

**Two decisive problems about *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*: the cleaved world and the attributes of the Being and the ethical act / *Dois problemas decisivos sobre Para uma filosofia do ato: o mundo cindido e os atributos do Ser e do ato ético***

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**ABSTRACT**

*Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, a fragmented and unfinished essay written by Mikhail Bakhtin, is one of the texts of the 1920s that better let us glimpse the subtle and complex dialogue established by the Russian philosopher with the philosophical field of his time, in particular through an exciting interpretive turn in Kant's legacy. This paper seeks to discuss how the concept of an apartness between the world of life and the world of culture and the problems of both the attributes of Being and the open eventness of the responsible act are instrumentalized in a way that allows this philosophical turn, setting what accounts for Bakhtin's first great contribution to occidental thinking.

**KEYWORDS:** Ethical act; Responsivity; Architectural responsiveness; Neo-kantianism

**RESUMO**

*Para uma filosofia do ato, ensaio fragmentado e inacabado de Mikhail Bakhtin, é um dos textos da década de 1920 que melhor permitem entrever o sutil e complexo diálogo que o filósofo russo estabelece com o campo filosófico de seu tempo, através, sobretudo, de uma empolgante virada interpretativa do legado kantiano. O presente estudo objetiva discutir como o conceito de divisão entre o mundo da vida e o mundo da cultura e os problemas dos atributos do Ser e da transitividade e eventicidade aberta do ato responsável são instrumentalizados de modo a permitir essa virada filosófica, configurando o que representa a primeira grande contribuição de Mikhail Bakhtin ao pensamento ocidental.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Ato ético; Responsividade; Arquitetônica responsiva; Neokantismo

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## Some preliminary words

Some texts come to academic life under an epithet that determines, forever, their destiny with readers. There are those who are born classics, there are those who are revolutionaries... It is not even that rare, despite the designation, a revolutionary text appears as a classic. Sad plight, however, for those that are born as *difficult* texts. *Theory of the Novel* (Lukács), *Aesthetic Theory* (Adorno) and *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (Bakhtin) are what have been called difficult texts. The tour by which we began our considerations approaches two difficult texts and will explore similarities between them, paving the way to discuss their *difficulty* and what seems to be behind it.

It seems that the two fragments that survived as *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* were part of a broader philosophical research project, probably situated in terms of a border zone between the fields of aesthetics and moral philosophy. An expert of the text and its subject, Adail Sobral recognizes its programmatic character, whose implementation would extend to the late Bakhtinian texts of the 70s. Concerning the classic *Aesthetic Theory*, by Theodor W. Adorno, also an unfinished text that composes, as well as *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, a larger project, also unfulfilled: besides the *Aesthetic Theory* (left uncompleted), we would have the *Negative Dialectics* and a third work of moral philosophy, which was not written. Some ideas contained in the two works are indeed alarmingly close. Adorno says, for example:

Because art is what it has become, its concept refers to what it does not contain. The tension between what motivates art and art's past circumscribes the so-called questions of aesthetic constitution. Art can be understood only by its laws of movement, not according to any set of invariants. It is defined by its relation to what it is not. The specifically artistic in art must be derived concretely from its other; that alone would fulfill the demands of a materialistic-dialectical aesthetics. Art acquires its specificity by separating itself from what it developed out of; its law of movement is its law of form. It exists only in relation to its Other; it is the process that transpires with its other (2004, p.03).

Some ideas in that fragmented Adorno's text closely resemble those of Bakhtin's. We notice in the passage quoted above, for example, the presence of an implied notion of indirect temporality, although it is almost palpable in the stretch that puts symmetry in art and his past. The notion of event also does not escape this field of

temporality. Understanding this concept is essential to the formulation of the Bakhtinian reasoning that we use, a little later, in our further considerations. In addition, both authors placed the question of spatiality, prepared by the analogy of an aperted world-second (be it of culture or art) from the sphere of a world-first (identified by the two philosophers as the empirical world, of experienced life). This topic is, moreover, what we mean to explore in more detail along these reflections – the apartness between the world of life and the world of culture.

