

**BRONCKART, Jean-Paul & BOTA, Cristian. *Bakhtine démasqué, Histoire d'un menteur, d'une escroquerie et d'un délire collectif*. Genève: Droz, 2011, 629 p.**

*Serge Zenkine\**

### **The incompetent unmaskers<sup>1</sup>**

This is the price of fame: by dint of being venerated and studied, some famous authors are submitted to such a meticulous textual criticism that it ends up denying, if not their physical existence, at least the unity of their work and that some of its parts belong to a single and same person. The philologists have debated the “Homeric issue” for a long time; nowadays, the same misadventure happens to Mihail Bahtin.

We know the story of the problem: Around 1970, few years after the rediscovery of the Russian theoretician’s work, it was publicly declared that, besides the texts signed by him (*Dostoevskij, Rabelais* among others), he had also written several books and articles published in the 1920s and 1930s under the name of his friends, especially Valentin Vološinov and Pavel Medvedev. This opinion, after being nearly dominant for a period of time, has nowadays, as a result of the pendulum swing, seen the number of its partisans get lower: the “disputed texts” are re-edited and commented as works of their respective signers and are not part of Bahtin’s complete works.

Two critics from Geneva, Jean-Paul Bronckart and Cristian Bota, have gone a step further: They have published a long research aiming at dispossessing Bahtin of part of his acknowledged works. According to them, he not only had no link with Vološinov’s and Medvedev’s works (“the issue of the *disputed texts* is definitively closed,” p.585), but the first version of his book on Dostoevskij, published in 1929, is also attributed in great part... to Vološinov, occasionally helped by Medvedev. It was not Bahtin who did lend his texts to his friends but rather the contrary. As for the legend of the “Bakhtinian omni paternity,” attributing to him works by Vološinov and Medvedev, it was supposedly “conceived and built during the 1960s” (p.590), much

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after the disappearance of the real authors; supposedly it was a deliberate *lie* by Bahtin, the plagiarist<sup>2</sup> and of a contrived *swindle* planned by his Russian “promoters” Vjačeslav Vs. Ivanov, Vadim Kožinov and Sergej Bočarov, who “kept generating the lucrative international dissemination of the master’s reconstituted works” (p.237). Furthermore, Kožinov and Bočarov have supposedly been “overtly co-authors” (p.272) of the second version of *Dostoevskij* (1963), as Bahtin was unable to finish any work by himself and unable to understand the significance of “his” book, which was not his in fact. Finally, for an unknown reason, the swindle would have been sustained by many exegetes from different countries, trying to rationalize the legend of the “Bakhtinian omni paternity” and hence indulging in a real *interpretive delirium*.

This anti-Bakhtinian critique, whose violence is translated by J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota’s often lampoonist tone, is not entirely novel, except perhaps in France. Thus, Bahtin’s legatees, namely Bočarov and Kožinov (died in 2001), have already been questioned (with no proofs) for having taken ownership of Vološinov’s and Medvedev’s copyrights, by Jurij Medvedev, the son of the latter in 1995<sup>3</sup>. And the hypothesis of the collective authorship of the 1929 *Dostoevskij* has also been evoked in 2005 by the Russian linguist Vladimir Alpatov<sup>4</sup>, with no harm to Bahtin. It is true that up to nowadays no one has developed these conjectures in such a detailed manner and so extensively as in J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota’s book. It is thus the details of argumentation and the alleged proofs that have to be examined in order to evaluate their work. This verification would require a much longer article than this one: It will be limited to general insights illustrated with some examples.

J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota do not add new elements to the issue. They reveal neither facts nor unknown texts, they do not question documents that have not already been. While accusing most of the researchers who preceded them for having more or less participated of the “interpretive delirium,” they nevertheless use the factual materials and texts assembled by these same researchers. Yet, symptomatically, except

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<sup>2</sup> “**His own late writings fall clearly under *plagiarism***” (p.274, here and from now on, what is in bold and in italics in the quotes have been used by the authors of the book).

<sup>3</sup> See Ju. P. Medvedev, “Pis’mo v redakciju zhurnala...” [Letter to the editor of the journal], *Dialog. Karnaval. Hronotop* n° 4, 1995, p.154. This precursor document is missing from J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota’s bibliography.

