

Bakhtin Completely Naked
or
A Reading of Bakhtin in a Dialogue with Voloshinov, Medvedev and Vygotsky
or else
**Dialogism, the Misfortunes of a Concept when it Grows too Big, but Still Is
Dialogism all the Same**

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Foreword

This text is twice a “text of circumstance.” It was firstly proposed as a supporting text of an oral presentation in the seminar “Language, Dialogue, Interaction” (LDI) organised by Maryse Bournel-Bosson and Katia Kostulski and within Yves Clot’s framework of teaching of labour psychology in February 2012. It is this “circumstance” which explains that, particularly, at the end, the issue of “dialogism” is related to what might be a “concrete psychology” in its relationships with narrative and dialogue. The fact that this work has been presented to “Labour psychologists” and not, for example, to semioticians specialized in Bakhtin justifies, in my view, the number of quotes and the correlative effort – whether it is successful or not, is a different issue - so as not to presume that the nature of the problem is well known.

The second circumstance is the publication of Jean-Paul Bronckart and Cristian Bota’s book: *Bakhtine démasqué, Histoire d’un menteur, d’une escroquerie et d’un délire collectif*¹. It is because this book is a destruction of the myth of a total Bakhtin that I have given this text its first title “*Bakhtine tout nu*”- “Bakhtin Completely Naked.” The second title, however, refers to the other addressed authors. And the last one indicates that there is a will to express a certain reservation with regards to the inflation of the usage of the term “dialogism, acknowledging, at the same time, that if there may be “concrete psychology” (?), it certainly entails diversified modalities of a dialogue with the others and with oneself.

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1. The references are provided at the end of the book.

It is not only a circumstantial text, but also a text which does not claim to be knowledgeable. Firstly, I do not read Russian and I can barely read German. On the other hand, (and correlatively) I do not know the majority of the source authors of the authors who are mentioned here (either German or Russian). I am, therefore, incapable of replacing these authors in the history of ideas, of establishing causality or influence links, sources of what revolves around the theme of “dialogism,” of “genre” or others.

Likewise, I am incapable of mastering well some issues, particularly the one related to what a Marxist analysis of culture is and more specifically that of literature. In relation to this issue as well as others, I try to clarify my own way of orienting myself with no intention to build a “theory.” I only hope that this text can help the reader in building his or her own “point of view.” (I leave open the question of the validity of the “point of view” metaphor.) Furthermore, I am unable to scientifically take sides on attribution problems. I have only tried to build for myself something like a “reasonable opinion.”

Moreover, at the time (July-August 2012) when I read this text again, other articles had been published, especially the review of Jean-Paul Bronckart and Cristian Bota’s book by Serge Zenkine, which seems to me well documented and moderate.

Anyhow, I undertake here the reading of Jean-Paul Bronckart and Cristian Bota’s book (from now on “Bronckart” or “B. & B.”) without consulting the set of documents they refer to and, much less the ones they have not mentioned. I also use some pieces of information presented in Patrick Sériot’s preface to the critical edition and to the French translation that he did on *Marxism and Philosophy of Language* (from now on *MPL*) published earlier. In my view, there is no specific reason which could explain or justify why at a given time I refer to one work rather than the other: Seriot’s text is certainly more condensed; there is no doubt it is better documented on the period and, on the other hand, it bears a less controversial tone. Anyhow, I hope I have not betrayed any of the two, except for inevitable reasons, due to brevity.

I feel then as a “participating” reader rather than an expert in reconstituting the historical truth, for which, once more, I am not qualified. Above all, it seemed to me that once the validity of the critiques addressed to the myth of the “total Bakhtin” is acknowledged, I could go back, partially of course, to the issue on how I / we (here, I leave in suspense the question regarding what “I, we” might refer to) could receive

Bakhtin's, Medvedev's and Voloshinov's (alphabetical order) thoughts and react to them. Then, I was led into the (re)reading of some other authors, particularly Vygotsky. In any case, one cannot, strictly speaking, summarise his work and much less quote him thoroughly. Hence, the oddity or the rickety aspect, as one might say, of these necessarily partial quotes.

Thus, the second part of the text tries, on the one hand, to point out some aspects of what Voloshinov and Medvedev have written themselves. Then, it goes back again unto the more specifically Bakhtinian issue (it seems to me) of what the relationship of a "human science" could be, at the same time, in relation to daily practice and, on the other hand, in relation to the reception of works, particularly novels.

Finally, in the last part, I propose some ideas, and I am not either a specialist on these, on what a reflection on dialogue and narrative in the practice of psychology can yield, be it everyone's common place or naïve psychology, or the one which I reckon as pertaining to the "professional psychologist." Whether it is the others, in the flesh, texts, or else the relationship that everyone has with oneself, I keep in mind – without being able of course to "address it thoroughly" – what could be the "dialogical" issue of the different forms of reception-comprehension-response established in our relationship with others, with ourselves, with works. All of this in different situations. What could one say about what this "dialogue" could be in different situations? For example, what is it to understand (enough, of course, "to understand thoroughly" is devoid of meaning) the other who is familiar, in ordinary and extraordinary circumstances, and the other who is unfamiliar, pertaining to a very different culture. Adding to that the difference between understanding for a precise goal: To help, for example, or to console, which has very little to do with "understanding in order to explain to a third party what is going on." What happens then to the comprehension of oneself and of its variable modalities? Likewise with the comprehension oriented towards an objective in professional life. This raises also the question of what is exactly the "subject supposed to understand" (reputative). What happens then to the articulation between an expressed and generic knowledge (the one we find in treatises) and the practice reflected in our effective relationships with others (whether it is within the framework of current interactions or within the psychologist's interpretative practice), or else our mode of comprehending a hero of a novel or a film? Without wishing to put an end to the debate

before opening it, one could say that the different authors with whom I will try (very briefly) to dialogue might help me to open perspectives, guide me, render explicit what seems to me “all natural” in my relation with myself and with the others (is it this what could and should be called “phenomenology”?). Or else, and this is a different aspect of the same dialogue, to help me see that the “completely natural” for me is not completely natural for the other or in general. In any case, the matter here is not about leading to a “theory.” We do not know which relationship one could presume between what could possibly be proposed as “true in general,” what is evident for a period of time (our time) or an object of individual reflection possibly shared with what one could call the little “we” of “I-you² and some others” in contrast with the big “we” of the period. There is no reason for the process to come to an end. On the contrary, restarting is inscribed firstly in the succession of generations. Taking here only the example of the significance of literary works for us, let us imagine that one could say: “Now we know the meaning of Shakespeare’s or Proust’s work. Read M. X’s commentary rather than the work itself. Is it more secure (or quicker)?” Likewise, it is doubtful that one could assert: “Since Marx, Freud or the progress of brain imaging (*ad libitum*), we know what the explanation of a human behavior is.” Yet, it is in such reflection, certainly too general, on “dialogues and comprehensions” that I seek to read the authors and, at the same time, raise the question of “concrete psychology.”

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In order to define more in detail the first two parts, first, I try to quickly summarise, on the basis of the two texts referred to above, the critiques of the myth of a “great Bakhtin,” author of Voloshinov’s and Medvedev’s works. This presentation has become dominant (even if not unanimous) from 1970 until today. I clarify that I can only repeat here the authors’ analysis and I am not sure if I understand the reasons behind the success of this representation of the “Great Bakhtin.” I do not have either full command of the question regarding the precise relations of influence between the three authors (and others). Furthermore, I do not have the expertise to render explicit the “intellectual climate” of the circulation of themes and approaches in the nascent USSR.

² TN. The author uses ‘*tu*’ in the original, which stands for ‘you’ second person singular.

Reestablishing the legitimacy of “signatures” does not solve the question of circulation of ideas and much less the one related to the exact significance of the notion of author and, more broadly speaking, to the question “who speaks through us?” All these questions remain underlying.

The second part will then try to present some aspects of my reading on these three (four) authors. And I am very much aware of its limits and of its forced partiality. It is just a matter of proposing some directions for consideration, not from summarised “ideas,” but, as much as possible within a limited period of time, from the movement of some quotes which are presented here, whose aim is to render the discussion possible, far more than analyzing them. Attribution problems do not resolve the question of the relationship between different lines of thought, particularly the “Marxist” or, at any rate, the “sociological” in Voloshinov, which is further marked by a reflection, partly inspired by neo-Kantianism regarding the place of the individual and the inevitable diversity of approaches found in Bakhtin. It seems that the reference to the significance of the novel and of its plot has also been more and more dominant in Bakhtin. As shown in the title, I also wonder to what extent all this could and should be synthesised around the notion of “dialogism.”

More precisely, it seems to me that apart from the “auctorial” analysis, B. & B.’s book presents a strongly critical reading of the very thought of the texts by “reduced Bakhtin” or else “completely naked,” which I do not share. Here, it is no longer a matter of “historical science,” but rather a matter of point of view about texts, of what “reading as” is, of “responsive comprehension” if one might say. In order to avoid a useless controversial style, I will not concentrate on the way how the B. & B.’s value judgments do not seem to do justice to the specificity of Bakhtin’s thought considering that they do not take much into account the volume of work that Bakhtin has written about the novel, particularly, in the texts collected in *The Aesthetics of Verbal Creation* and in *Aesthetics and Theory of the Novel*. However, it also seems to me that they did not know or want “to go deeper” into an early text like *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, which is certainly closer to what Bakhtin wrote at the end of his life. To go straight to the point, for me, it is a matter of presenting Bakhtin as a thinker of heterogeneity of existence, exactly as expressed in the plot of the novel. Certainly, this deviates us from a kind of totalizing form of Marxism or “historical materialism.”

Likewise, I cannot follow completely the criticism that Sériot makes to *MPL*. At the end of his preface, Sériot expresses his refusal of the western vision and particularly, the French one – around 1968 and subsequent years – in relation to Bakhtin-Voloshinov, but also a critical review of the latter in the name of “science.” To be more precise, it seems to me that Sériot is right to partially raise doubts about what constitutes the “Marxist” side in the appeal to a social perspective in Voloshinov. However, it also seems to me that this does not justify the critical appraisal he makes of the whole of *MPL* as a “non-scientific” work.

Nevertheless, a criticism of critiques is at least a questionable genre. While reading again Bakhtin’s as well as Voloshinov’s texts, I found again the enthusiasm which enthralled me the first time I read it (is it the “same” enthusiasm? Certainly not. Anyhow, it is impossible to determine it). It is something related to this enthusiasm that I would like to share. I start with recalling some of the “major ideas” that one finds in *MPL* and likewise in *Freudianism*, as it would have been impossible, in my view, to talk about Bakhtin without recalling his distance or relationship, alternately, with what could be proposed as being Voloshinov’s specific thought.

I also allow myself to quote some passages from Medvedev’s work, be it just for the fact of not having been successful in France (first of all for the simple reason of a late translation) as the other two authors. Acknowledging the specificity of Bakhtin’s thought does not exclude the fact of taking into consideration what is also shared with Medvedev (or originates directly from him): the critique of the solely “formal” or formalist approach of the texts.

In relation to Bakhtin, who remains at the core of this work, obviously, I can only go back over a tiny part of his work, especially the one related to the philosophy of the novel. The limits of this work are therefore considerable, not to mention the multiplicity of perspectives that the comparison, particularly with Vygotsky’s *Psychology of Art*, might open up. Likewise, Voloshinov’s global considerations on thought and sign would benefit from being confronted with the approach of this problem, which is, in my view much richer and expanded in Vygotsky’s work as a whole.

In the course of its development, this text has been diversified (and enlarged) due to multiple encounters. Thus, it is not my intention to put forward that what is

presented here constitutes “the essential part” of the authors’ thought. This reading does not aim at being exhaustive either. It is therefore, with all the “subjectivity” that, in the minor sense where “subjectivity” means “peculiarity,” I get back to some passages which strike me in the authors involved. In fact, it seemed to me more appropriate to comment upon relatively long passages of these authors rather than propose a “thought of X” or “of Y” illustrated by some short quotes. I thought that this would allow the readers in turn to more easily enhance these texts differently, especially that, to me, a text is characterised by its movement and not by the summary that one may make out of it. Furthermore, my choice has been to present above all texts which struck me with what they seemed to contribute, rather than those which I could consider as being liable to criticism. Of course, I hope that this text, despite its partiality, bears “some connection” with the works it quotes, probably even with the global “thought” of the involved authors.

I started from the assumption that every reading creates a form of contemporaneity with the read authors, which is not incompatible with the acknowledgment of their distance, as, after all, no proximity between us implies “identity” or “identification,” but rather “community-distance.” Even if a scholarly reading, which is not mine, would enable to “replace the authors in their time,” it would not impede them from irrupting in our time or, in other words, that our reading creates a fragile kind of “intertemporality.”

In other words, there lies the risk – should one say “dialogical”? - that every attempt runs so as to report the thought of other authors, considering that this one is (relatively) brief. Then, obviously, it is not a question of substituting here the reading of these two works, and much less the reading of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov or Vygotsky.

1 Bakhtin’s, Medvedev’s and Voloshinov’s Respective “Authorship”

Then the question is: why some texts published under the name of Voloshinov and Medvedev have been assigned to Bakhtin? In this respect, which is essential, B. & B.’s critique (which converges with the reconstitution carried out faster by Sériot) seems to me well founded.

The foreword in B. & B.'s book recalls that in 1961, three young admirers of Bakhtin's text on Dostoevsky went to Saransk to meet him and contributed then to bring his name out of oblivion. Thus, nearly thirty years after the first publications, Bakhtin as author reemerges with the publication in 1963 of an expanded version of *Dostoevsky*, followed by a revised version of the thesis on Rabelais. *Dostoevsky* was translated into French in 1970 and in English in 1973. Rabelais was translated into English in 1968 and in French in 1970. They are followed by the translation into English of *Marxism and Philosophy of Language* in 1973 (signed Voloshinov) and into French in 1977 (signed Bakhtin / Voloshinov), and followed by the translation into English of Medvedev's book in 1978 (the translation into French is very recent: in 2008).