But the similarities, which are not at all irrelevant to justify a broader contrastive study between Bakhtin and Adorno, stop there if we look at the context in which the texts were written, and especially when they are read. If the *difficulty* of Adorno's text derives from an undisputed intellectual culmination, characteristic of a *magna opera*, and its fragmentary character is a testimony of the death that took off pen and books from the hands of Adorno at 65 years old, Bakhtin's work must be necessarily and reasonably *difficult* for other reasons.

Born on November 17, 1895, Bakhtin would have produced the manuscripts of *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* between 1920 and 1924, i.e., between 25 and 29 years old, when it can be accepted that he was also far from full intellectual maturity. While Adorno transited through very famous intellectual circles in the West and expressed himself in the language of Kant and Hegel, Bakhtin suffered with the distance from both the northernmost ice and the language of Pushkin. Adorno's work has as interlocutors the entire *magna philosophia* of his time and the time of his predecessors, which differed greatly from the Russian scene, fresh out of a feudal universe. Adorno's readers did not hesitate to recognize him as a philosopher without circumlocutions, plus his most habitual readers are usually versed in philosophy. Bakhtin's readers usually come from an environment marked by a more heterogeneous intellectual formation. If they dare to call Bakhtin a philosopher, they examine the audience in search of reactions and are, themselves, mostly foreigners in the field of philosophy.

We do not deny the complexity of the text by the young Mikhail Mikhailovich, nor overestimate the comparative rationale that we propose. They are not even reasons – but *contingencies* – and there's no reason to deny the difficulty of *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* for the scholar of Bakhtin's works. But we should not overstate this difficulty, as if it were an indexical trace of a *magna opera*, which, incidentally, would be both

unjust and unjustifiable. There's still room to restore Bakhtin's interlocutors (philosophers, artistic writers, sociologists etc.), plus little is known (or will be known) about the spine of the other books on his shelves at the time he wrote *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* (and what to say then about his reading notes?); little is known to clarify this youth text without having to resort to this laborious work, however elementary: a path that runs from Socrates to Hegel. Or from Aristotle to Husserl, as Adail Sobral believes.

Finally, it also should not be denied the truly seminal character of this work. We risk, however, to assert that it is more important for the problems that anticipates than for the *ready* answers that, every now and then, we want to find; responses, moreover, that, if they existed, would necessarily be premeditated and yet would cryptically be hidden in a text in which, for example, the repetition – understood not as a stylistic phenomenon, but as a novitiate proof – is a resounding evidence of an intellectual humility intonation that Bakhtin began to exercise (with a greatness, we dare to say, that is admirable in a young intellectual).

Apart from reasons of broader spectrum while directing our eyes to the problems that *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* opens, we want to consider on this brief analysis two components that temper the complexity with which this essay challenges its Bakhtinian scholars. The first component is the topic of the apartness between the world of life and the world of culture, which follows, in our rush, the problems of the attributes of Being and the transitivity and open eventness of the responsible act. We intend to discuss the interpretative hypothesis, raised by us, in which these components instrumentalize the philosophical turn of Bakhtin in relation to (neo) Kantianism expressions from which his thought gradually begins to pull away ever since.

## **1 The apartness between the worlds of culture and life**

A crucial argumentative moment of *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* that seems to deserve more attention than it is usually devoted is one in which Bakhtin is faced with the problem that is mentioned in a wealth of comments from more varied strain, as being that of apartness between the world of culture and the world of life. This schematic reduction is (only) apparently harmless; it is far from being a brief resume of

the problem discussed here. In stating that this is a crucial problem, we are not proposing any analytical plethora to the topic in question in the interpretation of the thought of the young Bakhtin.

The apartness of the worlds is, alongside other theoretical and methodological problems, a high point of the philosophical debate carried out by Bakhtin and seen in the great aporia of his essay. We are concerned by the importance they attach to it in the methodological repertoire of the first works of Bakhtin, the perception of their destiny in critical fortune of this text.

