Reflexion and Refraction: Reflexion is the official term; refraction is one which is advanced by Voloshinov as an alternative concept. Reflexion presupposes that the ideological object stands in a simple relationship with material reality: subordination. It may be telling that this idea goes back to Plato, who was a dialectician but not a materialist. Reflexion is used by Voloshinov, as it is used by Bakhtin and Medvedev, as a concession to the official ideology. In the rather awkward use of both terms in a simultaneous way we can see a certain political caution: reflexion is the sugar for the pill of refraction. An image may be reflected in the void, if there is...
a mirror and there is light; but in order to be refracted it has to be transmitted through a dense medium. Voloshinov is striving to show that ideology has a density and an autonomous role which is not recognized by the more doctrinaire Marxists; it is presented as a material force (as Voloshinov et al. keep insisting it should be) in the image which describes its workings, *refraction*.

**Consciousness and signs:** "Consciousness itself can arise and become a viable fact only in the material embodiment of signs" (Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, 11). This makes me think of Benedetto Croce's statement (in chapter I of his *Aesthetics*) that there cannot be intuition without expression, that is, that an intuition is not a purely "spiritual" happening in a conscience; it can only be achieved through the medium of signs. Croce is one of the last Romantics; this may be another instance of the further synthesis of materialism and idealism which is being attempted by Volosinov here (and which I see as the continuation of Marx's absorption of Hegelian dialectics). But then Croce's statement can hardly be said to be idealist in any foggy or mystical way. Rather, this coincidence shows that semiotics may be a kind of meeting ground for materialism and idealism, just as the sign is the point where concept and material basis meet. In working with a precise semiotic language to deal with a concrete ideological problem it is difficult to be a doctrinaire materialist or idealist.
**Word & ideology:** "The word is the ideological phenomenon par excellence" (Voloshinov 13). Here we can see the full extent of the concept of ideology advanced by Voloshinov, and which is in fact quite different from Marx's. Marx's ideological constructs were ethical or political systems, religions, the arts. Those are superstructures (or rather, the superstructure). But Marx does not mention language; and a consideration of language completely disrupts any simple conception of ideology as a superstructure governed by the economical basis; it is plain that language is rooted in society in a different way than a set of laws on property. Stalin himself acknowledged that language was not a superstructure, after the official ideology had tried to fit it into the model. But for Volosinov language is something of a superstructure (the language of everyday activity is given form by the social messages and the relations it is used to convey and reinforce) and something of a base (for it is the primary ground where the rest of the ideological constructs are elaborated). That is, the "superstructures" (but the word is no longer what it used to be) are also dialectically generative.

**Saussure:** Voloshinov's analysis of the two currents of philosophy of language, "individual subjectivism" and "abstract objectivism" is very helpful; the section on Saussurean linguistics in particular is outtasight, if I may use this critical term. I would like to point out, however, that the kind of abstract objectivism you find in
Saussure is "rationalist" or "conservative" only if it is presented as a world-view, a perverse attempt to see closed systems everywhere. The Saussurean abstractions are necessary for certain immediately practical tasks (for instance, writing a grammar or a dictionary) just as Voloshinov's specificities are necessary for other aims (writing literary criticism, for instance). Voloshinov's system presupposes Saussure's just as the sign presupposes the signal; it does not abolish it. Once we understand the place of each approach within an overall semiotic project, and the heuristic nature of the study of structures in this project, it is only fair to recognize this.

**Verbal interaction:** I found particularly challenging the idea that a sign is not a sign until it is actually used in an act of "ideological or behavioral impletion" (Voloshinov 70), and that a multiplicity of meanings is what makes a word a word (101). The idea as a whole is enormously productive, and it has an immediate utility for literature; it is in line with the current emphasis on reception theory, but I think it is more radical than Iser's or Jauss's ideas on this point. The view of literary works as verbal communication, polemizing with their predecessors, is at once the heritage of Russian Formalism and the logical outcome of the critique on Saussurean linguistics. Literary works are "printed verbal performance" (94), an instance of *parole* as redefined by Voloshinov; the fact that they are creative derives from the fact that language as a whole is creative. I think that Voloshinov is bringing together
to a common logical conclusion many lines of argument which were unrelated in previous theory.

**Theme and Meaning:** One term comes from literary theory, the other from logic and linguistics. Here they are seen as the extreme poles of a spectrum, they are shown to belong to a science that comprises the study of both semiotic system and concrete (ideological) performance, a kind of social semiotics. It is helpful to see them related in this way, but the distance between one and the other is expressed rather unsatisfactorily, as a kind of shading off into one another (Marxism and the Philosophy of Language 100). I think that at least a part of the no man's land between theme and meaning may now be thought of in terms of the concepts developed by speech act theory and text linguistics. Locutionary meaning as described by Austin or Searle seems to go beyond a dictionary definition of meaning, if only by the fact that it is identified at sentence level. Illocutionary force requires already an element which is not narrowly linguistic, a social recognition of a standardized act (a promise, etc.). And in turn, these standardized illocutionary acts might be thought of as tools which are used in actual discourse to perform "macro-speech acts" at supra-sentential level. These acts are no longer a relative narrow and conventional set; they have to be related to concrete areas of discourse (i.e. to concrete areas of social activity). It is these macro-speech acts that I think are nearest to Voloshinov's 'theme'; but 'theme' is still more concrete; it is not "this kind
of" macro-speech act, but \textit{this} speech act being interpreted in \textit{this} particular situation. Of course, a limitation of Voloshinov's view is that he speaks of theme at word level and not at the level of the text as a whole, but the whole thrust of his analysis points in the direction of contemporary discourse analysis. And beyond.


\textit{The Chains of Semiosis: Semiotics, Marxism, \& The Mill on the Floss}