1.1 The Construction of the "Myth"

A chronological fact: Bakhtin died in 1975. Voloshinov died from tuberculosis in 1936 and Medvedev was shot in 1938. This has somehow left to Bakhtin (or to those who spoke in his name) a position whereby the other two "involved parties" could not answer.

Only ten years after the rediscovery, which has just been mentioned, that the "issue" of the "disputed texts" did emerge. The revelation is firstly made by V. Ivanov in a conference he gave in 1970, and published in 1973 in *Sign Systems Studies* of Tartu School. It appears under the form of bibliography assigning the works in question to Bakhtin. According to this revelation, his "pupils" Medvedev and Voloshinov had made only small changes (and the title in the case of *MPL*). He adds that this belonging to a single author is "confirmed by witnesses" and "appears clearly from the text itself." One may observe incidentally that Ivanov's text borrows the major part of the quotes "by Bakhtin" from the texts originally signed by Voloshinov and Medvedev. For him, undoubtedly, the unity of the book was somehow taken for granted. Correlatively, it is only in Leontiev's *Psycholinguistics* (1967) that a "Bakhtin School" or a "Bakhtin Circle" is mentioned.

However, apart from this late appearance, the situation is twofold obscure from the very beginning. Firstly, the defenders of the thesis of "Bakhtin School" frequently juxtapose different formulae. In their "official" biography, Clark and Holquist (quoted by B. & B., p.146) recall first of all: "We will never be able to unquestionably reach a

decision on the matter of knowing how and by whom these texts have been written,” particularly considering that Bakhtin refused to sign the official document prepared in 1975 stating that he was indeed the author of the three books.

Here, I do not get back to Bakhtin’s contradictory declarations, nor to the meaning assigned to his wife’s remarks in relation to the book signed by Medvedev: “How many times have I not recopied him!” or to her testimony according to which Bakhtin had dictated to Voloshinov his *Freudianism*. (Anyhow, no manuscript has been conserved.) This is accompanied with value judgments, presenting Medvedev and Voloshinov as mediocre authors. Thus, I do not get back either to the issue related to the resumption of the expression “Bakhtin Circle.”

B. & B. recall that this doxa has never encountered unanimity: Titunik, the first translator in English of *MPL* and *Freudianism* does not take into account at all Ivanov’s discourse (p.59) and sees no reason to follow him (p.60). Here, I merely quote Bronckart (p.83):

The American and German translators-commentators (Titunik and particularly Weber) have simply ignored these allegations. Then, they have strongly rejected them on the grounds of three types of arguments:

- the absence, mentioned above, of any true testimony;
- the impossibility for a man alone to produce four books and nine articles in three years considering the living and working conditions of the time;
- the evident differences in style and content between the texts signed by both and by the other, despite the peremptory and gratuitous statements made by Ivanov on this issue. And these specialists have always continued to express their scepticism regarding the Bakhtinian omni paternity.

Much later, Bakhtin’s declarations emerged together with the issue of contradiction between these later declarations and his first declarations, a matter which remains obscure.

Sériot (p.47) observes the diversity of solutions adopted in the world in relation to the presentation of the authors’ names:

In Russia, apart from the editing of Voloshinov’s texts by N. Vasiliev (1995), all the new editions of the “controversial texts” have been carried out under the *sole name* of Bakhtin, in a collection whose title evokes a detective novel: “Bakhtin under the Mask”. In the other

countries, Voloshinov was either mentioned on his own [...] or together with Bakhtin.

Sériot quotes nine in the first case, six in the second, with different typographical solutions: comma, slanted bar or parentheses. He also adds that for some of the attributions, “the paths have been inverted depending on the countries.”

Nonetheless, this doctrine was spread particularly in France and firstly through Jakobson’s preface to the French edition of *MPL*. In prior texts, Jakobson had first quoted Voloshinov as the author of the book. Here, he attributes the authorship solely to Bakhtin: “We end up discovering that the book in question and many other works [...] were in fact written by Bakhtin.”

Bakhtin “refused to make concessions to the phraseology of the time.” This is what, supposedly, Voloshinov had done as well as providing an appropriate title. Marina Yaguello, the translator, calls on, at the same time, to Bakhtin’s intransigence, to his modesty, to his love for the carnivalesque, somewhat too *ad hoc* and multiple explanations which, at least for the first two, do not seem to be coherent with the fact that there was the 1929 publication of *Dostoevsky* under the name of Bakhtin. Furthermore, nothing enables one to distinguish what in the text pertains to one author or to the other.

1.2 Some Factual Information about the Cultural Life in the USSR during the Twenties

Among the factual data, undoubtedly, the most important piece is that there has been no “Bakhtin circle.” The expression was used for the first time by Leontiev (1967) and Bakhtin did not take it over in his interview with Duvakin (Sériot, p.19-20). On this issue, I follow Sériot’s text which recalls that the circle in question comprised other members than the three currently translated in France and, especially, that no reason related to age or prestige makes of it a “Bakhtin circle.” He also recalls that, at the beginning, the group called themselves “Kantian seminar,” organised by Kagan who had studied philosophy in Germany, as the Jews could not pursue higher education in the tsarist Russia. Nonetheless, this group met first in 1921 in the small town Nevel’, located 300 kilometers south-west from Petrograd, then in Vitebsk, where (Sériot, p.21) “many intellectuals and artists from Petrograd settled temporarily so as to escape from a

town devastated by ‘war communism’ [whose] inhabitants were literally dying from cold and hunger.”

Bakhtin and Voloshinov were twenty four years of age and they met among others “a group of talented and refugee youngsters.” Among them, there was Pumpjanskij, about whom Sériot adds a remark:

The chronological primacy of Pumpjanskij’s works in relation to the Dostoevsky work, the nature of Gogol’s laughter, the philosophy of nature, the formal method, make of him by far a precursor of Bakhtin. Together with Kagan, he was the most charismatic character from the Nevel’ and Vitebsk’s groups...

Sériot relates some features of the intense intellectual life in Nevel’ and Vitebsk, particularly a course on literature given by Bakhtin, as well as his participation in a public debate on “God and socialism” and to another one on “Christianism and the critique” where Bakhtin presented Nietzsche’s attitude in relation to Christianity, on “the Russian national character in literature and philosophy” or else on “the person’s role.” In summary, different perspectives were presented. Nonetheless, they were more philosophical, religious and cultural than “Marxist.”

The second historical point of interest to the current reader is that back then the newspapers which reported on these debates were overtly hostile to “religion.” However, the intellectuals who defended it in one way or another could freely develop their point of view.

It was upon the invitation of Medvedev, rector of the Popular University of Vitebsk that Bakhtin and Voloshinov went to this larger city. Therefore, there is surely a shared intellectual life, with more than three involved, and Bakhtin held no specific preeminent position.

Apart from Kagan and Pumpjanskij’s roles, Pavel Medvedev’s key role (1892-1938) is highlighted here. Initially a lawyer, member of the local council of Vitebsk, he organised the cultural life of this town and started writing about literature as of 1912. In 1918, he organised the popular University and created within the scope of the University a “free aesthetics Society” and a seminar on sociology. He brought Pumpjanskij to Vitebsk, who was then followed by Bakhtin (1920), and then, it was Voloshinov’s turn (1921). He was at the heart of local cultural activities that Chagall

and Malevitch took part in. Back then it was referred to as the “Renaissance of Vitebsk.” Furthermore, Medvedev wrote from 1910 to 1920. Therefore, it was before Bakhtin, who should rather be firstly considered as Kagan’s as well as Pumpjanskij’s disciple, and then, at least, inspired by Medvedev. The latter, as a matter of fact, certainly engaged in finding a job for Bakhtin.

I add some elements about Medvedev which have been withdrawn from the biography annexed to the recent translation of the *Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*. To start with, he published a number of works dedicated to the poet Dem’jan Bednyj and to Alexandre Blok (in 1923 and then in 1938) as well as to Serge Esenin (in collaboration). His bibliography comprises about twenty articles between 1914 and 1937, particularly on Dostoevsky. The whole thing makes out of him a surely remarkable author and (by the way) he did publish before Bakhtin.

Furthermore, he had an important institutional role and acted as a “route companion.” He was the one who did the editing of the first edition of the book signed Bakhtin devoted to Dostoevsky. In 1936, as a curator of the University of Saransk, he contributed to get a teaching position for Bakhtin, who was back then banned for political reasons.

Likewise, I have withdrawn from Sériot’s preface (p.50 and subsequent ones) some aspects on Voloshinov’s work which make it possible to set up a different image other than the relationship master-disciple between Bakhtin and himself (apart from their contemporaneity). Voloshinov firstly published poems and texts on music. After his return to Petrograd – Leningrad in 1924, he registered in the ILJaZV (Institute for compared history of languages and literatures in the West and East) where he pursued a doctorate, working on “the transmission of the speech of others,” and held the position of lecturer in January 1925. At the same time, his fame increased. Sériot observes that he has not finished a thesis nor the translation of volume I of *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* by Cassirer.

I add some words (borrowed from Sériot and especially from Ivanova’s article) on Lev Jakubinskij (1892-1945), who was certainly forgotten, at least in the West. He was Baudouin de Courternay’s student, and in 1917-1919, he founded the Society for research on poetic language (Opojaz) and he worked, at the same time, at the “Japethic Institute (under the direction of Nicolas Marr). He published in 1923, inter alia, an

article on “dialogical discourse” devoted to the articulation of psychology and sociology in language and on the relationship of daily speech and poetic speech, which has influenced both Voloshinov and Vygotsky. He was the one who developed the first Dostoevskyan example of the word pronounced under different intonations (taken up by Voloshinov). He was the one who developed the presentation of intonation taken in the broad sense of relational significance produced by mimic and globally by the body. These considerations on dialogue have to some extent originated from Chtcherba (1915).

Ivanova recalls that the problem of relations between poetic language and ordinary language was, together with the reflection on the notion of “function,” one of the recurrent issues of intellectual exchange in the USSR. Besides taking intonation into account, Jakubinskij developed the notion of inner production of more or less automated replies, the one related to the articulation of speech on the perception of a common world, as well as the possibility of a change of plan, of dialogal return on the preceding speech. In this sense, one could perhaps establish something as an identity of relationships: Jakubinskij / Voloshinov = Voloshinov / Bakhtin in the sense that the first one has initiated the second to the issue of dialogue. (Jakubinskij had Voloshinov as a student in his ILJaZV seminar).

At the same time, Ivanova insists on the fact that Jakubinskij takes the form of the text as a starting point, while Voloshinov considers the global situation of communication. She adds:

The relationship between Jakubinskij’s article and Voloshinov’s works and their scientific value becomes more evident if we take into account another work which, in fact, has also fallen into oblivion. It is V. Vinogradov’s book *On the Poetry of Anna Akhmatova (1925)*. In this work dedicated to the specificity of style of this poet, Vinogradov introduced a chapter: “The Grimaces of Dialogue,” where he studies the role of dialogue in Akhmatova’s poetry. This introduction of dialogues enables the poet not only to avoid monotony, but also to create an array of emotional effects which organise the architectonics of meaning of her poems.

Therefore, there is a large wave of authors working on dialogue and on the “sociology of language” where Bakhtin was far from being the “active centre.”

1.3 Bakhtin's "Strange" Relations with Factual Truth

Moreover, what one might at least call Bakhtin's "strange" relations with factual truth have been established. Sériot (p.33 and subsequent ones) observes that the different places where Bakhtin has taught, he gave in different curriculum vitae particularly about his date of birth as well as the place where he finished his university education.

Yet, there is no trace of him having even passed the university entrance exam, differently from his brother Nikolaj [...] Mikhail Bakhtin's name does not appear in any list of students nor any list of auditors [...] The details provided by Bakhtin about his life are copied from his brother Nikolaj, and they change over time. He also uses some pieces from M. Kagan's biography. The latter seems to have substituted Nikolaj in the role of mentor of Mikhail after the departure of the elder brother.

Likewise, it seems he mistakenly introduced himself as being from a noble origin...

Furthermore, the issue of the practice of plagiarism is raised (in contrast with the sole theme recovery or circulation of ideas). Thus, Bronckart quotes (p.298) Matejka: In relation to "The Problem of Content."

Certainly, the most striking fact is that in his article, Bakhtin does not make any reference to Broder Christiansen's neo-kantian *Philosophie der Kunst* while he explores this book in a way which would be considered as plagiarism, according to the standards of Western Europe.

Likewise, Poole (p.299) finds in *Rabelais* five pages by Cassirer withdrawn from *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, copied exactly the same with, sometimes, some interspersed observations by Bakhtin.

Moreover, in relation to the historical setting, one could question the image of hostility towards the regime, considering that he could hold as of 1945 the position of head of department of general literature of the University of Mordovia, a position that he held for fifteen years. On the other hand, those who could consult the original manuscripts have found "reverential tributes" to Lenin and Stalin. He was no longer

banned as of 1930. Furthermore, his ideas started being part of the intellectual circulation of the time.

1.4 About “Authorship”

In order to try to conclude on the attribution of the “disputed” or “controversial” works, one can observe together with Sériot (p.37) that “Bakhtin has given only evasive, contradictory and disconcerting answers.” Sériot adds (p.42) that “towards the very end of his life, he [Bakhtin] refused to sign an acknowledgment of ownership despite the official request from the Soviet Association of Copyrights (VAAP).” And (B. & B., p. 239 and subsequent pages) in a text dated 1994, Bocharov (one of the three researchers together with Kozhinov and Gachev who had resumed contact with Bakhtin in 1961) mentions a letter by Bakhtin to Kozhinov which contains, in particular, this passage:

I know very well the books *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* and *Marxism and Philosophy of Language*. V. N. Voloshinov and P. N. Medvedev were my friends and at the time when these books were written, we used to work very closely and creatively. Furthermore, these books like my study on Dostoevsky are based on a common conception of language and verbal work. Our contact throughout our works lessens neither the autonomy, nor the originality of each of these three books.