To situate ourselves with caution and advantage, we will resume the inaugural source of our concern and we will expose, without further delay, the contents of our apprehension. In the *Introduction to the Russian edition*, Sergei Bocharov approximates *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* and *Art and Answerability* but referring to the latter, he says:

It is with a discourse on “answerability” that Bakhtin entered the intellectual life of his time in the immediate postrevolutionary years: his earliest known publication (1919) was an article entitled “Art and Answerability”. *It spoke in a impassioned tone about surmounting the ancient divorce between art and life through their mutual answerability for each other; and this answerability was to be actualized in the individual person*, “who must become answerable through and through” [...] Bakhtin probably began working on the treatise “Toward a Philosophy of the Act” soon after that programmatic article and it is inspired by the same passion of surmounting “the pernicious non-fusion and non-interpenetration of culture and life”. [our emphasis] (BAKHTIN, 1993, p.XXII-XXIII)

When considering the emphasis in the excerpt above, the first question that comes to mind is: is this the same problem in both works? Reading up carefully the small text of 1919 and the long essay fragment of 1920-1924, we are led to conclude affirmatively. A second question suggests itself: is it the same context? The short extension of the text of 1919 does not allow to determine with reasonable certainty the heuristic scope intended by Bakhtin. But it is certain that his concern is focused on the placement of the problem under the discursive context of the role of responsibility in the *production and appreciation of art*. The title of the text published in *The Day of Art (Art and Answerability)* is already reason enough to render the question sufficiently clear: the problem is the same; the context of his discussion is not.

In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, there is a radical expansion of this context. Bakhtin introduces the topic in *another argumentative scenario*, starting from the idea that aesthetic activity possesses a common moment with the scientific-philosophical discourse (from natural science and philosophy) and expositive and descriptive historical speech: for all of them, there would be *apartness between the historical actuality of being of the act-activity and his content-meaning*.

We will make here a new and brief digression, preparatory for the discussion of the statements that we just made above. Bénédicte Vauthier, in a provocative article devoted to the works of Bakhtin's youth and the most celebrated work of Pavel Medvedev (*The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*), works the hypothesis that the first three works of Bakhtin would compose an unfinished triptych dedicated to stylistic of verbal creation. Although it is a palpitating topic, we will not go beyond the statement of methodological value about the partial acceptance that we give to this hypothesis. Thus, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* would be the first part of a text that would have continued, in a central position, *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity*, and as the final part, *The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Literary Creation*. Of course, one must consider that the latter essay has a degree of textual accomplishment differentiated by circumstances that are already known: the original known by us had been prepared for *The Contemporary Russian*, and was not published because the journal was closed before.

It matters to us to resume the discussion that *The Problem of Content* is abounded with arguments that allow us to carry on the topic of apartness or duality. To the delight of those who feel the passion of the difficulties, it should be noted that many of these arguments seem to stand in sharp contrast to what would be the established reading between the most eminent commentators and that is, to a greater or lesser degree, constituted of variations around Bocharov's statement that we already alluded to.

We will begin by trying to capture the value placed by Bakhtin on the opposition between the historical actuality of being of the act-activity and his content-meaning. In *The Problem of the Content*, the young philosopher says, still in the first section of the essay:

In general, one must do what is not always done: draw a rigorous distinction between content — an indispensable moment or constituent, as we shall see, in the aesthetic object — and cognitive, object-related differentiatedness — a moment that is not obligatory in it. Freedom from the determinateness of a concept is not equivalent to freedom from content; objectlessness is not lack of content. In other domains of culture as well, there are values which do not admit in principle of any object-related differentiation and any limitation by a determinate, stable concept. Thus, a moral action actualizes (at its highest level) a value which can only be accomplished cannot be expressed and cognized in an adequate concept (1990, p.265).

In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, as stated above, Bakhtin formulates the apartness between world of culture and world of life from a broader framing. Not surprisingly, he also does the same in *The Problem of the Content*, even though the perceived width is affected by a diffuse arrangement of the argument, which, anyway, is still different from that of *Art and Answerability*. The fragment quoted above, however, leaves us no doubt that Bakhtin admits the split as a rule of the methodological path trodden by him, even though the difficulty that he examines there is already another. We could imagine the possible developments, set in motion by the reasoning discussed above. If a literary work would be strictly different from a musical work, its content as an objectified product can get confused with the moment of the conceptual determination (matching object and content in a distinct moment, though necessarily in mediate relation to the formal one). The music would already repel such an arrangement (allowing an immediate relationship between form and content, there being *absent*, or, as we prefer, *elusive* or *indiscernible*, the conceptual object). If it is not admissible a differentiation like this, we could posit as possible to situate a literary work on the terrain of those free arts (*free from purely cognitive determination and differentiation of content*, or free as *abstract arts*, in spite of the poverty of the formulation). Obviously, Bakhtin is grappling, in the quoted passage, with the treatment of the relationships between content, form and material. He chooses not to resort to the same treatment as used in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*; here are not present neither the strongly theoretical level necessary to reflection within a general aesthetic framework nor the metatheoretical level that involves the key concepts that are used in that first (fragment of) sketch of a triptych, as well as has noted Jean Peytard (see VAUTHIER, 2008, p.79).