<sup>4</sup> See Vladimir ALPATOV, *Vološinov, Bahtin i lingvistika* [Vološinov, Bakhtin and linguistics], M.: Jazyki slavjanskih kul’tur, 2005, p.117. This work appears in J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota’s bibliography; nonetheless, its importance on that issue has not been highlighted.

for some insignificant comments, they do not make any real use of the very rich comments made in Bahtin's *Complete works* in seven volumes (Moscow, 1997-2011), a reference publication for all those who study this author.

This omission is of a more general level: If they have included some Russian publications in their impressive bibliography, J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota never quote the texts; all their quotations come from sources in other languages. One may presume that both authors do not master Russian, which would compromise the validity of their analysis: imagine a Hellenist who intends to address the Homeric issue without knowing Greek! In fact, being forced to rely on translations of the Russian texts, which are not always faithful, they sometimes venture into risky interpretations. An example: Among Bahtin's interviews recorded by Victor Duvakin in 1973, the reply, which starts with "No, what are you saying!..."<sup>5</sup> (p.267) and is written over seven lines, contains *three* serious translation errors (it is a second translation, done by J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota from an Italian version)<sup>6</sup>. Firstly, Bahtin characterizes Vadim Kožinov as "an absolutely unscrupulous person" – the original says "an absolutely fearless person [*besstrašnyj*]." Then, Bahtin's word *minusnik*, which he uses to call himself, is translated as "less than nothing" – in fact, it is a term related to the administrative jargon from the Stalin period, which means deported, forbidden to reside in a number of large cities (they used to say *minus desjat'*, *minus dvadcat'* - "minus ten, minus twenty"). Finally, and this is very curious, here goes one sentence by Bahtin, which is rather weird and suspect: "**This book of him**<sup>7</sup> had been forgotten, I mean the *Dostoievski* one..."; indeed, to whom does this "him" refer – could it be Vološinov? This is J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota's comment: "We can observe Bahtin's hesitation regarding Dostoevskij's work, which he manifestly finds it difficult to call it 'my book'" (p.268). Now, the original is very simple: "*Knižku etu zabyli – 'Dostoevskogo'...*" [This little book has been forgotten, the "*Dostoevskij*..." one] – and does not show any hesitation nor linguistic abnormality, considering that the possessive determiners are less frequent

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<sup>5</sup> TN. The expression used here is an exclamation, showing surprise. The question form is used so as to be as close as possible to the original sentence.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the Russian original: *Besedy V.D. Duvakina s M.M. Bahtinym* [V.D. Duvakin's Interviews with M.M. Bakhtin], M.: Progress, 1996, p.217-218.

<sup>7</sup> TN. In the original review, the author used "*ce livre de lui*", which, apparently, is a translation from Russian, is not a standard form of expressing in French that something belongs to someone. Hence, a non-standard form "This book of him" is used here so as to convey the same idea in English.

and obligatory in Russian than in French. The suspicious interpretation is strictly pure misunderstanding.

There are far more serious misunderstandings. J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota seem to ignore the whole historical, biographical and institutional context in which Bahtin's speeches and writings as well as his friends' have been produced. They confront, like a police investigator, Bahtin's frequently evasive talk in relation to the "disputed texts," without taking into consideration the changes of the political ambiance, of the interlocutors, of the material situation, of the age and health state which could have either incited him to openness or to circumspection (that this old *minusnik*, victim of political persecution, had had to learn well and which he showed on several occasions, not just in relation to the "disputed texts"). They accuse Bahtin's three "promoters" of sordid swindling as if they were unknown people, obscure men, without inquiring after (this is what a good policeman would do) their moral and professional reputation – yet, at least one of them, the semiotician Vjačeslav Vsevolodovič Ivanov<sup>8</sup> is renowned worldwide. They join the three characters in an association of wrongdoers, a "muscovite troika" (p.245), yet they ignore important literary and ideological differences existing between some of them. As for the socio-historical context, they believe, for example, that the Stalinist purges, which have taken millions of lives around 1937, used to hit "especially – if not exclusively – the party members and the Marxist teachers" (p.33); they do not admit, in a rather strongly naive manner, that a small provincial university of Saransk (initially a "pedagogical institute" for teacher education), where Bahtin taught in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, might not have had a good reference research library, (or a bookshop – p.317)<sup>9</sup>. On several occasions, they suggest that Bahtin could not possibly be an intellectual leader when compared to his friends Medvedev and Vološinov because, differently from them, he had no university degree<sup>10</sup> and was not an "experienced researcher" (p.293), - probably they were not aware that this was not an

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<sup>8</sup> The index in J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota's book (p. 618, reference on page 266) does not make any distinction between him and his homonym, the poet Vjačeslav Ivanovič Ivanov (1866-1949). The same index (p.621), as well as the text in the book itself (p.32), assign to the writer Léon (Lev Nikolaevič) Tolstoj fanciful initials "N.J."