He adds that this is not the case for the other works by Medvedev and Voloshinov. I follow here Bronckart for whom this text is perfectly clear in relation to the question of authorship. However, he adds that all this gets in conflict with Bakhtin’s later declarations according to which he had thoroughly written the works in question. Likewise, the issue raised here regarding collaboration: “is hardly compatible with the one, so frequently proposed, of a relationship of master (Bakhtin) with his students (Voloshinov and Medvedev).”

I copy verbatim what Sériot has concluded (p.45-46):

The most likely is that all these works are the result of multiform discussions, that the influence might be multilateral, and that each author has addressed in his own manner themes which were discussed on many occasions with different interlocutors. It is likely that in

Nevel' and Vitebsk, the jurist Voloshinov learned a great deal from the philosophers Bakhtin and Kagan, but that in Leningrad, Voloshinov, the sociologist and language philosopher, has rather introduced Bakhtin to the developing new science. In that period, in comparison to Bakhtin, Voloshinov was more and more autonomous on issues as essential as Marxism, Freudianism, Marrism.

One could add at the level of likelihood that the triple field of Marxism, Freudianism and Marrism are very little or not at all referred to in the texts that are surely Bakhtin's. Bronckart says nearly the same thing. He recalls that one could propose together with Morton and Emerson (B. & B., p.214) that the initial Bakhtin does not think in terms of "dialogism" and that it is Voloshinov who has led Bakhtin towards this theme. Likewise, one could attribute to Medvedev the introduction to the issue of genre.

But then Bronckart inquires about the writing conditions of the first *Dostoevsky*: In his interview with Duvakin, Bakhtin acknowledged that it was Kozhinov who did all the re-editing work of the book in question (B. & B., p.267). However, Bronckart wonders about why Bakhtin seems to hesitate to consider the book as his. For the first *Dostoevsky*, (B. & B., p.272 and subsequent pages) one should firstly acknowledge that there was an urgent need of records of publications for him to be liberated or have the initial penalty attenuated (deportation to the Solovetski Islands). Yet the work comprises two parts: Philosophical and religious considerations according to Bronckart and a method of analysis similar to Voloshinov's and to Medvedev's. (I would add that the first part is justified by the central aspect of the religious issue in Dostoevsky). Then, Bronckart proposes that the attribution of this book (at least the second half) to Bakhtin should be questioned, saying it was rather a gift from his companions so as to ensure he gains notoriety (p.272), while acknowledging that there is only a "path for a probable truth" (p.268).

Moreover, Bronckart denounces more sharply than Sériot what one could call the strong evidence with which the "pan-Bakhtinism" got imposed. However, a question remains: why has this belief of Bakhtin's "omni paternity" spread so quickly, as well as the existence of "Bakhtin circle"? Bronckart (p.100 and subsequent pages) observes that the assertion takes at times a paradoxal shape. Thus, in *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle*, followed by *The Writings of the Bakhtin Circle*, Todorov starts by explaining what renders the issue obscure. Thus, he observes (p.20):

The writings signed by Voloshinov and Medvedev but attributed to Bakhtin are therefore well integrated into the series of writings by these authors; nonetheless, there are remarkable differences between the writings signed by Bakhtin and those assigned to him.

In short, clear writing of Medvedev's text, dogmatism of Voloshinov's text which comprises assertions with no proof and confused writing and repetitions in Bakhtin's texts. (One should highlight that considering that no editing was done in the majority of Bakhtin's texts when he was alive, it is understandable that these texts have been more or less prepared in view of their publication). And, in fact, (for example, in the few quotes that we will be using later), the texts reveal very different styles. However, Todorov adds: "Naturally, these surface differences unveil a large homogeneity of thought; this is the reason why Ivanov's statement seems so likely."

On the other hand, Todorov refutes the idea that Medvedev and Voloshinov were responsible for a vague Marxist terminology. He observes (and I believe one could follow him) that being Marxist or not, this presentation is not a superficial use of the notions related to it, even if one might have doubts together with Sériot – it will be addressed later – about the "profoundness" of this Marxist inspiration. From that point, Todorov claims (p.23):

It is unacceptable that we purely and simply erase Voloshinov and Medvedev's names and go against Bakhtin's overt wish not to assume *the publication* of such writings. However, it is equally impossible not to take into account the unity of the thought testified by the publications as a whole (and which can be attributed, according to many testimonies, to Bakhtin's influence).

Finally, Todorov's book tends to unify under the notion of "dialogical principle" the whole production of these authors, considered as Bakhtin's work, but, especially, from formulations borrowed from *MPL*, which poses a problem if we acknowledge that the texts which have surely been written by Bakhtin express a largely divergent inspiration. Here, I would rather follow three times Bronckart's thought (and Sériot's as well):

- there is no testimony on account of the fact that Bakhtin had somehow "thought more" than the other two authors;

- Bakhtin's university degree is unquestionably presumed;
- likewise the multiple depreciating value judgments regarding the other two authors have been asserted with no proof.

Moreover, as it has already been said, Bakhtin's first known texts do not bear any sociological or Marxist orientation, which we find in *MPL*.

The fact that Bakhtin's heirs have had a financial interest (copyrights) or a "moral" one (prestige) in this belief, there is no doubt about that. Among the factual problems, Bronckart (p.237) talks about: "Russian promoters of Bakhtin who kept managing the lucrative international dissemination of the master's reconstituted work."

Unless I am wrong, this financial aspect has not been well clarified. However, probably it is difficult to provide the proofs.

Furthermore, one could surely appeal to the general tendency regarding the making of a story populated with heroes and forgetting the mass of the "others," but this tendency is certainly too general to have an explicative role here. A more precise explanation might make appeal to the ideological ambience: hostility towards Marxism in current Russia and some American authors. Yet, Voloshinov used to profess Marxism and Bakhtin certainly did not (or rather, much less). This explains the wish to make out of Bakhtin "the great man." This was the explanation that Gardin had already provided in his article in *La Pensée* published in 1978: It might have been the will, during the period of ebb of Marxism, to give preference of quoting a non Marxist author rather than two authors who claim to belong to Marxism.

In relation to the attribution of *Dostoevsky*, I cannot take sides particularly that I do not have access to the first version. And whether Duvakin's interview with Bakhtin, as reported by Bronckart (p.267), confirms the role held by Kozhinov in this new edition, it is not thoroughly clear. I can only state that *Dostoevsky* holds its place among the texts dedicated to the novel, currently acknowledged by the critique as belonging to Bakhtin.

However, above all, it seems to me that one could eliminate the myth of the "Great Bakhtin" and find a large number of loans or influences in Bakhtin's texts, either explicit or, more frequently, non explicit, without withdrawing significance and value from these texts.

*

Therefore, before undertaking the reading itself of the texts of the three authors, some points are raised on what this reading could be.

It seems to me that reading whatever book, it is, first of all, to let oneself be carried out by its movement. It is also to face the difference of our first reaction modes: there might be immediate agreement, first refusal, questions. From then on, our responsive comprehension might try to render our reading background more precise:

- elucidation of the author's specific historical place,
- clarifications regarding the words which represent the notions he uses (the author himself or the translator). This work of meaning is potentially infinite,
- particularly that it also (above all?) comprises the elucidation of one's own attitude

I think I can see something as a "fundamental project" (I do not know whether the notion is good) in Bronckart to demolish Bakhtin's statue. Thus, when he tells us (p.237) that, besides the glorification of the master, the development of the *Bakhtin industry* had provoked "a set of detailed studies of his writings, which had highlighted the conceptual and stylistic poverty of the initial texts," an evaluation which he approves, uses again and frequently amplifies. I feel that my attitude is rather the opposite: Try reading Bakhtin's texts with the least possible hostile prejudice (this is what one might require from any reading, as well as any relationship with others or with oneself. This is evident. Even if no one is "pure," and I am not anyway, I can also claim hostility towards Bronckart or at least towards a form of Marxism).

Furthermore, one can observe in the author the presence of fields of thought: Religious inspiration, neo-kantian or phenomenological culture, like the relationship of what he writes with what is found in the other two authors. However, one should not then be hasty to talk about contradiction, for example, between the theme of distance, of the author's exotopy and that of dialogism. Rather, it is the case of wondering about how these two notions, by the way polysemic, can work and how they can interact. Anyhow, they cannot be "contradictory" (a term frequently used by Bronckart) as are the logicians' p and not-p. And then, once Medvedev's and Voloshinov's authorship has been admitted, would this lead to the fact that Bakhtin has had no role in the genesis, the prior discussion of these texts and the development of the notions? Doesn't then

Bronckart run the risk of inverting the movement of the defenders of the “thorough Bakhtin” to make out of him only a sad liar?

Bronckart observes, this is certain, that in the texts from 1953 till 1975, Bakhtin maintains in part the inspiration which is reflected in the former texts about which we have just seen the reasons for attributing them to Mededev and to Voloshinov, which he, nonetheless, never quotes. However, in my view, although he introduced some modifications, he remains faithful to the line of thought outlined in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. Bronckart concluded then that it was loan, even plagiarism. This no longer takes into account the probability of a common preparation, which would justify the absence of quotes.

I doubt that one could introduce a definitive positioning. It seems to me that it is no longer possible to defend as such the “dialogical principle,” unifier of “bakhtinism” according to Todorov. However, an author is not to be criticized because his thinking is multiple, either as a result of his own development, or through loans. This is the case, even if, as explained earlier, one could reproach Bakhtin for practicing non-quoting, contrary to “the author’s ordinary morality” which is imposed upon us (it certainly does not get imposed, for example, upon practitioners of oral literature).

What remains then is the issue of the circumstances of soviet life as well as the reciprocal influences within the group in which he took part. It seems to me that Sériot’s conclusion presented earlier is plausible. Furthermore, it leaves some margin for a reading within which one can alternately find some relationship and distance between these three authors, particularly that, at least, part of Bakhtin’s texts dedicated to the novel (which will be discussed later) correspond neither to his very early texts, nor exactly to the inspiration of the “disputed texts.”

Furthemore, even in the case of non-explicit systematic loan (a circumlocution meaning “plagiarism”), this “loan” acquires a new sense within the configuration where it takes place. The “naïve” or “a priori favourable” reception remains the primary condition to apprehend the sense. Whether it is a text, a relationship with the others or our relation with ourselves, finding common things in another person, or even mimesis or loan does not withdraw from the person all the “value,” nor finds in him conflicts or “contradictions.”

And then, both in our relation to the movement of a text, of the other as well as ourselves, one cannot separate what could be “intellectual” or “cognition” and what could be “felt” or “affect.” In other words, there is no “purity” in the relationship with truth. Based on this, is our relation to a text (or to the other) necessarily better when we feel close to it or far from it? In any case, the prejudice which would make comprehension and proximity closer bears no certainty. And the dynamics of this relationship with texts, with others and with oneself is something which is revealed to us rather than something towards which we would have a large “cognitive clarity.”

Therefore, it is not a matter of seeking “the truth” of the text, of the other or of oneself. It is only a matter of being able to reformulate, to clarify a little, for ourselves or for the others, the movements of our relation, the corrections which will certainly be corrected in turn, together with the existing background that is little or not attributable, without aiming at anything definitive.

2 Which Reading(s)?

As we have just seen it, contrarily to the perspective which has been dominant, I would like to try to read each of these authors without correlating them, without necessarily looking for continuity between Bakhtin’s texts written in different periods.

With the inherent risk of using “big words,” one could probably talk about some trials of “dialogical” reading, where the term refers firstly to the peculiarity of the reader who has chosen some passages which seem to make sense for him and possibly for others. Besides, this refers to the “interpretative” position that every reading comprises or more broadly every perception: perceiving as, in such field, such horizon. Adding to that the possibility, always partial and relative, of emphasising some aspects of this perception-reading. And, in particular, the kind of questions, related to the inevitable distance of the field that “I-we-one” perceive(s) as being the one that is outlined in the text (or that we could also suppose) presented by the author and the field of our own reception, for example, in the form of extension or question (insofar as we could do the part of what pertains “to us” and “to the author” in our reception).

2.1 Readings of Voloshinov

Firstly, a sort of enthusiasm in a “Marxist” or “sociological” affirmation taken for granted emerges in Voloshinov. At the same time, to my knowledge, there is no true “philosophy (or “science”?) of language” in Marx and Engels. However, it is not the matter of answering here, mainly in a quick manner and sideways, the question of knowing what it is like to be “Marxist” or what is the relationship or the distance of what has been written by Marx in different periods, or whether one should relate or distinguish the works by Marx and the ones by Engels. And I am even less qualified to answer the question related to knowing what it is like to be “Marxist” in our time, for example, about what a sociology could be, a Marxist science possibly separated from a “revolutionary” practice. Or should one wonder whether the claim to such “science” is only an academic disguise?

Anyhow, whether it is Marxism or not, in relation to my initial project of getting back to Bakhtin, here, there are more quotes by Voloshinov than foreseen. This means only that for me, these texts speak for themselves and, I hope this is the case for my listeners-interlocutors.

The texts presented here are excerpts from an article, “Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry: Questions of Sociological Poetics” in *MPL*, and from the book *Freudianism*.

2.1.1 “Discourse in Life and Discourse in Poetry”

I start with this text (whose inspiration does not seem to me to be different from the one in *MPL*) simply because the publication is earlier. Here, Voloshinov uses “sociological” as an equivalent to “Marxism” whose method is characterised, without expanding on it, by *monism* and *historicism*. (This is obviously vague in this form.) It is a matter of asserting that there is no autonomous study of semiotic forms. Their study could and should consider them as “ideological,” which means that the method which should analyse them is thoroughly “sociological” or “Marxist.” Voloshinov is opposed to the dominant trends which seek to analyse in an isolated manner either the form itself

of the text, or the author's psychology or the psychology of the receiver of the text. Then, the question raised has to do with the reference to a total approach (p.187):

However, in reality, the "artistic" fact viewed in its totality lies neither in the thing, nor in the creator's psyche, nor in the receiver's, but it comprises these three aspects. The artistic fact is *a peculiar and fixed form in the work of art of a reciprocal relationship between the creator and the receivers.*

It would be inappropriate to criticize this statement of isolated principle of what might particularly help to ensure what is aesthetic or not.