The understanding that we extracted from the passage quoted above is very similar to that achieved in the following quotation of *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, which also contains a methodological reflection derived from the admission of dualism as a rule:

Thus, insofar as we detach a judgment from the unity constituted by the historically actual act/deed of its actualization and assign it to some theoretical unity, there is no way of getting out from within its content/sense aspect and into the ought and the actual once-occurrent event of Being. All attempts to surmount – from within theoretical cognition – the dualism of cognition and life, the dualism of thought and once-occurrent concrete actuality, are utterly hopeless. [...] To look for the actual cognitional act as a performed deed in the content/sense is the same as trying to pull oneself up by one's own hair. The detached content of the cognitional act comes to be governed by its own immanent laws, according to which it then develops as if it had a will of its own. Inasmuch as we have entered that content, i.e., performed an act of abstraction, we are now controlled by its autonomous laws or, to be exact, we are simply no longer present in it as individually and answerably active human beings. (BAKHTIN, 1993, p.7)

The theoretical operation described by Bakhtin is easy to understand, since we do not neglect to keep active the necessary associations. The statement that constitutes a real act-event will be marked by an accomplished becoming as it remains immersed in the world of life. The transfer that places it in the world of theory eliminates this eventness and its becoming. The understanding ceases to be an act and loses its inescapable vocation to becoming.

However, it is when referring to the *moral procedure*, in the quoted passage from *The Problem of Content*, that the apartness between the world of life and culture appears in its fullness in the stretch: if the moral procedure fulfills an achievable moral value but it cannot adequately express or be cognized, the procedure as a single act-event denies itself to the objetification as an act-activity. In other words, Bakhtin refers to a type of act whose content-meaning, existing at the single and unrepeatable act-event, cannot be reduced to the necessary conceptual determination for thinking the act as act-activity. We add, if it is useful: the one and only act-event devoid of universality and necessity would escape from the *a priori* field and its entry into the transcendental world would be refused.

## 2 The time of aporia

The act-activity is objectified, according to Bakhtin, within the unity of a given domain (art, science, philosophy), but his real Being remains as an alive truth only outside these objective domains where the real Being exists in the fullness of possession of those predicates. It survives as living truth at the moment of the act-event. The split that affects the act-activity thus allows it to belong to the world of culture (and determinates itself, objectified as a product, in a unit that makes possible a full content-meaning whose validity is determined by the specific constituents of a given domain of objectification in which it participates), although only in the world of life he can bear the unrepeatable uniqueness of life as a human experience. The question leads to the aporia to which we have already referred to and that we make explicit now: how to constitute a *prima philosophia* without (re)producing the passage of living thought, taken as act-event towards the thought theorized, taken as an act-type? In other words, how to propose a philosophy of participation<sup>1</sup> if in theorizing the thought becomes objectification and loses links with the historicity? The answer is already expected: the responsible act appears as overcoming the aporia.

Let us also add that there is little productive in realizing that Bakhtin describes the split between life and theory as pernicious if the perception stops right there. This apartness is not harmful to life, because this can be experienced regardless of being thought! It is pernicious, rather, to theory, which has the obligation to think, and from