<sup>9</sup> The two authors insist on a sentence by Brian Poole which they translate as "**Bakhtine has rarely lived near a good bookshop**" (p.316). The original in English (*The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 97, 1998, p.568) says *library*.

<sup>10</sup> The issue related to Bahtin's higher education during his youth is not very clear. Some people suppose that he must have attended the university courses without being registered (see N.L. Vasil'ev, "Kommentarii k kommentarijam" [Comments of comments], *Dialog. Karnaval. Hronotop*, n° 4, 1995, p.160).

exceptional thing in the revolutionary Russia, where for example, one of Bahtin's opponents in literary theory, the formalist Victor Šklovskij, was capable of founding and animating the famous Society of studies on poetic language (OPOJAZ) without having finished his university course and for earning his living as a writer, scriptwriter, army officer, and, at times, even as a clandestine conspirator.

Important documents on Bahtin's biography and the issue of the "disputed texts," which have not been all translated from Russian, have not caught J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota's attention. They suggest that Bahtin's "promoters," after proclaiming the authorship of the "disputed texts" to him, have never cited their sources – in fact, they did it in 1995: V.Vs. Ivanov specified that he had learned about it (about Vološinov's *Marxism and philosophy of language*) already in 1956 through the scholar and linguist Victor Vinogradov<sup>11</sup>. As for Vadim Kožinov, he confirmed having learned (about Medvedev's *The formal method in literary scholarship*) from Vinogradov himself, as well as from the eminent literary critics Naum Berkovskij and Victor Šklovski<sup>12</sup>. Probably J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota refuse to have any confidence in those people. However, rather than criticizing their testimonies, they do not disclose them. They proceed in the same way in relation to the unpublished memoirs of the Hellenist Olga Frejdenberg, who had met Vološinov and who also claimed that his "linguistic book" had been written by another person<sup>13</sup>. Having died in 1955, O. Frejdenberg's sole statement would suffice to invalidate the thesis according to which "after Bahtin's declarations of paternity and their dissemination by Ivanov, no testimony from that period [between 1925 and 1970] confirming the issue has ever been made" (p.82) – on the contrary, everything leads to the belief that it is a rumour which circulated during the said period within the academic and literary milieu and which has been recorded, at least, in a document from that period. Be it true or false, or partly true and partly false, it did exist. Bahtin and his colleagues did not invent it in the 1960s; thus, the whole hypothesis regarding their "swindling" crumbles.

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<sup>11</sup> See V.Vs. Ivanov, "Ob avtorstve knig V.N. Vološinova i P.N. Medvedeva" (About the authorship of the books by V.N. Vološinov and P.N. Medvedev), *Dialog. Karnaval. Hronotop*, n° 4, 1995, p.134.

<sup>12</sup> See V. Kožinov, "Kniga, vokrug kotoroj ne umolkajut spory" [The book which we do not stop discussing], *ibid.*, p.140.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted by Nina Perlina already in 1988. See a commented publication, with a photographic reproduction of the manuscript: Nina Braginskaja, "Meždu svideteljami i sud'jami [Between the witnesses and the judges]," in *M.M. Bahtin v Saranske* [M.M. Bakhtin to Saransk], Saransk, 2006, p.39-60, <<http://ivgi.rsuh.ru/article.html?id=207419>>