Then, Voloshinov claims that the analysis of aesthetic communication is related to the one on discourse of daily life. At the same time (p.188) because

the foundations and the potentialities of the later artistic form are already formulated in this kind of utterance and then because the social essence of the word emerges here more clearly and neatly, and the connection which links the utterance to the social milieu is more easily analysed.

As a matter of fact, I do not believe that there is a specifically "Marxist" thinking: The search of a global signifying phenomenon which embraces the one who speaks, the one who receives, the linguistic form and the context is found in many forms of "sociolinguistics." At the same time, language does not comprise necessarily the sole utterance of a fact, but it comprises an evaluation (p.189):

This is how we usually characterise and evaluate the utterances of daily life: "It is a lie," "It is the truth," "these are strong words," "you should not have said that," etc. All evaluations of this kind, independently of the criterion – ethical, gnoseological, political or other – which guides them, comprehend far more than what is contained in the properly speaking verbal, linguistic aspect of the utterance: *They comprise at the same time the word and the extra-verbal aspect of the utterance.* These judgments and these evaluations refer to a certain totality within which discourse is in direct contact with the experienced event and gets rooted in it so as to form an indissoluble unity. Discourse itself, viewed in isolation as a purely linguistic phenomenon, can be neither true nor false, nor daring, nor shy.

In this text as in others, Voloshinov seems to refer to the current and effective situation of the utterance. Clearly, this cross-reference poses some problems of method.

Firstly, because this evaluative context can be (or rather it cannot afford not being) multiple: the absent is as much constitutive of the context as the present.

Moreover, Voloshinov writes (p.190-191):

Above all, it is perfectly clear that discourse does not reflect here the extra verbal situation like the mirror reflects an object. In this case, one should rather say that discourse *accomplishes the situation, that it somehow provides an evaluative overview*. More frequently, the utterance of daily life prolongs actively the situation and develops it; it outlines the plan and the organisation of a future action. However, what matters for us is the other aspect of the daily utterance: Whatever it may be, it always connects with each other those who take part of a situation, like co-participants who know, understand and evaluate this situation in the same manner.

It seems to me that one can take over this analysis of the utterance in a situation. However, at the same time, it poses many questions. The first one relates to the effective method of analysis. Voloshinov uses the metaphor of the enthymeme, the common situation being implicit, the unspoken constitutive of the meaning in question. Is the metaphor a good one? Is the situation comparable to another utterance, as in the case of the non-expression of the major premise of syllogism in the case of the enthymeme when one says only: “Socrates is a man, therefore he is mortal?” I do not believe so. The situation is not so easily understood. Yet Voloshinov acts as if this appeal to the situation does not pose any problem. He seems to deduce the unity of the experienced world from the unity of reality (p.190):

This extra verbal context of the utterance is decomposed in three aspects: (1) the spatial horizon common to the speakers (the unity of the visible place: the room, the window, etc.), (2) *the knowledge and the comprehension of the situation*, equally common to both interlocutors and, finally, (3) *evaluation* – still *common* that they make of this situation.

This assertion of meaning as common is explained a little further (p.191):

What I know, what I see, what I love cannot be implied. An utterance or part of it can only be implied only if *we*, speakers, know, see, like and acknowledge all what is common to all of us and what links us. Then, the social is in its principle thoroughly objective: It is nothing else but *the material unity of the world* which gets into the visual

horizon of the speakers (in our example, it is the room where they are, the snow falling behind the window) as well as the *unity of real conditions of life* – a unity which incites a community of evaluation (the belonging of the speakers to the same family, same profession, same social class, finally to the same period as the speakers are contemporary with each other). Consequently, implied evaluations are the product of individual emotions, they are socially determined and necessary acts. *Individual* emotions can be but the harmonics which accompany the *major tonality of social* evaluation: The “I” can only occur in discourse based on the “we.”

Here again, the society seems to work as a whole, while, it seems to me that, throughout our life, we are rather caught in varied or contradictory social relationships. And then, if this is so, what happens to the metaphor which represents the “individual emotions” like “harmonics of social emotions”? There is at least a problem. Indeed, Voloshinov adds (p.192):

But this horizon, upon which the utterance is based, might expand both in space and in time: the “implied” might exist at the level of the family, nation, social class, days, years and whole periods. As the common horizon expands together with the social group which corresponds to it, the implied aspects of the utterance become increasingly constant [...].

Indeed, the emphasis is put on the unity of the community and that of the experienced world. This means that the question of the possibility for each of us to comprehend what makes one’s community-difference with one’s “others” is not taken into account. And then, how can one determine the way the third party represents the way the other perceives the situation in question? One has to bear in mind the fate of the “learned third party” confronted with the multiform mass of “human sciences” supposed to help him reconstitute other people’s situation. Voloshinov does not seem to ask himself about the status of the interpreter. However, above all, Voloshinov presents the situation as being common. This poses a problem: What is the relation between what is common and what is not in two people, both in their differences of social standing and of individual becoming (subjects or individuals as one might say) who share the “same” situation? Why shouldn’t one evoke the differences of perception, evaluation of temporal perspective between the child and the adult, the leader and the subordinate? Doesn’t the “common social” become here the machine which explains everything? There is no doubt. This does not exclude the fact of considering language as an

evaluation, set in movement, “pragmatic” if we like, regardless of the danger there might be to project on a given author a notion which emerged later. And then, resorting to the notion of “evaluation” makes it possible to reach a broader perspective than what a strict conception of “pragmatics” as a manner of acting on others implies. Our language, our corporeal disposition, our perception itself are never pure observations. Likewise, for the animal or the child, evaluation is force, immediately put into motion. Furthermore, the links between evaluation and the setting into motion might slacken, get inverted, develop at the same time as the setting into corporeal motion becomes a sign. Clearly, this is “quite a situation.”

Anyhow, Voloshinov’s following development poses a new problem. It is a loan from Jakubinskij, which has already been mentioned and it is about (p.194-195) intonation on the borderline of the verbal and the corporeal of a single word “that’s it” pronounced in such or such situation. As a matter of fact, it is valid for every sign. However, Voloshinov adds that the intonation of “that’s it” pronounced in a situation bears an “enigmatic” (the quote marks have been used by Voloshinov) feature: The indignation that it bears is not addressed to the interlocutor, but to a third party:

To snow? To nature? To fate perhaps. There is a tendency towards personification, to the magical formula as a feature of the first language. The third party is the hero.

One could glower at everything. “Inversely one could smile at everything so to speak: to the sun, to the trees, to our thoughts [...] intonation and gesture are active and objective due to their own tendency. They do not express only the passive state of spirit of the speaker.”

In the face of passages like these, in my view, one could say that Sériot is right when he observes that Voloshinov appeals far more to the group at large rather than to class conflict and much less to such a concrete class conflict, especially that he gives above all fictitious examples. Voloshinov does not analyse real situations where the comments were expressed, which would have certainly brought out, at least partially, the differences of evaluation according to the characters and their evolution. There will always be the question of interpretation of the unspoken as well as the dialogue at a distance between the analysed comments and the perception of the “learned third party”

who describes them. (Voloshinov does not seem to enquire much about the validation conditions of his own comments. However, who can evaluate the meaning of his own words, the manner of signifying for the recipient third party or even more so for the “distant recipient”?) Then, Voloshinov addresses the issue of the work and the relation there might be between the author, the hero and the receiver (p.204):

Where the linguistic analysis sees only words and reciprocal relations between their abstract moments (phonetic, morphological, syntactic, etc.), for the living artistic perception and for the concrete sociological analysis, relationships between men, which are simply reflected and fixed in the verbal material, get unveiled. Discourse is a skeleton which gets covered with flesh only during the creative perception and, consequently, during the living social communication.

It seems to me that we can agree on the creative role of reception in the dialogue with the work, as in any dialogue. And even if this raises a problem, will it not be enlightening to bring closer “living artistic perception” and “concrete sociological analysis”? At the same time, this consideration also leads to masses of questions: What is it that differentiates here aesthetic perception from common perception? To what extent could one say that there is no distance between concrete perception and sociology? It is true that a number of these questions are addressed in a more detailed manner in *Marxism and Philosophy of Language*.

2.1.2 *Marxism and Philosophy of Language*

Note: I precede my references to the translations with I or II depending whether it is the first or second translation. I use the numbering successively of edition I and II. Translation I distributes the chapters continuously from 1 to 11 while translation II distributes them in three parts (referred to here as I, II and III), the numbering of the chapters starts with 1 in each part.

I am not reviewing here the presentation of the “Two Currents of Philosophy of Language” (I, 4 / II, II, 1) which is regrettably schematic in my view. (To repeat an observation made by Sériot, if being “dialogical” means leaving the other person’s thinking develop in its specificity, then one could say that Voloshinov’s text is very little dialogical.) I am not reviewing either the very first chapter (I, 1 / II, I, 1), devoted

to “science of ideologies and philosophy of language,” which is too general, except for making an observation that Voloshinov introduces in it an equivalence between “sign” and “ideology”, which gives to “ideology” a broader meaning than the one normally given to it. Chapter 2 “The Relationship between the Base and Superstructures” is also, certainly too general. Nonetheless, to me, it disagrees partially with Sériot’s view according to which one finds in Voloshinov only a traditional and vague relation with “society.”

2.1.2.1 “Ideological Facts” and their Context

The fact of establishing a relationship between the basis and an isolated fact detached from its ideological context taken as a whole and in its entirety has no cognitive value. One has to determine above all the meaning of an ideological change given in the context of the corresponding ideology [...] It is only under such circumstances that, at the end of the analysis, one will notice that instead of a superficial correspondance of two fortuitous phenomena situated on different plans, there will be rather a real process of dialectical evolution of the society, which starts at the basis and finishes in the superstructures (II, p. 147-149).

Here, the specific sign, the Word and ideology refer to the indissoluble trait that the union of sign and significance bear in a given context. Indeed, Voloshinov does not tell us how to analyse concretely the relationships of ideologies and that of “the basis” especially taking into account the manner how the different ideologies develop in accordance with the temporalities which are not modelled on the becoming of “the basis.” However, is the aspect “declaration of principle” of the text blameworthy? I am not sure whether the principles of the “good method” have been written somewhere.

Voloshinov proposes then the example of “man in excess” in the Russian novel, and particularly in the character Roudine in Tourgueniev’s novel (1856). This character cannot be deduced (II, p.149):

It does not imply in any way that the economic turmoils have provoked through a relation of cause and effect the emergence of “men in excess” in the pages of the novels (the absurdity of such proposition is evident) and, on the other hand, this correlation has no cognitive value while neither the specific role of “the man in excess” in the literary structure of the novel, nor the specific role of the novel in social life as a whole have been determined.

Controvertially, it seems to me that Voloshinov is right. Is the programme in question liable to be effectively carried out? I do not know. After all, there is a large number of cases where we have “negative truths” regarding what is, for example, false or unacceptable, without being capable of expressing them under the form of completed positive truths. And then, doesn’t “the basis” remain here as a really undetermined concept, an arguable metaphor? Especially considering that the relations between productive forces and relationships of productions are themselves historically complex, they undergo exactly the kinds of setting into motion of groups or individuals in the groups which are not separated from ideological movements. Furthermore, in relation to the usual “Marxist” meaning, Voloshinov seems to make use of an important displacement (p.151):

Indeed, the core of this issue at the level of interest to us consists in knowing how the existence (the basis) determines the sign, how the sign reflects and refracts the becoming existence.

Whether it is legitimate or not, the issue is no longer the one of economic basis, but rather of the place of language in the existence.

2.1.2.2 “Psychology” or “Semiology”?

Still in the same chapter “Infrastructures and Superstructures,” Voloshinov raises a very general principle (I, p.38):

The psychology of the social body does not get diluted somewhere inside (in the “souls” of the individuals in a situation of communication), on the contrary, it is thoroughly externalised: in the word, in the gesture, in the act. There is nothing unexpressed in it, internalised, everything is on surface, everything is in the exchange, everything is in the material and particularly in the verbal material.

However, he adds (I, p.44):

In every ideological sign, indications of contradictory value are confronted. The sign becomes the arena where class struggles occur. This social pluri-emphasis of the ideological sign is an extremely important trait.

In chapter 3 “Philosophy of Language and Objective Psychology” the relationships of psyche and of sign become clearer (I, p.50-51):

The reality of inner psyche is the reality of sign [...] By nature, subjective psyche is located on straddle between the organism and the outer world, so to speak at the borderline of these two spheres of reality. This is where the encounter between the organism and the outer world occurs, but this encounter is not physical: *The organism and the world meet in the sign*. The psychic activity constitutes the semiotic expression of the contact of the organism with the outer world. *This is why the inner psyche should not be analysed as a thing, it can be understood or analysed only as a sign*. What is it that constitutes the semiotic material of psyche? Every gesture or process of the organism: Breathing, blood flow, body movements, articulation, inner discourse, mimicry, reaction to external stimuli (for example light), in short, *everything which gets accomplished within the organism might become material for the expression of psychic activity, considering that everything might acquire a semiotic value, everything might become expressive*. It is true that each of these elements has no equal value. For a psyche to be somewhat developed, differentiated, a fine and supple semiotic material is essential. Moreover, it is necessary that this material is well suited for formalisation and differentiation in the social milieu, within the process of outer expression. This is why the word (*inner discourse*) turns out to be the privileged material of psyche. It is true that inner discourse crisscrosses with a mass of other gestural reactions which bear a semiotic value. However, the word emerges as the foundation, the framework of inner life. The exclusion of the word would reduce psyche to almost nothing, while the exclusion of all other expressive movements would hardly decrease it.

A big difference in translation II has been observed at the end of the passage (p.175)³:

This explains why semiotic material of psyche par excellence is the Word: *Inner speech*. It is true that inner speech is mingled with a large number of motor reactions bearing a semiotic value. But the basis, the framework of inner life is the Word. If it were deprived of the Word, psyche would be reduced to almost nothing; if it were deprived of all the other expressive movements, it would be thoroughly extinguished.

