediacy that he seeks to avoid.

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*The Norms of Answerability: Social Theory Between Bakhtin and Habermas*, by **Greg M. Nielsen**. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002. 250 pp. \$65.50 cloth. ISBN: 0-7914-5227-1. \$21.95 paper. ISBN: 0-7914-5228-X.

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This book is a sort of jigsaw puzzle whose two big pieces are “norms” and “answerability”—parts of the book’s title. To put these two pieces together, while also fitting in numerous smaller pieces, is Greg Nielsen’s task. And a grand task it is, since the pieces (large and small) are culled from fragments of a long history of Western social thought, going back to the ancient Greek philosophers. Does the completed puzzle provide us with a satisfying picture of social life? Or does the picture look awkward, as if the pieces had been hammered into place and some left on the side? These are the questions that confront us as we read through these 200 plus pages.

“Answerability” is a term borrowed from the Russian literary/cultural thinker Mikhail Bakhtin, who used it in developing his dialogical conception of human interrelationships. The idea is that one’s actions take place in the context of others who also react. Hence, one is held accountable to those others, who are able to answer back. Actions can anticipate reactions, but they are also unique and, hence, new. There is an element of unpredictability, a sense of ferment about dialogue. Here one should think of openness, give and take, creativity, the impossibility of finalizing or sealing off social life.

In contrast, “norms” is a term associated with sharing and agreement, such as underlies the German scholar Jürgen Habermas’ view of social life understood in terms of communicative rationality. How do social actors come to agree on the rules by which they will abide? How do they come to shed other maxims of conduct and settle on just these? Here the central problem is not creativity, emergence, and ephemerality in social affairs; rather it is the production of consensus.

*The Norms of Answerability* is a book about social theory in only one of its two contemporary senses, as Nielsen points out. In one sense, social theory is what comes out of or builds on empirical research, the reflection on observed phenomena, such as actual behaviors or instances of discourse. In another sense, however, and the one that informs Nielsen's book, social theory is about the great ideas in Western social thought and how to piece those ideas together. This is an intertextual view of theorizing in which a contribution's significance is measured by how satisfying the new assemblage of pieces is. The issue is not empirical discovery but rather "moves" in a big game unfolding along the axis of Western historical time.

Such social theory merges imperceptibly with philosophy, from which it draws inspiration. And so one will find here discussions of Plato, Kant, Fichte, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and others. The closest we come to empirical research is a section on the Quebec separatist movement (in Chapter 8), though Nielsen, for the most part, discusses the phenomenon through the writings of others on the subject.

As we read on, the picture behind the puzzle begins to take shape, and we realize that we had earlier only a vague inkling of what it would look like. Now it is clear that Bakhtin is at the center, and the answerability piece is the larger of the two. This is a book about the significance of Bakhtinian dialogue for social theory. In Chapters 4 through 6, Nielsen positions Bakhtin's dialogical ethics with respect to Kant's moral philosophy, the recasting of that philosophy by neo-Kantians, Max Weber's neo- or post-Kantian sociology, and the "I" and the "me" of George Herbert Mead.

Chapters 7 and 8 take up the problem of *ethnos* (Habermas' "life world" or community based on a sense of belonging) versus *demos* (Habermas' "system" or society construed in terms of a legal interconnectedness—norms without shared meaning, togetherness without a sense of belonging). Canada becomes the type case for *demos*, with *les Québécois* as a candidate for *ethnos* within it. Here the central question is: Can one *ethnos* make contact with another? If so, can the sharp distinction between system and life world, between *ethnos* and *demos*, be broken down or at least traversed?

The key contribution of Bakhtin to social theory emerges, in Nielsen's account, as his emphasis on never completely reducible difference. Participants in dialogue are unlike one another, and they cannot be hammered into exactly the same shape by externally imposed universal norms. Yet their differences are also malleable in the workshop of dialogue. There is the possibility of boundary transgression. Interactions can bring participants closer together (as in the case of Westernization as homogenization), but they can also push them further apart (as in the case of separatist movements). The question of difference is perhaps the central one of our time, and it is one from which Nielsen does not shy away. Are universal norms universal only because they are imposed, backed up by coercive force? Or can norms be understood, within the framework of answerability, as emerging from (while also organizing) a global dialogue?

From my own hopelessly biased vantage point, two gaping holes in the resultant puzzle appear. First, the crucial semiotic portion has been left out. How can we hope to understand dialogue, which is, after all, a communicative process, without it? And this is a topic about which Voloshinov, if not Bakhtin, has had something to say. Second, there is no sense of circulation or movement of culture here, although the process is crucial to grasping how larger scale dialogue can transform the world.

Even so, the picture Nielsen has assembled fascinates. Like one of those Picasso paintings, in which differing perspectives have been superimposed, the book forces us to shift our attention back and forth, looking at social life now in this way, now in that. It challenges us to construct a single whole out of the differing perspectives, and the very endeavor to do so turns out to be—like Bakhtinian dialogue itself—a source of not inconsiderable aesthetic satisfaction.