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<sup>1</sup> There are reasons to believe that it would be reasonably prudent to study in a more systematic way the similarity between the concepts of *participation* by Bakhtin and Plato. The platonian theory of participation is proposed in two of his most important dialogues: the *Parmenides*, that outlines it, and *The Sophist*, that concludes it. The first part of the *Parmenides* contains a presentation of five problems, in the end of which is fully outlined an apartness between the human world (taken as the world of sensible things) and the divine world (to be understood as the world of Ideas). The theory of participation responds precisely to the relationship between Ideas and sensible things. Without mutual approval, of course, but here is the parallel with the division between the world of culture and world of life, as proposed by Bakhtin. In the other dialogue, Plato goes beyond the defense of the relationship between Ideas and the sensible world, demonstrating in a brilliant turn the relationship between Ideas. Also in *The Sophist*, an important parallel is given: the *methexis* as separation and union, very familiar to those who remember the statement expressed by Bakhtin as difference and unity. Returning to Plato, we need to synthesize the quoted stretch on the following reasoning: the unity promoted by participation does not imply the disappearance of individual beings, since, considering the theory of the five supreme genres, the existence of the *Same* implies the existence of the *Other* (we would say, *participates in*). If there is something that Bakhtin cannot be accused is of not insisting that assertion. A closer examination of what appears to be a platonian substrate in Bakhtin can raise substantially innovative contributions to understanding the complexity of the philosophical elaboration of the thinker from Orel. Increasingly we believe that Bakhtin has great familiarity with the multivocal explosion of Plato, philosopher (ancestor) of the dialogues.

Bakhtin's point of view, the duty of thinking from a position that is not foreign to the world of life! If it was not so, it would have been sufficient to align, critically and contributively, to any of the moral philosophies of his time or of past times...

The evaluative intonation within which Bakhtin is in motion does not lead merely to censure the split between theory and life. Nor it could only stay in their recognition. The *prima philosophia* that he chases must overcome, within the method, the split in order to establish itself within the world of life and not outside it, in the transcendentalism of a pure thought. He starts from this recognition and directs us to the understanding that, in the face of this apartness, the act and its content may only be seized as a human act if the evaluative accent operates between them, bringing them together in a true oneness. Without this evaluative accent, there would be no moral foundation that should propel a conscious awareness plan to seek the yet-to-be-realized. In other words, what keeps, in the draft of a *prima philosophia* by the young M. Bakhtin, the subject (integrated as opposed to what his consciousness establishes as the Other and integrated in the connection with the historical real Being) is the responsibility of the ethical act. In the words of Sobral:

[...] Bakhtin considers vital in any human endeavor to prevent the apartness between “the content or meaning of a given act/activity and the historical concreteness of the being of this act/activity, his once-occurrent and current experience” [...], in his view a separation that reaches both the theoretical discursive thinking [...] as the historical description-exhibition and aesthetic intuition. The “content or meaning of the act/activity” refers to the product of the act, that generated by the act; “once-occurrent and current experience” of the act is the process of the act, which is updated [...] in an actual situation that don't remains unchanged and therefore occurs only once. (2008, p.226, our translation)<sup>2</sup>.

It is in this context – eminently methodological – that arise, throughout the entirety of *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, some appeals that we will call refoundational. We will take one of these appeals and from the consideration of the

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<sup>2</sup> In the consulted original text: “[...] Bakhtin considera vital, em todo empreendimento humano, evitar a separação entre “o conteúdo ou sentido de um dado ato/atividade e a concretude histórica do ser desse ato/atividade, a experiência atual e uni-ocorrente dele” [...], separação que a seu ver atinge tanto o pensamento teórico discursivo [...] como a descrição-exposição histórica e a intuição estética. O “conteúdo ou sentido do ato/atividade” refere-se ao produto do ato, aquilo que o ato gera; a “experiência atual e uni-ocorrente” do ato é o processo do ato, que se atualiza [...] numa situação concreta que não permanece imutável e, portanto, ocorre uma única vez” (SOBRAL, 2008, p.226).

effects that could be produced by them, we will understand how Bakhtin makes, from the recognition of the split between the two worlds, a crucial methodological operatory component to understand large passages of the text:

We have identified as unfounded and as essentially hopeless all attempts to orient first philosophy (the philosophy of unitary and once-occurrent Being-as-event) in relation to the content/sense aspect or the objectified product taken in abstraction from the once-occurrent actual act/deed and its author – the one who is thinking theoretically, contemplating aesthetically, and acting ethically. (BAKHTIN, 1993, p.27-28)

Bakhtin does not fall into despair. He stands before the aporia and works to overcome it. It is there, in this stretch, the caveat for anyone who wants to understand it: unfounded when makes abstraction of the real and unique act-action and of its author. The Russian philosopher's appeal consists in *generally de-transcendentalize* ethics, aesthetics and science, as understood Sobral (2010). It is refoundational by proposing shifting theories of knowledge into the material and concrete field of the historical and therefore of the social. Besides that it is refoundational as it opposes to that independent and idealistic kingdom of *pure ideas, values and transcendental forms* (see MEDVEDEV, 1985).