In the argumentation put forward by J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota, one has to highlight the frequent use of abusive readings, biased deductions and logical slitherings. Bahtin confesses to Bocharov: “The way I could have written (the book on Dostoevskij) could have been very different from the way it is”; the two critics comment that “in a strong hypothesis, this can mean that Bahtin has not written this book” and that they prefer this hypothesis instead of “the weak hypothesis”; yet, the latter is more in accordance with the rest of the conversation, according to which “he has written it, but not the way he wanted to” (p.254). In 1928, Boris Pasternak wrote to Pavel Medvedev after reading his work *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, saying that he did not know that the said author was “a prominent philosopher”; this appreciation is sometimes cited to show the exceptional status of the work (supposedly pertaining in fact to Bahtin) amongst the other works written by the signer. J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota’s reply is “no,” it is only trite praising, “I did not know you were so brilliant” (p.67). Indeed, we would answer, as the poet does not speak of degrees of brilliance, but rather, with more precision and tactfully, of a difference in nature between two discourses, literary criticism of Medvedev’s previous works and the philosophy which Bahtin was working on. Bahtin said to Sergej Bočarov that he wrote the “disputed” books “from beginning to end” (p.244), and he told Vadim Kožinov that Pavel Medvedev made “some additions [...] not very successful” (p.246). From their inquisitive look, J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota detect a “total contradiction” (p.247) between these two declarations: Certainly, a sign of Bahtin’s lies that the “accomplices of these lies” (p.271), badly concerted between themselves, did not know how to dissimulate... However, in all logic, why does the fact of having written a text from beginning to end exclude the idea that one might have been inspired from other people’s ideas or that one could have *later on* left it under the care of others to revise it, or even to complement it with questionings?

Has Bahtin then lied? It happened to him to provide false information on his biography (his social origin, his studies), but on the core of the issue of the “disputed texts” he never contradicts himself nor contradicts directly the facts we have. J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota could not prove the contrary: What varies in these remarks are the motives, the explanations of the acts, which are most of the time compatible between them, but he never says formally that he *has not written* the problematic texts,

nor that he has written them by himself, with no participation of the others. His position is always nuanced between the two: At times he admits being the main author of his texts, in spite of some touching up undertaken by his friends, at times he only claims “a common conception of language and of verbal work” (p.241) that those texts share elements with his own texts from that period and likewise between them. The last fact seems unquestionable, and it is indirectly acknowledged by J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota: “...Medvedev’s approach is absolutely identical to the one developed by Vološinov” (p.493). However, considering that it is a matter of relationship between Medvedev and Vološinov and not with Bahtin; they do not claim plagiarism, nor author substitution...

However, the same community of ideas will be used to deny the authorship of *Dostoevskij*. According to J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota, Bahtin’s friends supposedly engaged themselves to transform his confused fragments with a religious connotation into an innovative work in human sciences after Vološinov’s own research. In other words, “Vološinov has decided to publish under [Bahtin’s] name part of the work he was doing then” (p.555). The publication of the book was meant to strengthen Bahtin’s professional reputation and to ease his fate considering that in 1929 he was about to be judged for his activities within the religious circles of Leningrad. The hypothesis is ingenious; the problem is that it does not fit within the chronological frameworks. The authors of this hypothesis suggest (p.271-272 and elsewhere) that Bahtin could not have written and edited his book as he had been arrested by the political police in December 1928. Now, in fact, he spent only a few days in prison. After that, before going into exile in February 1930, he lived in Leningrad under house arrest. This fact could not have impeded him from working on the editing of his work<sup>14</sup>. It is then false that the editing process “has been clearly carried out by others due to the signer’s incarceration followed by deportation” (p.51)<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, the latter declared having finished his

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<sup>14</sup> The fact reported by Bočarov (p.259) and contested by J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota for being “in contradiction with other historical data” (p 260) is confirmed by Bahtin’s judicial file. See S.S. Konkina and L.S. Konkina, *Mikhail Bahtin*, Saransk, 1993, p.185-186.

<sup>15</sup> It is equally false that upon reediting *Dostoevskij* in 1963, Bahtin was unable “to carry out this task by himself and, as he indeed mentioned it in his interview with Duvakin, it was Kožinov indeed who was responsible for carrying out the reformulation” (p.519), “the effective rearrangement [had been] undertaken basically by Kožinov...” (p.539; cf. the same statement p. 272, 590 and elsewhere). In fact, as Bahtin explains to Duvakin (see the quoted Russian edition, p.218), Kožinov has succeeded to have the book *published*, he “promoted,” “propelled” it (*prodvinul, prochibal*) to a publisher in Moscow; but it was Bahtin himself who did all the work of touching up and adding things including the writing of a supplementary chapter on the issue of genre. For example, his manuscripts of the second *Dostoevskij*, published in 2002 in volume 6 of the *Complete Works* constitute a testimony, yet they are ignored by J.-P. *Bakhtiniana*, São Paulo, Special Issue: 185-195, Jan./Jul. 2014.

book in 1928, *before being arrested* (p.267), and his testimony is confirmed through discovered editorial documents (in 1928, Bahtin had signed a contract, bearing the 15<sup>th</sup> of October as the deadline for giving in the manuscript) and through the date of the first review of *Dostoevskij* published in the media on June 10, 1929. The two Genevois critics do not discuss the latest facts – they ignore them as they ignore nearly all the critical framework of the *Complete works* where these facts have been reported<sup>16</sup>. In fact, typesetting, galley proofs and printing require at least five to six months<sup>17</sup>; hence, for a book to be published in early June 1929, its manuscript should have been handed in to the editor before the end of 1928. After Bahtin's arrest, Vološinov or any other person would not have had time to rewrite his text, had they had the intention to do so.