Furthermore, Voloshinov addresses again the relationship of self to self in “self-observation” I, p.61, puis p.65):

3. In their translation, Sériot and Tylkowski decided to write *Mot (Word)* with a capital letter in order to recall that this term translates the Russian *slovo*, highly polysemic, which means not only “word” but also “speech,” “discourse” and “language,” depending on the context.

Mental activity is neither visible, nor directly perceptible, it is in contrast comprehensible. This means that during the process of self-observation we substitute mental activity in the context of other comprehensible signs. The sign should be clarified by other signs.

The ideological sign is alive as a result of its achievement in the psyche and, reciprocally, psychic achievement lives from ideological input. Psychic activity is a passage from inside to outside; in the case of the ideological sign, the contrary happens. Psyche is extra-territorial to the organism. It is the social which is infiltrated in the individual's organism. And everything which is ideological is extra-territorial in the socio-economic field, considering that the ideological sign, which is situated outside the organism, should penetrate the inner world so as to achieve its semiotic nature. This way, there is an indissoluble dialectical interaction between psyche and ideology: *Psyche dismisses, destroys itself to become ideology and reciprocally.* The inner sign should liberate itself of its absorption by the psychic context (biological and biographical), it should stop being subjectively felt in order to become ideological. The ideological sign should get integrated in the field of inner subjective signs, it should resound with subjective tonalities so as to remain a living sign and avoid acquiring the honorary status of incomprehensible museum relic.

Initially, the “sign” replaces the consideration of psyche, or rather, psyche appears only as sign, with the articulation of bodily semiotics as well as words (should one talk here about “dialogue”?). And secondly, an appeal is made, very quickly, to the reciprocal movement of ideology and psyche. Likewise, psyche is characterised by its “extra-territoriality” (which certainly means that it is a frontier location, which cannot be localised on a fixed point).

As I see the importance that it might be necessary to render explicit the conditions within which an ideological sign might not remain a void formulation, whether one does or not the movement of resumption of this formulation on one's own account. And doesn't one recognise here what every pedagogical, political or literary situation finds with regards to what becomes or does not become a formulation in its circulation?

This text opens many perspectives at the same time as it raises problems (this is not criticism). In my view, one could localise these “openings-problems” around three points:

- The idea itself that any body movement might become a sign;
- The issue of the relationship between these body signs and linguistic signs, particularly, within inner language;
- The idea that what matters is not the fact of saying that inner truth is outside, but rather in the circulation between external ideology and the subjective inner sign.

The fact that there are infinite problems does not prevent (for me) the shock effect produced by the manner how “ideology” and “psyche” are related.

Having said that, one could enquire more precisely about the relationships between “innerness” and “outerness” or certainly, even more so on the different manners how these semiologisations act in us, upon us (or on what might act upon us without being semiotised). Likewise, one might wonder whether it is adequate to consider the Word as “the basis, the framework” of inner life. In any case, even if this requires discussion, development, one could observe the importance of the field open by this notion of circulation between innerness and outerness. Even if the question of the relationship of these “corporeal semiotics” with verbal semiotics could be the object of reflection, description, analysis, viewed as infinite strictly speaking. And what is the kind of “knowledge” that is relevant here? Is there only one? The question obviously remains open.

Is this “semiologisation” of psychic life, controvertially meant to “give an objective basis” to psyche, capable of accounting for the overall of what each one calls spontaneously “psychic life”? Can we recognize in it, especially what exerts strength on us or not, what sets us into motion? Or more broadly, is it necessary, is it possible that we recognize ourselves in what “science” tells us about psyche? To be more precise, isn’t the example taken in relation to what constitutes reaction to the outer world (reaction to light) very restrictive regarding the manner how our “inner language” somehow works on a background of perceived world, remembered or foreseeable in the future, a world also endowed with multiple modalities, familiar or strange, shared or not, bearable or not, anyhow where our awareness is far from what our sole capacity to talk about it gives us?

Or else, in my view, Voloshinov is very quiet about the issue of childhood and of its possible later resumption-modification. Likewise with the characteristic recommencement of birth, together with the fact that there are no laws, but at best

probabilities: What a child will become is not prescribed at birth. Similarly, presenting psyche in terms of signs runs the risk of neglecting the question of what sets us into movement, while avoiding the molieresque statement: “If we move, it is because there is an impulse which makes us move.”

2.1.2.3 Ideology of Daily Life

To me, ideology of daily life seems to constitute a third theme, specific to Voloshinov’s thinking (v. I, 6 / II, II, 3, “Verbal Interaction”):

One could say that it is not the expression which adapts to our inner world, but rather it is our inner world which adapts to the possibilities of our expression, to its possible paths and orientations. We will call the totality of mental activity focused on daily life as well as the expression attached to it: *ideology of daily life* in order to distinguish it from constituted ideological systems such as art, morality, law, etc. Ideology of daily life constitutes the field of inner and outer speech, disorderly and not fixed in a system, which accompanies each of our acts or gestures and each of our states of consciousness. Considering that the sociological nature of the structure of the expression and of mental activity, we could say that the ideology of daily life corresponds essentially to what we designate, in Marxist literature, under the name of “social psychology” (I, p.130).

[The official ideological products] conserve permanently a living organic link with the ideology of daily life; they get nourished from its sap, as outside it they die, as would die, for example, the concluded literary work or the cognitive idea if they are not submitted to a living critical evaluation (I, p.131).

Indeed, the question regarding the very broad sense of “ideology” given by Voloshinov is raised – by the way, in accordance with the meaning of the Russian word *ideologija*: In this case, there is also a problem of translation.

It seems to me that the appeal to “the ideology of daily life” can be viewed in multiple manners. Firstly, as a reaction of the effective groups of existence to the “grand ideology,” art, religion, science and technique. In the same way as ideology of daily life emerges as what circulates in us, it constitutes the time of our “innerness.” One could use, together with the risks of verbalism that might arise in my view, the term “dialectical” to indicate the circuit of social meanings and their resumption-modification in everyone.

At the same time, Voloshinov emphasises another aspect:

2.1.2.4 The Constitutive Role of the “Foreign Language”

Similarly to what Nicolas Marr said, Voloshinov recalls that philology has worked on the dead language. However, he adds (I, 5 / II, II, 2, “Language⁴ and Utterance”):

However, the monological utterance is already an abstraction, even if this abstraction is, so to speak, natural. Every utterance, even in a written, completed form, responds to something and, in turn, awaits an answer. It is only a link of a continuous chain of verbal interventions. Every old document continues those which have preceded it, is controversial with them, waits for an active comprehension in turn, it anticipates it, etc. (II, p.267).

Here, the thought is double: On the one hand, philology loses the dialogical movement:

The completed-isolated-monological utterance, cut out of its real verbal context, which is not liable to a potential active answer, but rather to the philologist’s passive comprehension, is the ultimate piece of data and the starting point of linguistic thinking (II, p.269).

But at the same time, Voloshinov develops another idea:

Regardless of the profound cultural and historical differences between linguists, from Hindu priests to contemporary European linguists, the philologist remains always and everywhere a decipherer of characters and of strange “secret” words, a master who transmits what is deciphered or received through tradition. The first philologists and the first linguists have always and everywhere been *priests*. History does not know a single historical people whose sacred texts or historical tradition have not been to a certain extent a mysterious or incomprehensible language for the profane. Deciphering the mystery of sacred texts, it was exactly the task of philologist priests. [...] (II, p.271).

The orientation of linguistics and of philosophy of language on the other Word, foreign Word owes nothing to chance, it is not an

⁴ TN. In French, there is a distinction between *langue* and *langage*. The first one refers to language as system in the sense given by Saussure.

arbitrary choice of linguistics and of philosophy. No, this orientation testifies to the immense historical role that the foreign Word has played in the formation of all cultures throughout the course of history. This role has been granted to the foreign Word, in all fields of ideological creation without any exception, starting from the socio-political organisation to the code of good manners in daily life (II, p.273).

Voloshinov mentions the “Japhetic” vis-à-vis the Hellene, Rome and Christianity vis-à-vis the Barbarians in Marr’s tradition.

Thus, we see the grandiose organising role of the foreign Word, always imposing itself by force and a foreign organisation, or else found by a young invading people on a land of an old and powerful culture they have just occupied, and this invaded culture somehow subjugating from the tomb the ideological consciousness of the invading people. The result is that in the innermost depths of the historical consciousness of the people, the foreign Word became associated with the idea of power, force, saintity, truth [...] (II, p.273).

Similarly, the chapter devoted to “verbal interaction” (I, 6 / II, II, 3) recalls that classicism is linked to the idea of primacy of the foreign language. It recalls also that there is something of that order in the cultural transmission of speech which matters. It is similar to the way how, for each of us, according to varied modalities, “sacred” speech (of religion, of theory) remains sacred or becomes daily.

2.1.2.5 A General Theory of the Relationship of the Individual and Society?

It seems to me that the theme developed in the chapter “Verbal Interaction” (I, 6 / II, II, 3), contrarily to the preceding “productive” observations, is the expression of a general sociology, which is a bit too general. I present it here very quickly, particularly considering that parallel discussions can be found in *Freudianism* which will be referred to again.

[...] the inner world and the reflection of each individual are endowed with a well established own social audience [...] The more the individual is acculturated, the more the audience in question gets closer to the average audience of ideological creation, but anyhow the ideal interlocutor cannot leave the borders of a class and a well defined period (I, p.123).

This is presumed rather than shown and bears a development which has always surprised me (I, p.126):

The mental activity of we is not an activity with a primitive, gregarious nature: it is a differentiated activity. Better than that the ideological differentiation, the growth of degree of consciousness are directly proportional to the firmness and the stability of social orientation. The more the collectivity within which the individual gets oriented is strong, well organised and differentiated, the more his inner world is clear and complex.

The least one could object is that the issue of the relationship between awareness, modes of semiotisation and kinds of group belonging remains an open question. He also adds (I, p.128):

Individualism is a peculiar ideological form of mental activity of we from the bourgeois class (we find an analogous type in the feudal-aristocratic class). The individualistic kind of mental activity is characterised by a solid and affirmed social orientation. It is not in the innerness, at the innermost depth of the personality that the individualistic self-confidence, the consciousness of one's own value is withdrawn, but rather at the outerness.

Certainly, Voloshinov goes very (too) fast. We could ask ourselves about the varied forms of "self-confidence" expressed or not by infants in their early bodily style, which separates us anyhow from a simple social causality. Likewise, when he writes ((I, p.129):

Besides its objectivation, its fulfillment in a determined material (gesture, speech, shout), consciousness is a fiction. It is nothing but an incorrect ideological construction, created without taking into account the concrete information of social expression.

However, to start with, should one talk of "consciousness" or "movements of awareness"? And then, can these movements describe themselves only through the emergence of such or such "sign"? Aren't we sent back to something that we could call "psychology," "anthropology of awareness" or "phenomenology"? For example, if we wonder why the same semiotic material does not work in the same way in response to "what is present" or "what is absent." In the chapter "Theme and Meaning in

Language” (I, 7 / II, II, 4), Voloshinov mentions the problem of articulation of “theme” (concrete sense) with the “meaning” as technical apparatus for the implementation of theme.” He speaks of emphasis, of dialogue. However, the concrete questions of analysis, for example, of community articulation and of differences of emphasis of everyone remain suspended, like those of effective articulation of speech and of the “rest.”

2.1.2.6 The Other’s Language and Literature

Voloshinov’s book has no conclusion; it ends with two chapters which, by introducing “technical” developments on reported speech, specify the manner how, particularly in the novel, the presence of the “discourse of the other” is expressed. Thus, in I, 9 / II, III, 2, Voloshinov refers to Jakubinskij:

The speech of others is conceived by the speaker as an utterance of *another* subject, completely independent at the origin, completed from the point of view of its construction, and is situated outside the present context. It is from this independent existence that the speech of others goes into the author’s context, while conserving its objectal content and at least rudiments of its linguistic integrity and initial autonomy of construction. The author’s utterance, when integrating in its composition another utterance, develops syntactic, stylistic and compositional norms in order to assimilate it partially, to associate it to the unity of an author’s utterance, conserving at the same time, at least in a rudimentary manner, the original autonomy (syntactic, compositional, stylistic) of the utterance of others, without which the latter would not be apprehended in its plenitude (II, p.365).

The problem is raised here. A little further, a (very) quick historical shortcut of different figures of history of thinking in this relationship of the discourse of the other emerges:

Authoritarian dogmatism, characterised by the linear style and the monumental style of the transmission of discourse of others in the Middle Ages; the *rationalist dogmatism* with its even more neat linear style (17th and 18th centuries); *the critical and realistic individualism* with its picturesque style and its tendency towards the infiltration of the author’s comments and answers in the speech of others (end of 18th and 19th centuries) and finally, the *relativist individualism* with its dilution of the author’s context (contemporary period) (II, p.379).

I leave aside the question of the kind of significance that such a general approach might have. Nonetheless, raising this problem is striking, even if we can, obviously, find many other different cases. Still, Voloshinov (I, 9 / II, III, 4) reports the comments made by different authors who have addressed the technical problem of reported speech. In the last chapter, he compares the grammatical forms of free indirect speech in German, French and Russian. And he explains (II, p.429):

The stylistic meaning of this form lies in the fact that one has to guess who is speaking. In fact, from the abstract grammatical point of view, it is the author who speaks, from the point of view of the real meaning of the whole context, it is the hero who speaks.

In the numerous examples he provides, we see clearly the efficiency of this mode of expressing the plurality of voices being reflected, in relation to which Voloshinov observes that “it cannot be rendered adequately through reading aloud.” For example in the *Idiot* (II, p.457):

And why didn't the prince approach him? Why did he, on the contrary, turn away as if he had not observed anything, although their eyes had met. (Yes, their eyes had met and they had looked at each other!) Didn't he want earlier to take him by the hand to go together *there*?... Or else was there effectively in Rogojine himself, the way he was *today* with all his speech, his movements, his actions, his glances, something that justified the prince's terrible premonition and the revolting whispering of his devil?