Could we propose a synthesis of how to resolve the aporia in the reflections developed by Bakhtin in the triptych?

The explicit textual formulation of aporetic moment arises, strategically, by the end of the introduction:

The world in which a performed act orients itself on the basis of its once-occurrent participation in Being – that is the specific subject of moral philosophy. Yet the act or deed does not know that world as an entity of determinate content; the performed act has to do only with one single person and one single object, where, moreover, this person and this object are given to it in individual emotional-volitional tones. This is a world of proper names, a world of *these* objects and of particular dates of life. A probative description of the world of a once-occurrent life-as-deed, from within the performed deed and on the basis of its non-alibi in Being, would constitute a *confession*, in the sense of an individual and once-occurrent accounting to oneself for one's own actions. (BAKHTIN, 1993, p.53)

To overcome the aporetic state of reflection, Bakhtin postulated the existence of common moments, present in all the innumerable and immiscible individual worlds. He has, it is noteworthy, care to stress that these moments do not present themselves as universal laws or concepts. He acts, therefore, in order to extricate himself from the Neo-Kantian theoretical school, to which his thought is opposed, but from which he draws – not without an extraordinary methodological insight, since he *de-transcendentalizes* to *re-found* – a renewed methodological apparatus set on the notions of space and time that will be so valuable for a lifetime:

All the values of actual life and culture are arranged around the basic architectonic points of the actual world of the performed act or deed: scientific values, aesthetic values, political values (including both ethical and social values), and, finally, religious values. All spatial-temporal values and all sense-content values are drawn toward and concentrated around these central emotional-volitional moments: I, the other, and I-for-the-other (1993, p.54).

### **3 The attributes of Being: transitivity and open eventness of the ethical act**

Turning our thoughts to a moment of conclusions about this reflection, it is time to approach the formulations of *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Bakhtin argues, since the first lines of the text, that the being produced by the aesthetic activity is objectified as sense. This aesthetic activity is no other than that of our senses that propitiate the perceptions of external objects to our consciousness. Further it will also serve the term *aesthetic intuition*, often forming par with the related expression *theoretical cognition*. This is how the being of sensible (and cognizable) objects differs from the real Being, which is in constant becoming and to which Bakhtin assigns the predicates of transitivity and open eventness. He who contemplates, i.e., whose consciousness apprehends representations arising from the aesthetic activity can thus perceive from the being objectified-as-representation just what is in him a moment of consciousness (alive and living) of the subject that contemplates, although the existence of the real Being is given in complete independence of the conditions in which our senses produce representations of it. We could crudely summarize, with a picture that one does not live within the aesthetic contemplation or theoretical

cognition and therefore there will be no subjects, but objects. Subjects exist in the real Being of history, *transitive* and open in their eventness.

The *transitivity* of this Being is barely defined by Bakhtin. And yet, its quality is essential to the correct understanding of the theoretical edifice of the text. The term appears in every edition we have consulted (we found *transitiveness* in the Liapunov's English translation; *transitivité* in Bardet's French translation; *transitividade*, in Faraco and Miotello's Portuguese translation), except in the Bubnova's Spanish translation, in which we found *caducidad*. We confess that without resorting to the Spanish translation, we would have been victims of a lapse of understanding caused by familiarity with the use of the Portuguese term in language studies. We read *transitivity* and understood *incompleteness of signification requiring a complement* – in other words, we were puzzled to understand Being transitive as Being of incompleteness or Being of the mobility meaning of itself to the Other. It was nothing like that at all. *Dicionário Aurélio* registers for *transitive*, as first defined, *transient*. Transitivity of Being is, after all, *his processuality, its permanent transformation* preventing an absolute and definitive coincidence of Being with himself. Eternally changeable, Being can only be identical to himself in the fiction of a stillness that is valid only in the theoretical dimension of discourse and that only has truth (*istina*) in theory.

The open eventness does not receive, in turn, a very different treatment. It is given as a predicate of Being and there are repeated references to it in the text. But in one respect the text proposes the concept in connection with another important moment in the development of its own argument. The eventness has a necessary relationship with the concept of duty. Because of this, it is so important when Bakhtin refutes Rickert's thesis. By disabling duty as a founding concept of truthfulness, Bakhtin maintains the Being inside that open eventness spoken in the initial lines of text. If there was the must-be in terms of Rickert, would not be sustainable the existence of Being in open eventness. In other words, things and beings and phenomena and everything else would be, not happen.