Considering that the biographical and factual arguments emerge as imperfect, what happens to the other arguments withdrawn from the analysis of the theoretical texts? J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota seek to show that due to the content of its major ideas, the first *Dostoevskij* is closer to Medvedev's and Vološinov's works than to Bahtin's first philosophical texts (*Toward a Philosophy of the Act, Author and Hero*). It is possible, but why explain this proximity through the singular hypothesis that *Dostoevskij* is not Bahtin's work and not through the simple fact, acknowledged by the latter, of an intense intellectual exchange between the three men, which went as far as establishing a "common conception" of verbal culture? The fact that, in *Dostoevskij*, this common conception coexists with remnants of Bahtin's first philosophical theories is rather natural, and in principle one could sustain – as a matter of fact this is what J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota do – that they do not always agree. However, this is not enough to reach the conclusion that the book has been written by two or three different people. It would be more logical to presume, as it has been already done, that the author worked on his text for a long time, and that the latter comprises parts dating from different periods of time.

It is true that in order to reach the "common conception," Bahtin must have gone through a tremendously quick evolution – from a phenomenological and religious

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Bronckart and C. Bota, who seem to know – through a second interpretation or even a third interpretation, according to Kozhinov quoted in English by N. Rzhnevsky – only a short guide written by Bahtin at the beginning of this work, in 1961.

<sup>16</sup> See Mihail Bahtin, *Sobranie sočinenij* [Complete Works], t. 2, M. : Russkie slovari, 2000, p.432, 473.

<sup>17</sup> For example, this must have been the publication period of the book *Les Archaïstes et les novateurs-The Archaists and the innovators* by Yuri Tynjanov, published by the same publisher in the same period, in January-February 1929.



philosophy towards objective and sociologising human sciences. However, his case is not unique: Among his close friends, a similar evolution is observed in Lev Pumpjanskij and, particularly, Valentin Vološinov, who few years before getting inspired by the “dialectical materialism” (p.582), must have been a Rosicrucian<sup>18</sup>. This kind of conversion has been equally frequent within the European intelligentsia of that period, as is the case of the mystical Walter Benjamin or the phenomenologist Jean-Paul Sartre, mentioning only the most renowned. The causes of evolution might have varied: free development of thought, readings and intellectual influences, ideological pressure (especially in the Soviet Russia), etc.; yet, without examining these possibilities, J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota give preference to another one: There was no evolution at all, but rather a simple substitution of people, followed by a “scandalous diversion of authorship” (p.271)<sup>19</sup>.

In order to make this thesis credible, they are obliged to exaggerate the incompatibility of the two research programmes between which Bahtin was supposed to evolve: They claim that these two approaches are “*radically disconnected and largely antagonistic*” (p.507). By emphasizing the religious tendencies of the first Bakhtinian aesthetics – which they do not stop vilifying as a “reactionary ideology” (p.393), a “*regressive and destructive perspective*” (p.408), “*a radically reactionary ideology*” (*ibid*), a “fabric of ultra-phenomenological and *bondieusarde*<sup>20</sup> considerations” (p.515) – they believe they detect in it “a radical *monologism*” (p.410), which is in contradiction with the dialogic principle in *Dostoevskij* and in Vološinov’s writings. They do not perceive that the notion of monologism, defined in *Dostoevskij* as the dominance of *discourse*, is not applicable to the works in which the problem of language has not been

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<sup>18</sup> See Patrick Sériot, “Preface,” in Valentin Nikolaevič Vološinov, *Marxisme et philosophie du langage*, Limoges: Lambert-Lucas, 2010, p.52-54.