And this interaction of the author's voice as well as the hero's, in my view, makes sense intensely, particularly in all the quotes that we could use from Dostoevsky. This is where lays my difficulty to perceive the meaning of the last speech of the book (II, p.465):

Currently, verbal expression in literature, rhetorics, philosophy and in human sciences becomes the realm of “opinions,” of notorious opinions and even, in these opinions, what stands out first is not their content, but rather the manner, either individual or typical, how the opinion is expressed. This process, which affects the life of the Word in contemporary bourgeois Europe and at home as well (until very recently), can be defined as a *reification of the Word*, as a *reduction of the theme value of the Word* [...]. Does one need to explain here through which class premises does this process explain itself and repeat Lorck's justified speech on the sole possible paths for the

renewal of the ideological Word, with its full sense, imbued with a secure and categorical social appreciation, of the Word serious and responsible in its seriousness?

Is it sincere conviction or sacrifice towards the growing ideological terrorism at that time? I am not capable of deciding. Anyhow, explicitly, we are far from “dialogism,” whether it is a matter of “theory” or to “give the speech” to the authors we quote.

2.1.3 *Freudianism*

Here, I am taking into account only some aspects from Voloshinov’s reflection. By acknowledging once for all that it is not a completed theory, but rather approaches which might have for us the function of revelators, particularly considering that the first article was published in 1925 and the book in 1927. This means that Voloshinov, obviously, could not possibly refer to Freud’s work as a whole.

There is nothing really original in the critique according to which (for example p.88-89) Freudianism emphasises only sex and age, the role of child sexuality, without considering the role of social classes, “Leitmotiv of times of crisis and decadence” (p.89). Likewise, (chap.7) presenting Freud as a “subjectivist” and non-“objectivist” psychologist does not lead very far in my view (and would miss the “dialectics” presented earlier between “innerness” and “outerness”). In counterpart, it seems legitimate to me (p.161) to raise the question on the kind of vocabulary which makes it possible to describe the “unconscious”: Freud highlights “desire,” “affect,” “representation.” Yet, these terms have a more or less precise meaning in relation to the conscious psychic phenomena. However, we could wonder about what representations or unconscious feelings are. Similarly, one could question principled dichotomies between “principle of pleasure” and “principle of reality” like Voloshinov who wonders (p.163) in relation to what the discriminatory “finesse” of censorship might be. He also wonders whether there has been a work of mental construction contrary to the work of analysis unravelling, which, in my view, seems to be a legitimate question. In other words, one could enquire in Freud about what might also constitute a problem in every theory: The support on generalities which are paradoxically the most problematic.

It also happens that Voloshinov believes Freud is right. Thus, in chapter 8, “a psychic dynamics where, due to forces of nature, ideological reasons confront each other,” Voloshinov observes that with regards to an irenic vision of psychic life (but has this one really ever existed?), the big novelty of Freudianism consists in introducing war, chaos, psychic misery, the tragic character against biological optimism. However, on the other hand, he always reinforces the argument: This is still individual psychology, and considering that “unconsciousness” emerges only through awareness, we are faced with “reasons” only and not “true causes.” I leave the question open: Is it only “reasons” that emerge to consciousness? And inversely, does “scientific knowledge” have access to the “true forces” which set us into motion? In another perspective, Voloshinov proposes that it is a matter of “launching in the psyche some objective relationships of the outer world translating, above all, the extreme complexity of social relations which exist between the patient and his doctor” (p.175).

There are chain refractions in the discourse of relationships with the analyst.

In other words, what the psychic “mechanisms” unveil for us without any pity is their social origin: An “unconsciousness” set up not against the patient’s individual consciousness, but above all against the doctor, his demands and opinions; a “resistance” which is also centered, above all, against the doctor, the listener, in short, against *the other*.

The fact that there might be “something like that,” there is no doubt. The fact that the relationships with the analyst somehow shape the relationship of the person under analysis in relation to himself is, in my view, part of what one could call the analytical vulgate. And can’t we wonder to what extent our relationship with our current and past others constitutes somehow the frame itself of our way of existing? This leaves unanswered the question regarding our modes of reacting, of our lifestyles and, especially of our relationships with ourselves.

Isn’t there here, particularly, in Voloshinov (but, this does not appear only in the latter; none of us certainly escapes all the time from the strange pleasure of the provisionally definitive formula) an example of what could be theoretical violence? Adding to that the fact of specifying the relation of our inner language with spoken language on the one hand, and on the other hand, the background of our way of feeling, of “being in the world” is always risky. And here, it is not a matter of “inner” or “outer”

as the presence of the common outer world does not tell us in the name of what we perceive-feel it as such, and does not tell us especially what is the share of what is common and different in this perception, what are our emphases, our implicit evaluations. Yet, trying to specify this mode of perception, of existence is not an “introspective” relation. It is not a matter of “section,” but rather the strange exercise which makes it possible for us to go back more or less well, with the help of the “words of others” or “we-one⁵” trying to make out of them “words of we” about the meaning of what we perceive-feel as well as what the other perceives-feels. Our perception of the “outer world” is at the same time that of a felt world, guiding us towards flight, acceptance, enthusiasm, or... And it is against a very simple vision of context. We will recall that this perception of the present is equally a perception of the absent. Why then don't our “verbal reactions” express somehow (reserve is certainly important) the whole of our life without being necessarily a sort of copy of a proto-experience without words? Instead, there would be the elements of a “dialogue between heterogeneous languages” on the one hand, the “language” itself, and on the other hand, the way how the “non-language” speaks in us, how it is somehow expressed. And certainly, the problem of knowing how we can (each one in his own way, undoubtedly) render this dialogue between languages explicit persists.

Voloshinov adds that in the analytical situation our verbal presentation reinterprets our childhood in adult terms; it is not the childhood that speaks. This is inevitable. He also adds (chap.9, p.182-183):

In order to distinguish Freudian unconsciousness from ordinary “official” consciousness, we could call it a “non-official consciousness.”

Motivating one's action, raising awareness of oneself (as consciousness of oneself is always verbal and it always comes down to the invention of a precise verbal complex), it is to subject oneself to a social norm, to a judgment of social value, it is, if I dare say, to socialise oneself and one's action. Raising awareness of oneself is somehow to try to see oneself with the eyes of the other, of the other representing one's social group, one's class, to ensure that after all *consciousness of oneself* always leads to *class-consciousness*, of whom, in every profound and essential aspect, it is only a reflection and a particularisation. The objective roots of our verbal reactions lie

⁵ TN. The author has used “on,” which stands for an indeterminate pronoun meaning ‘we-one.’

there, even if they are the most personal, the most intimate. And we will have access to them only through objective methods of sociology of which Marxism endowed itself so as to analyse these diverse ideological constructions which are law, morality, science, philosophy, art and religion [...] The more my thinking becomes clear, the more it gets closer to the shapes acquired by the results of science. Moreover, my thinking would not know how to be really clear before finding for it a precise verbal formulation and before converting it into a scientific work which engages me. Likewise, no feeling would know how to mature, nor assert itself permanently if it does not manage to translate itself outside while giving life to words, to rhythms, to colours, etc., in other words, if it does not result in a work of art.

I am not sure which attitude to take in relation to these very general assertions, which, in my view, seem to pose a kind of monism of “class consciousness” without justifying it. Why would the other, through whose eyes I try to see myself, be a representative of my class? And why not of another class or a representative of the other generation or...? I will not mention “science” as a form of “fair consciousness,” just as a feeling might take shape in a practice and not necessarily in a work of art, considering that one could continue wondering how this “non-official consciousness” reveals itself effectively (a formulation which seems striking to me).

Voloshinov continues (I make comments on the quote):

This path from which a content of an individual psyche leads to a content of culture is long and difficult, but it is the only one, and all along its route, in each step it obeys the same socio-economic laws (a). Yet, in each of the said steps, our consciousness (b) makes use of the word, and because it is within it that the refraction of socio-economic laws is at the same time the most subtle [...] the rules of refraction of the objective need within the word are the same in both cases (c) [...] As for the other strata [of ideology of daily life] which correspond to Freudian unconsciousness, they are far more distant from the system of the dominant ideology, in relation to which, on the contrary, they denounce unity and coherence for being compromised and the current ideological motivations for being uncertain. Yet, even if this accumulation of inner reasons with a tendency to erode the unity of daily life ideology were certainly capable of taking on a fortuitous character and testify only social downgrading of some individuals, generally speaking, it is the sign of an early decomposition, if not that of a class, at least of some of its groups. *In a healthy social body as in a socially healthy individual, the ideology of daily life established on a socio-economic basis is coherent and solid*, without any divergence between official and non-official consciousness. (d)

- (a) Is it a matter of laws? In which sense they are socio-economic? Isn't effective history far more opaque and multiple than this recourse to laws? Isn't it rather the pressure that social life exerts on our ways of acting, feeling, speaking, which we could call as our "practical conformism," independently of the shape of our religious, anarchistic, evolutionary consciousness, etc.? Using Bourdieu's term, isn't there something related to *habitus* (whatever problems that this other "big word" poses)? And then, what are these laws which, in my view, are never presented in a concrete and explicit way?
- (b) Here, it is not a matter of saying that consciousness is nothing without signs, but that it uses words. Furthermore, the nature of what happens through words is presented in a less simplified manner than in other texts quoted earlier.
- (c) Should one speak of "fantasy" to refer to the belief in Marxism as a total science which knows the general laws of articulation of words, thus of consciousness and of the world? Or is "fantasy" only a vague term related to "scholarly insultology"? Still, Voloshinov is very fast.
- (d) The problem related to the reasons of such generality, of which the least we could say is that it strikes our implicit pre-thinking, our "evidence" as well as our trials to render it explicit, is posed.

One could also observe that there are a number of aspects of life, both individual and common, which are not taken into account here by Voloshinov: childhood, illness, death, solitude. These aspects, regardless of the historical changes, for example in relation to health, make sense through the exchange between men who belong to very different societies. All this is substituted by a very/too general consideration on "socio-economic laws." There is also (the most frequent one) a consideration of language, which is isolated, without its links with the semiotic others (particularly the corporeal ones). Nonetheless, we could wonder about what "raising awareness" of a situation by an animal, by an *infans* is exactly. Likewise, we could wonder about the articulation of language and non-language in our own movements of raising awareness (perceived, felt, presence of the field related to the past and future). The question of change in the field of real life experience, which, in my view, seems to characterise raising awareness as a temporal process, as an irruption, is also posed. Just as the perpetual variation (which is not incompatible with the permanence of a given style) of our ways of perceiving-

feeling-reacting (in other words, of “thinking”), independently of what goes through words.

2.1.4 A Quick Look on the Critical Reading of *Marxism and Philosophy of Language* by P. Sériot

P. Sériot strives as much as possible to reconstitute a “philological-historical” reading of Voloshinov (as it is about him that he writes in his Preface to *MPL*) and incidentally about Bakhtin back then. And, to me, this work is very clarifying. However, Sériot also makes a retrospective judgment, which, in the name of science, restrains without due cause what the reading of Voloshinov might offer us as well as what it might bear as “Marxist.”

Even if Voloshinov’s “Marxism” remains undoubtedly problematic, contrarily to Bronckart’s presentation (p.417) who refers to a “materialist monism inherited from Spinoza” as if it were a simple principle (here, I do not go over what is problematic in this reading of Spinoza) just as I also have doubts about the clarity brought by the assertion of psycho-physical parallelism. And I also wonder about the use that Voloshinov makes of the term “ideology,” as if one could simply substitute “consciousness” by “signs” in order to eliminate the risks of “idealism.” Shouldn’t we rather acknowledge that be it “materialism” or not, everyone is confronted with the distance of daily life experience, of its different aspects, of the different ways of presenting it (telling it) in relation to the theoretical models whatever they may be?

Sériot recalls correctly that rather than “class struggle” in Voloshinov’s text, it is far more a matter of pertaining to a group and that of common experience which renders possible the exchange, discursive circulation within this group. (He observes that Voloshinov uses family as examples of group or at best - if I dare say – workers from the same workshop.) And above all, the image of group integration given by Voloshinov remains at least astonishing. Sériot’s criticism seems to me well founded here. Nonetheless, the way he seems to propose at the end of the preface, these critical observations do not lead to the denial of all scientific value of Voloshinov’s approach. We could raise an objection to Sériot that a social theory of communication could or should be (partially) developed before it becomes a matter of relationships between complex groups. Furthermore, Sériot insists on what might be schematic in the chapter

dedicated to the conflict of theories of language and to the opposition of “abstract objectivism” and of “individualistic subjectivism.” Sériot seems to be right on this issue as well. Having said that, can we raise an objection to Voloshinov:

He can very well say that the utterance taken in its link with its “situation” is always unique, always particular. However, it is due to its epistemology that we are left with our eagerness: What would be this science of the object which is, at the same time, unique and related to everything? How could a theory of knowledge of what is not repeatable be built? Deprived of every procedure of control of its assertions, *MPL* is far more a manifesto than an analytical treatise: We do not see how we could “apply” it to anything (“Preface”, p.92).

However, there does not seem to be an agreement on what could or should be “the method in human sciences,” for example, the relations between statistic and clinical approaches, synchronical description and history, etc. And then, after all, aren’t the historians, independently whether it is macro-history or micro-history, incessantly confronted with the repeatable weakening and with the multiplicity of clarifications? Certainly, the heterogeneity of the data and the multiplicity of perspectives prohibit even the possibility of building a general “epistemology.” Fortunately, *MPL* is not a “treatise of epistemology on human sciences,” a kind of book which has certainly never been good for anything. It is rather a gathering of a set of perspectives whose approximation is a shock (in my view). It is rather an essay instead of a manifest. And it is not a matter of applying a method which supposedly had been firstly fixed (a strange dream of the School head masters). It is much more a matter of witnessing (participating of) the circulation of facts, clarifications and theories at the same time. (And, as a matter of fact, the dominant practices and discourses supposed to be founded on the method acceptable by the reading committees of acknowledged journals are certainly not capable of developing creative enthusiasm.)