To synthesize as much as possible the conceptual point in question, the ideas of transience (leaving transitivity aside because of its inconvenient competition with

its other non-philosophical use) and open eventness determine what we should understand by act in this Bakhtin's text. The Act, therefore:

- a) has a meaning of process (as indicated by the transience and the opening of its eventness), which lies closest to the verb than the noun; that is why we are able or might admit as preferable to think of human action;
- b) is determined by its inherent *caducidad*, it is an act that ends and begins incessantly (as indicated by the transience and the opening of its eventness);
- c) implies a subject, but not in the unique meaning of one who acts (it makes something occur in spacetime), containing equally and especially the notion that *it is necessarily subject because it operates* (it is contained in the occurrence and acts incessantly, or otherwise would dilute in the occurrence), therefore something that has more activity than the original notion;
- d) within a philosophy that figures as moral, it can only be treated as inextricably linked to an evaluation (determination of value) attached to a must-be, limiting the discussion to just one type of act, what the Spanish translation does not let us to forget, by the way, when it registers in the title *acto ético* and not just *acto*, and in Faraco and Miotello's translation that exhibits the adjunct *responsável*.

Without keeping in mind such injunctions which guided our reading, we could lose ourselves – carelessly, for pernicious erudition or pure exhibitionism – in the trap of inserting this debate in a *tout court* act theory.

#### **4 The must-be of the historical reality of the responsible act**

Let us return to the refutation of Rickert by Bakhtin. Rickert's thesis, formulated in *Der Gegenstand der Erkenntnis* [*The object of understanding*], according to which the mind (or cognition) is a true judgment that would recognize values and condemn disvalues, is contained in the ethical field, and we stress it to confirm obedience to the interpretative injunction that we rose recently (Bakhtin argues that the act is ethical). It is to this thesis that Bakhtin responds when he asserts

that the true-being is the duty of thinking. For the leader of the neo-Kantian school, cognition operates evaluatively through a prior knowledge of what value is, what Bakhtin does not admit to the field of theoretical cognition or aesthetic intuition, since an ethical act is a historical real action of the world of life, different from the products (content-meaning) of the fields in the world of culture:

Insofar as we abstractly separate the content of a lived-experience from its actual experiencing, the content presents itself to us as something absolutely indifferent to value *qua* actual and affirmed value; even a thought about value can be separated from an actual act of valuation (BAKHTIN, 1993, p.33).

However, the product of thought (taken as possible lived experience and not as a product of intuition or cognition) that is valid in itself can become *a participant of the being history of the real cognition*. For this, it

must enter into an essential interconnection with an actual valuation; it is only as an actual value that it is experienced (thought) by me, i.e., can be actually, actively thought (experienced) in an emotional-volitional tone. [...] No content would be actualized, no thought would be actually thought, if an essential interconnection were not established between a content and its emotional-volitional tone, i.e., its actually affirmed value for the one thinking (BAKHTIN, 1993, p.33-34).

Our first conclusion about the duty in this respect is, therefore, that the duty translates an evaluative capacity; derives, to some extent, from a given notion of value. But Bakhtin goes much further, as his reflection tries to de-transcendentalize Kant's contribution that he shares, and refuses to accept the split of worlds, although recognizing it several times. The pages of this manuscript are the blade with which he hallucinates tearing the veil between the worlds and put himself inside of life. So thought is the alive, incarnate thought. And this only exists in theory as a description, which is the immanent objective to the reflections of Bakhtin in his work (if it is allowable to postulate that he has not abandoned such interpretive injunction, as we suspect, that would impose a radical reinterpretation of many postulates pacified by commentators of his work).

To the duty, it is reserved the same fate. Thus, by proposing a description of the must-be of the ethical act, Bakhtin maintains the interconnection with the evaluative dimension. Our second conclusion, that no longer will amaze the most attentive, is that this evaluative dimension of the real cognition in the real Being of history is what Bakhtin calls *responsibility*.