<sup>19</sup> Another case of non-examination of alternative arguments: In 2001, Brian Poole, when examining the implicit references of the first writings by Bahtin, thought he demonstrated that they had been written around 1927, in other words, later than it was thought and during the same period as the first “disputed texts.” If this new date were correct, it would reduce to nil the timing of Bahtin’s evolution during the ‘20s, and would render it rather unlikely. However, already in 2004, Nikolaj Nikolaev and Vadim Ljapunov, the Russian and American annotators of volume 1 of Bahtin’s *Complete Works*, have provided a serious critique, with an important factual material, of Poole’s hypothesis. While knowing, through ‘second hand’ readings (see their note on page 513, making reference to a Swiss publication from 2005) about the existence of this criticism, J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota do not give any opinion about its validity, and they use Poole’s theses as they stand (see p.293, 512-513 and elsewhere). Once more, we are led to suppose they have not consulted *de visu* the complete works of the investigated author: a disconcerting thing, this is the least one can say.

<sup>20</sup> TN. The expression ‘*Bondieusarde*’ (adjective) is a contraction of ‘good God thing’ refers to theosophical considerations about a false and superficial devotion.

raised yet, while the situation of dialogue is anticipated by an analysis of *communication* between men – and not solely between man and God – not based on dominance but rather on love.

The same concern to widen the gap between the two programmes leads J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota to overvalue the “Marxism” of the “disputed texts” from the late 1920s. In fact, whether it is sincere or externally imposed (a problem which has long divided the exegetes, some interpreted these texts “to the left” and others “to the right”), this Marxism remains *elementary*. This has been recently shown by Patrick Sériot, for example, in relation to Vološinov’s<sup>21</sup> philosophy of language. It is a Marxism without dialectics, without class struggle nor revolution, without ideas of praxis, of work nor of ideology (the latter term, which is frequent in Vološinov, has a meaning which corresponds very little to the *German Ideology*), a Marxism which is reduced to the basic principle of “materialist monism” (p.417)<sup>22</sup> and to a “*social interactionism*” (p.464), favouring solidarities and not social conflicts among the communicating individuals. J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota, who know P. Sériot’s article, do not try to contradict any of these criticisms. Yet, reorienting the sciences of language and literature towards a study of human interaction and placing this interactionist aspect of language above its cognitive aspect – an important theoretical gesture with which we can fairly credit the authors of the “disputed texts” – all this does not necessarily imply the fact that they are “resolutely anchored in Marxism,” not in the least.

One could continue the discussion for a long time, but conclusions are required. By wanting to prove a lot, J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota have proved nothing. They have only managed to muddle even more an already complicated issue. The question of the “disputed texts” has not been filed – and probably, it will never be unless some new decisive pieces of information are discovered. The hypothesis of collective authorship of *Dostoevskij* could be more plausible; however, as it is deprived of convincing proofs and accompanied with an unlikely chronology, it remains gratuitous. The case of Bahtin’s “lies” in relation to the texts supposed to be part of his work should be closed

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<sup>21</sup> See Patrick Sériot, “Preface,” p.54 sq. Sériot’s analysis is even more important as the researcher discards the hypothesis of “the Bakhtinian omni paternity” and considers *Marxism and Philosophy of Language* as Vološinov’s work.

<sup>22</sup> By laying down this principle, J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota relate it (p.417) to two texts: Spinoza’s *Ethics* and Lenin’s polemical work *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, which do not seem at all the best introductions to Marx’s ideas.

under dismissal rubric, considering the lack of evidence and by virtue of circumstantial presumption of innocence. The incredible narrative of “swindling” supposedly committed by his Russian colleagues could be qualified as calumny if it could not be simply explained through an obvious ignorance of the facts. Generally speaking, the serious document gaps, the erroneous translations and readings, the forced deductions and the logical distortions which get multiplied in J.-P. Bronckart and C. Bota’s book end up depreciating their textual analyses, which are frequently highly detailed, but discredited due to their biased purpose.

Mihail Bahtin’s work is difficult. One can surely find obscure things, unacknowledged loans, apparent and real contradictions, texts that have been more or less finished and more or less successful. We lack factual elements to sort out the contributions that he himself and his friends could have added to some texts during the 1920s as a result of their exchange and their common background of ideas. It should be highlighted that some Bakhtinists have worsened this objective difficulty through their excessive zeal aiming at making of Bahtin a cult figure. In order to redress the situation, there is a need for a competent and patient critique, which does not seek sensational solutions, which does not reduce the complexities of a theoretical thinking to plagiarism or fraud of author’s rights, and which does not treat as liars, swindlers and insane those who claim it is the contrary. The heterogeneousness of the Bakhtinian corpus is a good problem – it is a pity if it falls in the wrong hands.

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