Moreover, to my knowledge, there is not in Marx himself an unambiguous theory of the relationship between “ideologies” and effective social practice. There is rather the ideological violence of the conflicts in the *German Ideology*. Mention should also be made to the historical reflections contained in the texts related to 1848 and the Commune. I mention here only the bulk of texts written by Engels, just as the huge set (we quote at least Gramsci and Lukacs) of what could have been written about “language and class consciousness.” It seems to me that Sériot is right to say that

Voloshinov was not Marxist in the same sense as Gramsci was, for example. Having said that, then could we, should we decide on who deserves the controlled denomination “Marxist”? (Another laudatory adjective for some, a synonym of shame for others, could be substituted here.) I doubt it.

Furthermore, it would be abusive (even comic) to consider that our historical distance would be the necessary and sufficient condition of an adequate awareness raising in agreement with Voloshinov’s positions. Firstly, it is because each of us (for example, in relation to Marxist or Freudian theories or practices) does not take part unambiguously in “the spirit of time.” However, it is also because the historicity of the cultural movement is not the simple result of a relation between “infrastructures” and “superstructures.” Likewise, each of us could always wonder about the articulation in oneself about one’s “pathos background” (should one say “character,” “unconsciousness,” “modes of repercussions”?) and of what is culturally transmitted, particularly through such or such genre of discourse.

2.2 Medvedev

2.2.1 *Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*

Medvedev’s text is more technical than Voloshinov’s. At the same time, it is difficult to extract from it quotations inasmuch as the work itself is constituted by a meticulous analysis of the formalists’ texts towards which he takes some distance. I raise here only few points. One finds again here, as in Voloshinov, a very general use of “sociological” as identical to “Marxist.” Medvedev insists firstly on the fact that a “sociological” explanation of art is not a form of explaining “from the outerness” (p.126). We would not want to explain art through society

instead of highlighting the sociological nature of the literary facts from the innerness, trying to prove at all costs the determining influence that the external factors (even if these are related to different ideologies) would exert on the literary facts, in a unique and exclusive manner. It is as if it were only when we interpret art as non-art, that it would become a social factor while it is by its very nature!...

However, one could wonder whether Medvedev himself practises effectively such “inner sociological poetics.” (Does it exist now? I really do not know.) He is confronted with the effective development of “formalism,” and somehow, only with “the feeling” that this sole formal analysis is not sufficient. Thus, (p.132) Medvedev ponders about what could constitute a critique which would express the social needs of the audience:

A competent and sound⁶ critique should entrust the artist with a “social request” in his own language, in the manner of a poetic request. When it is endowed with a high degree of artistic culture, it is the society itself, the mass of readers themselves which naturally and easily transpose its demands and its social needs in the immanent language related to poetic art. We should acknowledge that it is possible only in the relatively rare conditions of a homogeneity and class harmony between the poet and his audience. However, in all cases, critique should act as a translator, a *medium* between them... It is true that there are times when the artist and the dominant class cease understanding each other... But this happens only during the periods marked by a degree of acute and profound decomposition of society.

Therefore, Medvedev takes into account the diversity of situations, but he continues to think (an idea that we find in Voloshinov) that the ideal would be the community, the agreement between the author and the society. Should it be called “sociological prejudice” or a “too simple sociology”?

In summary, Medvedev like Voloshinov militate for a social approach of literature which does not exist yet. In my view, their texts should be seen as the efforts of authors confronted with a problem which they do not master. However, to my knowledge, we do not master it either. How could one think of the specificity of the characteristic “signs” (?) of literary works, in their “dialectic link” with the global society? This is what Medvedev tries to do when he uses and criticizes the formalists as thinkers of the specificity of discursive creation. Therefore, it is on a more limited and more technical plan that neither Bakhtin nor Voloshinov try to do.

Western formalism struggles against “idealism” and “positivism” (p.151); we find here the same binary presentation as in Voloshinov’s chapter dedicated to linguistics). The western formalists do not oppose work and content, but the Russians do so. And Medvedev refers to Fiedler who partially joins Bakhtin:

6. According to these words, it seems that Medvedev acknowledges that it does not exist.

We should not seek for art a mission which would be opposed to that of cognition, a more serious one; we should rather examine in an unbiased manner what the artist does exactly to be able to understand that he sees life in a way which pertains only to him and has thereby access to a comprehension of life that is inaccessible to any reflection.

We could in fact consider that the critique of isolated formal scholarship is underlying to Bakhtin's overall work. Except that Bakhtin, and in my view this is important, has not made an evaluation on the relationship between art and science, observing rather the impossibility of placing them on an unambiguous "scale of values."

Medvedev raises then a number of principles regarding what could be an inner sociology of art. Firstly, the analysis should ("formalist" principle) take into account the specificity of sensorial path, for example, sight in the case of painting or sculpture. Then, it is possible to write a "history of art without names," like when Wölfflin finds in different places and times the opposition between Classicism and Baroque, or Worringer in the case of naturalism and abstraction (which makes it possible (p.154), for example, to oppose Greek work where the materiality of stone and represented body become united, and on the other hand, gothic art where stone is submitted to verticality). Then, (p.169) Medvedev defends Russian formalism as the study of the word as opposed to symbolist ideality:

It became apparent that with the words, also viewed as grammatical units and transmental sound images, it was possible to engage in an abstract aesthetic game in view of constructing new artistic combinations.

This means that formalism is accompanied with a new practice, of the futurists, where the words are no longer linked to their ordinary referential conditions.

And here Medvedev insists on the significance of "defamiliarisation," found in Tolstoy's short story *Le Métreur*, produced by the fact that the narrator is the horse, as a form of expression of another "moral" perspective. This seems to me a good example of "inner" access in the "social sense" of the work, which maintains however its specificity of work when it compels us to "see the things differently."

A little further, Medvedev addresses again the articulation of ordinary language and poetic language: there is no specific poetic language, but possibly a transgression of everyday language (p.203). There are uses, poetic functions of language. However, we

would not know how to oppose “an” ordinary language and “a” poetic language (p.224):

Generally speaking, one could argue that where verbal communication is already built and appears as a fixed and set form, and where the content to be transmitted is equally determined and that we intend only to transmit it to others within the framework of an exchange already agreed; in this case the utterances present the features of formalists. However, this kind of situation is by no means typical of practical and daily life verbal communication. In reality, daily life communication does not stop evolving even if it does slowly and in a limited field. The reciprocal relationships between the speakers change continually, even if it is at a slightly perceptible level. During this transformation, it is also the content itself of what is transmitted which changes. Practical and daily life communication bears a nature of event and the most insignificant verbal exchange gets inscribed in this perpetual becoming. During this evolution, the word lives from an extremely intense life, even if it is a different life from the one that we find in artistic creation.

Still, from page 237 onwards, Medvedev gets back to the “‘transmental word’ as the ideal limit of poetic transmission.” If I understand well, for the formalists, it was a matter of highlighting the direct action of form. From the example of Sterne’s novel *Tristram Shandy*, form gets empowered, acts for itself. At the same time, we find in the game and in ordinary communication this tendency of empowerment of form. In summary, the concrete linguistics that Medvedev seeks (which we seek?) should be the analysis of an object in motion, even if this motion is slow. This object in motion is firstly located in the “forms of immediate, dialogic oral communication” (forgotten by the formalists).

In fact, here we find again the pluri-functionality of language just as it was presented by Jakobson (1896-1982), even if we might consider that poeticity, as characterised by Jakobson, is exactly too “formal” and defined by the return on itself and not through its own way of expressing.

2.2.2 “Form” and “Content,” “Fable” and “Subject”

Medvedev (like the other authors taken into account here, and especially Vygotsky further down) endorses the formalists’ distinction between *the fable (fabula)* in the general meaning as opposed to the specific meaning of what is *a fable (basnja)*,

the content itself and the subject, the becoming of the fable in such text, such effective form. And like Voloshinov, he establishes a number of principles (once more, together with the question of the significance of principles accompanied with a limited implementation).

Enquiring about what makes the link between the material reality of the word and its meaning, he responds (p.259): “We establish by principle that it is the social valuation which constitutes this element,” the issue of ordinary language preceding that of “poetic language.” What matters is the historical event which constitutes such utterance at such a given time. And this enunciation itself refers to more or less stable and contingent social values. These values are at the heart of communication. Thus, p.263 (and there lies the core of the critique of formalism): “The poet does not choose linguistic forms, but rather the values that are deposited in them.”

He adds (p.265) that two opposed groups might use the same words with opposed values. However, this is fiction:

In fact, language is created, formed and submitted to a perpetual becoming within the framework of a defined vision of the world of values. This is why two fundamentally different social groups cannot have an identical language arsenal.

The formalists’ theory in its articulation with the practice of the futurists is explained through the fact (p.266) that

Words have become light for them. This explains their “orientation towards the absurd,” towards speech “as simple as mooing.” Words had lost their positive weight, the distance which separated them had become smaller, their hierarchy had been disintegrated. It is as if the words were borrowed from the context of futile conversations of people who do not influence the course of life. This is to be linked with the fact that the futurists had emerged as representatives of a social group rejected to the periphery of social life without any influence nor social and political rooting.

Whatever doubt that one might have in relation to a sociology which opposes “integration” and “periphery,” the question raised is the one related to the diversity of values underlying the words (identical or different). Adding to that the issue of our capacity of somehow becoming aware of the system of values underlying the handling

of language, either our own or the language of others, where the words might always be used again and valued differently. Nonetheless, here, Medvedev does not render explicit the steps of this awareness. (But, by the way, do we have ourselves a “good theory” of this “natural extraction of values”?)

Then, (p.273 to 290) Medvedev examines the “elements of artistic construction.” On the one hand, he insists on the fact that a work of art cannot function as a representative of a “genre.” On the other hand, he insists on the fact that, contrarily to the other human activities, the work is characterised by its completion (p.274):

In literature, however⁷, everything leads exactly to this essential objective and thematic completion and not the superficial and discursive completion of the utterance. The compositional completion, which remains on the periphery of language, at times, might exactly be lacking in literature. It is possible to make use of non-completion as a procedure. However, this external incomplete characteristic highlights even further the deep thematic completion.

We will see that this theme is equally developed by Bakhtin. In any case, this very general utterance gets updated (p.281 and subsequent ones):

The artist should learn to see reality through this genre. It is only possible to understand certain aspects of reality only by relating them to determined processes which make it possible to express it. Furthermore, these processes of expression are applicable only to specific aspects of reality [...] The capacity of finding and apprehending the unity of a small anecdotal daily life event presumes to a certain extent the capacity of constructing and telling an anecdote and, in all cases, it implies that we move towards the processes of anecdotal treatment of the material. On the other hand, these methods themselves cannot be explained if there is not something truly anecdotal in life.

And inversely:

Between the faculty of comprehending the isolated unity of a random situation of life and that of understanding the inner unity and logic of a whole period, there is a gap. That is why this gap exists also between the anecdote and the novel.

7. In the other fields, there might be a compositional completion, not a thematic one [F.F.].

I leave aside the question of what, in reality, can be expressed under the form of a short story or a novel. In any case, we could say that the genre transforms reality into a *theme* in the social link it creates with the reader. Social link and link in real life are neglected by formalism.

However, it seems to me that the articulation of form and theme is introduced in a more concrete manner (but also quite differently) in Vygotsky's *The psychology of art*. Hence, this excursus.

2.3 Excursus: “Content” and “Form” in Vygotsky's *The Psychology of Art*

It is in Vygotsky's *The Psychology of Art* that the idea emerges – could it be extended to every work of art as Vygotsky explains? I do not know – that what makes the work exist is the contradiction between the *fable* (as content of the work considered in itself) and the way how it expresses itself in the concrete work. This is in contrast with the idea that what characterises the work is the unity of form and background (which, in my view, is underlying in Medvedev's text and it is also commonplace). Firstly, in the analysis (p.218) of Ivan Bunin's short story *Light Breathing*, Vygotsky contrasts the order of events of the *fable* and the actual order of the text. Following the order of the development of this young high school pupil's drama (p.220):

We learned the things more or less in this order: How Olia Mechtcherskaïa seduced an officer, how she started having an affair with him, how the successive adventures of this affair did occur, how she swore that she loved him and spoke of marriage, how she later started making fun of him; we lived with the hero all the scene at the train station, and his later resolution, and , of course, we remained there, tense and anxious, we remained there to observe during the few minutes when the officer with his diary in hand, after reading the note about Malioutine, went to the platform and, unexpectedly, shot and killed her.

In contrast, what makes the text flow is the fact that the death of the heroine is told in the form which evokes light breathing, her presence in the cemetery for the teacher who remembers her. We could also add the lightness, the futility of the dialogues with her classmate or the juvenile and provoking tone of voice when dialoguing with the headmistress to whom she tells that it was her own brother who

“made of her a woman.” Only when all this has been said that the episode of the shot itself emerges, which is quoted by Vygotsky:

“And one month after this conversation, an ugly and common Cossack officer, who had absolutely nothing to do with Olga Mechtcherskaïa’s world, shot and killed her on the platform of the train station amongst the crowd of people who had just arrived by train.” One needs only to study the structure of this sole sentence to discover fully the teleology of style of this narrative. Pay attention to the way how the most important word gets lost in the amount of descriptions which surround it from all sides, apparently strange to the narrative, secondary, less important [...].

Bunin’s full text as well as Vygotsky’s commentary should be quoted here as a way of expressing the manner how the movement of the text makes us think-feel. That being said, Vygotsky speaks of “law of annihilation of content by form,” which remains questionable and too systematic (theoretical ravages of a dialectical language?): The content, the heroine’s death is not nullified: Its meaning changes, it is somehow submitted to the theme of “light breathing.”