As our effort is to understand, it is convenient to find some stretches in which the explanatory proposal that we just sketched must allow itself to be perceived with the clarity of the demonstration. The first moment among those selected is the one in which Bakhtin undertakes, at some point in the text, the effort to better characterize what he calls emotional-volitional tone, no doubt due to the methodological need to differentiate it from a similar context, the one of psychologism counteracted by the Circle. That is when he says:

The emotional-volitional tone, encompassing and permeating once-occurrent being-as-event, is not a passive psychic reaction, but is a certain ought-to-be attitude of consciousness, an attitude that is morally valid and answerably active. This is an answerably conscious *movement* of consciousness, which transforms possibility into the actuality of a realized deed (a deed of thinking, of feeling, of desiring, etc.). We use the term “emotional-volitional tone” to designate precisely the moment constituted by my self-activity in a lived experience – the experiencing of an experience as *mine*: *I think perform a deed by thinking.* (1993, p.36)

We read the passage as a stage in that Bakhtin describes, in the field of theory, a reflection (thought) performed as an act by which he, denying value of understanding duty as a necessity, as it had settled in the philosophical tradition with which he dialogues, affirms a must-be (the possibility of being is updated, i.e., it comes into existence in the present through an act). It is within his being in the world of life that Bakhtin assesses the moral philosophy and enforces, for love of the human being, the duty to offer a philosophy like this. He carries it out as a response to, updates it and takes responsibility for it, makes it to be first by thought and then describes it in almost one hundred pages of the manuscript. This is how we propose to interpret duty of conscience.

### **The trunk and branches of the dialogue with Kantianism**

Bakhtin maintains, as we know, a productive dialogue with the Kantian legacy (without it meaning, of course, any kind of intellectual affiliation), although the tension is palpable in his dialogue with the neo-Kantian, who constituted, in the *suite* of generations engendered from Kant, the bond that became known as the School of Freiburg, headed by Rickert. If very important concepts like architectonics can be traced to the chapter *The Architectonic of Pure Reason* (see KANT, 2001, p.669-681.) and the notions of time and space as *a priori* intuitions developed in the *Transcendental Aesthetic* (see KANT, 2001, p.87-113.) are subtle but rigorously active interlocutors in *Author and character in aesthetic activity*, plus they can be, as we suspect, the ancestor moment of concepts such as chronotope and exotopy; it would be, in this respect, inappropriate to assertorically sustain that Bakhtin refutes Kant. Kant is, using a bad comparison, the two-faced Janus of Bakhtin, insofar as the reckoning with his philosophical contribution points the way forward and the way to overcome that season of the philosophical development of Bakhtin. And Bakhtin would be, if we are not exaggerating, the stitcher of opposites that, in a sense unique for his time, intuits that a path flows exactly over the other, in a way that transposes the problem to the direction of the track and not for the route itself. We hope to have demonstrated that during the four previous sections.

With the Freiburg school, however, the dialogue concludes in a more abruptly way. Bakhtin peremptorily terminated the issue of his rebuttal to Rickert, by claiming that the “answerable inclusion in the acknowledged once-occurrent uniqueness of Being-as-event is precisely what constitutes the truth [*pravda*] of the situation” (1993, p.39-40). Thus, we insist, the true duty, the duty of thinking is a duty for oneself to take on existing in the oneness of Being within this historical reality and this uniqueness/singularity is a concretely individual fact without, however, the self in his unrepeatable and unique place, can no longer aspire to open eventness of Being. This aspiration happens through the recognition that the must-be belongs to an architectonics. Bakhtin defines this architectonics as follows:

It is the yet-to-be-realized plane of my orientation in Being-as-event or an architectonic that is incessantly and actively realized through my answerable deed, upbuilt by my deed and possessing stability only in the answerability of my deed (1993, p.75).

It is worth to repeat, aiming at finalizing and situating us in the same not-purely stylistic dimension we assigned to Bakhtin, that the living center of this architectonics – and its implications for the problems of the cleaved world and of the attributes of Being and the ethical act – is the concrete human being, lovingly taken in his existence by his responsive act. This act is the call refoundation of theories of knowledge, in order to allow our conscious awareness gets surrounded by the knowledge of forms without suffering from formalism, live the objectified Being in aesthetics without suffering from any of the possible aestheticisms and, finally, operate the description of the occurrence-ness of Being in the theory without reducing it for any defects of theoreticism.

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