When Vygotsky analyses *Hamlet*, we find the same kind of “contradictions,” even more complex: the interpreters wonder how to explain the movement of the play. For example, is it an issue of Hamlet’s hesitant nature or the difficulties he encounters? But then we forget the relationship of form with content. And what makes the play run, Vygotsky tell us, is exactly the veil which prevents us from seeing a “true nature of Hamlet.” There is a contradiction between the received fable and the hero’s personality exactly as it appears in the play. Vygotsky makes fun of those who seek to know “what Hamlet really thinks” or wonder about the “objective time” during which, supposedly, Hamlet had delayed the time of revenge. Being against such psychological research, Vygotsky seeks (p.257) to follow the line of the work, which, in order to exist, should not be the simple place of the expression of the *fable*, reduced to the scheme “father’s murder – revenge.” On the one hand, there is the *fable* (here the transmitted legend): Hamlet kills the king to avenge his father. On the other hand, there is the *subject*: Hamlet delays to kill the king, and when he kills him, it is for another reason (his mother’s death, the poisoned sword that kills him) far more than avenging his father (p.261).

The whole “irrational” discourse held by Hamlet is added to this. This is what resists to the simple unity of the fable which makes the work function.

In this sense, it seems to me that Vygotsky, in his work on both books, manages to achieve what was still at the level of proposition of principles in Medvedev’s text: An analysis of the form of the text as the subject matter itself of the content of the work of art and not the expression of an event which we could narrate differently. It is the contrast of the fable and form which produces the subject itself of the work and hence its effect. And then, Vygotsky started his work with a striking formula (p.18):

In our view, the core idea of psychology of art consists in acknowledging that the artistic form outweighs the material or, in what amounts to the same thing, that art is a *social technique of feeling*.

Many questions remain (undoubtedly, as for any utterance as general as that). Firstly, is it only a matter of feeling? Certainly, it is not. Furthermore, a technique gets characterised by its explicit relation towards goals. Does the author know what he will produce on his spectators or readers? Inversely, does the spectator or the reader have access to the author’s intention? It seems to me that in both cases, the response can be negative. This leads to the consideration that there are indeed some effects produced by this technique, but they are “dialogical,” and do not depend only on the author’s know-how. In any case, by following Vygotsky, we can only see the unexpected aspect of the different readings of Hamlet, elaborate traces of the different modes of “perceiving as *such*.”

Here again, the reading of Vygotsky reveals that there is no contradiction between the author’s exotopy and the hero’s autonomy and their relationship. On the contrary, it produces a specific effect.

One needs only to go through any tragedy and *Hamlet*, in particular, to see that all characters are portrayed exactly as viewed by the hero, in this case Hamlet. All events are refracted through the prism of his soul and hence, the author considers tragedy on two grounds: On the one hand, he sees everything through Hamlet’s eyes and, on the other hand, he sees Hamlet himself with his own eyes, although every spectator of the tragedy is at the same time Hamlet and the one who contemplates him (p.265).

I wonder whether things are not a little more complicated. Here, Vygotsky talks about the written play. And it is certainly true that the play seen from the father's, the usurper's or the mother's point of view would be very different. And then, what about the performed play? Don't the animated bodies of each of the actors-characters make also centres of perspectives that are probably secondary, nonetheless centres of perspectives which resist being solely the hero's or the author's object?

Moreover, when reading Vygotsky, it seems that the duality which characterises the relationships of Hamlet seeing himself and seen by the author will project itself as it is "within" the spectator or the reader. This is not evident. Anyhow, the complexity of the situation is described later (p.267):

Just like in the portrait, the physiognomic non-coincidence of the different factors of face expression is the basis of our experience in tragedy, the psychological non-coincidence of the different factors of character expression is the basis of tragic feeling. Tragedy might produce incredible effects on our feelings, precisely because it constantly makes them become transformed into their opposite, be deceived in their expectations, face their own contradictions, become split; and when we see *Hamlet*, it seems that we live a thousand human lives in one evening, and in fact, we have been able to feel far more things than during whole years of our daily life.

Getting back to the formalists, they are the ones who are at the origin of all reflections regarding the relationship between the fable and the subject. They are against any psychological explanation for the sake of studying only the serious aspect of art, its form. They worry neither about the course of the world, nor about its form of acting upon us. Undoubtedly, they leave aside their own way of perceiving, from which only the work as a signifying totality can be given to them. Nonetheless, all those who came after them have been confronted with the specificity of the form of the text. However, I wonder whether we cannot extend Vygotsky's analysis to the specific manner how each person's words give a form which acts through its style on the way how the text makes sense for us. This is so, no matter how difficult it is to render explicit this action of style upon us.

2.4 Some Texts by Bakhtin

The reading of Bakhtin presented here is centered on the problem of literature and specifically on the novel in its relationship with “philosophy,” just as it emerges within the fragment of a text by Bakhtin, *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, written in his youth. And the way it emerges in partial excerpts of *Aesthetics and Theory of the Novel* and *The Aesthetics of Verbal Creation*, without making any appeal to the other texts available in French and without being capable of justifying through a simple principle the reasons of this selection.

2.4.1 *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*

In short, we could say that this Kantian influenced philosophy is based on the irreducibility of the three approaches, the theoretical, moral and aesthetic. The irreducible aspect of this distinction is opposed to the Hegelian views of theoretical totalisation in the final discourse and to, at least, a certain Marxist image of unity of practice substantiated by dialectic and historical knowledge.

From beginning to end of his life, it seems to me that Bakhtin is indeed a theoretician of non-completion and heterogeneity, of non-totalisation. This sets him in contrast with Voloshinov’s revolutionary-totalising enthusiasm as well as with the limitation to the critique of formalism we find in Medvedev’s work. Although I do not want to say that “history demonstrates that,” in my view, we are confronted with such theory of non-completion, as we do not believe, I think, that either science will resolve all our problems, or that a revolutionary process will suppress *ipso facto* the roots of any “alienation.”

The beginning of this text, certainly written between 1920 and 1924 (Bakhtin was born in 1885), is missing. A rather general principle is asserted to the “relative beginning” (p.17). I present it, despite its relative length, insofar as, to me, it sets well the question of difference of perspective with that of Voloshinov:

The common element to the discursive theoretical thinking (scientific and philosophical), to the historical representation-description and to aesthetic intuition, which are important for its analysis, is constituted by the following. All the mentioned activities establish a split of

principle between the meaning content of a given act of such activity and the historical reality of its being, of its singular experience, after which this act loses its dimension of value and the unity of a living becoming and of self-determination. Only this act *in its wholeness* is authentically *real*, participates in the being-event...

It is true that at least from the translation, the formulation might be considered as heavy. Nonetheless, its meaning is clear. It is through theoretical, narrative, aesthetic mediations that an act gains sense. However, these mediations necessarily lose the very reality of the act in question. What each of us, in my view, can acknowledge if one thinks about what has really counted in one's life. This starting point will not be proven. Could it be? Do we prove facts? Nonetheless, it will be later clarified in different manners (p.18).

As a result, two worlds face each other; they do not communicate at all, nor get intertwined: The world of culture and the world of life, the sole world where we create, discover, contemplate, live and die. The act of our activity, of our experience, like a two-faced Janus, looks in different directions: On the side of objective unity of the cultural field, and on the side of the non-reproducible singularity of experienced life, but there is no sole and unique plan, where these faces would get mutually determined in relation to a single and unique unity.

In particular, (p.20): "The theoretically valid judgment remains unpenetrable in all its components for my individually responsible activity."

In other words, I cannot demonstrate that the way I have acted was the sole good one. Indeed, science develops, particularly in its link with technology. However, one cannot simply want to resolve concrete problems of existence from theoretical statements.

However, the world as object of theoretical knowledge tends to portray itself to the world in its thoroughness, not only for the abstract *singular* being, but also for the concretely unique being in its possible thoroughness [...] (p.24-25).

And correlatively, the question of how the experienced world becomes when it is theorised is raised. Moreover, the way how theory can support action insofar as (p.32) "The unique singularity cannot be thought, but only experienced in a participative manner [...]."

The situation remains complex. On the one hand, aesthetic input and moral input cannot be confounded. Nonetheless, (p.34), “there are works which are at the boundary of aesthetics and that of confession (moral orientation in the singular being).”

As a matter of fact, isn't the notion of boundary or rather of “being able to be on the boundary” important for us, insofar as it means that whatever conceptual divisions we pose, they might also be transgressed?

Bakhtin takes the example of different possible forms of the relationship with Christ (p.37):

This world, the world where the event of Christ's life and death as a fact and as meaning has been achieved, this world in its principle, is determinable neither in the theoretical categories, nor in the categories of historical knowledge, nor through aesthetic intuition. In the first case, we comprehend the abstract meaning, but we miss the singular fact of the real historical achievement of the event. In the second case, there is the historical fact, but we miss the meaning. In the third case, we have both the being of the fact and the meaning which is revealed as a component of its individuation, but we miss our own position in relation to the other, our imperative participation in him.

This means that none of these perspectives is complete, self-sufficient.

Aesthetic world is closer to life than the world of theory, but what is missing in it is my engagement. That is how it is. Such passages seem important to me. Nevertheless, two points need to be raised. Firstly, I am not qualified to address Bakhtin's nature of Christianity in general. Here, in my view, the figure of Christ appears as the very example of the “existential fact” which escapes such or such way of thinking. Further, I do not know enough about neo-kantianism to apprehend what has become of Kant's thought. However, what seems important to me is that in opposition to Platonic thought, and then to the theology of the unity of Beautiful, Good and True, Kantian thought is a theory of separation between knowledge, morality and aesthetics. A separation which, in my view, corresponds well to the situation where we live. There might be links, but we do not deduce our practice from the daily life of a “science of man” (and I dare say that this relates also to “clinical psychology” or “practical”). I would add that Hegel's thought aims at encountering unity through the philosophical system. Furthermore, that the danger, at least, of one of the ways of intending to be “Marxist” is the fact of having wanted to reconstitute a “total theory” where the

knowledge of historical becoming was in continuity with a liberating practice. Can we determine the share that this assurance of possessing the true discourse has had in the dramatic events that we know of? No, none in my opinion⁸.

Still, there is a crisis that Bakhtin's text reveals (p. 42-43):

Contemporary man feels confident, at ease and lucid, where, in principle, he is absent, in the autonomous world of a cultural field and of its law of immanent creation; but he feels insecure, with no resources and confused, where he is faced with himself, where he is the centre of emergence of the *act* in singular real life. That is to say, we act with confidence, when we act not by ourselves, but as obsessed by the immanent need of meaning of such or such cultural field; the path, which starts from the premise to the conclusion, is traversed in a perfect and irreproachable manner, as I myself am absent on this path. However, how and where to integrate this process of my thought, which is pure and irreproachable within it and thoroughly justified? In Psychology of consciousness? Or in the history of the corresponding science? Or in my material budget, remunerated according to the number of lines which have been achieved? Probably in the chronological order of my day, like my occupation between 5 and 6 o'clock? In my scientific obligations? However, all these interpretations and possible contexts are themselves in a particular empty space, and are not rooted in anything, neither in a *one and indivisible* thing, nor in something that is unique. And contemporary philosophy does not provide any principle for this integration. This is where its crisis lies.

It seems to me that this discourse concerns us all. I imagine, for example, that all those who have worked as teachers might have wondered, while the flux of knowledge was flowing from their mouth: "But what am I doing here? This is not possible." Bronckart applies frequently the term "individualism", which is pejorative for him, to Bakhtin's thought. However, taking an individual perspective is good, it seems to me, in agreement with what Bakhtin has written, which characterises for each of us a "moral" perspective: I cannot decide for the others and the others cannot decide for me.

What Bakhtin points out, on the one hand, is the absence of a univocal philosophical totalisation (p.41):

We cannot refuse in our time the great merit of having become closer to the ideal of a scientific philosophy. However, this philosophy is

8. Marx was by then much less read and discussed in Russia than the Russian Marxists, Lenin, Plekhanov and Bukharin, to mention only the most important (v. Inna Tylkowski, *Vološinov en contexte*).

nothing else but a philosophy of specialty, that is to say a philosophy of the different branches of culture and of their unity under the shape of a theoretical transcription from the inside of the objects of the cultural work and of the immanent law of their development. This is why this theoretical philosophy cannot aim at being a first philosophy, that is to say a doctrine, not of the one and indivisible cultural work, but that of the one and singular being-event. Such a philosophy does not exist, and the paths of its creation seem to be forgotten.

On the other hand, doesn't the absence of a unified "scientific philosophy" get equally or much more imposed on us? Doesn't scientific babelism impede the fact that there might be a totalisation of scientific culture, without mentioning the impossibility for this scientific totalisation, which is impossible, to really help us to orient ourselves in life?

A parenthesis devoted to Marxism follows directly the preceding development:

Hence, precisely the deep insatisfaction in view of contemporary philosophy of those who think in a participative manner – an insatisfaction which leads some of them to a conception like historical materialism which, despite all its insufficiencies and all its failures, is attractive to the participative consciousness because of its efforts to build a world which gives way to a determined *act*, real at the concrete historical level; in the world of historical materialism, a consciousness which develops and acts can orient itself.

It seems to me that this text concerns us as much as the previous one: it is certainly impossible for us to view "historical materialism" as a source of definitive truth. Some evidence, for example, that of class struggle, might help us to guide ourselves in, at least, an obscure historical practice, at least insofar as we know that the way of being of each person is not reducible to his or her "being of class" and that we ignore which determinations will be predominant at a given time in history.

Anyhow, Bakhtin is not strictly speaking Kantian. Thus, in p.49, he finds Hegel's critique: A morality based solely on the universality of the rule cannot provide any concrete determination on the nature of duty which then takes shape in "purely theoretical determinations: sociological, economic, aesthetic and scientific. The *act* is rejected in the theoretical world with the void exigence of legality."

Furthermore, already in this text, Bakhtin links this heterogeneity of the subject to the heterogeneity of the word and of its three aspects (p.56): "aspect of meaning

content (the word-concept), its expressive-palpable aspect (the word image) and its emotional-volitional aspect (intonation of the word) in their unity.”

Albeit under a concrete form, there is indeed something like the reference to the three aspects of man separated in the three Kantian Critiques. Bakhtin adds that the word (*slovo*, ordinary language) is more adapted to indicate this heterogeneity of shades of meaning than representing abstract rhetorical truth (which is, in fact, certainly better expressed in *ad hoc* algorithms).

Nonetheless, it is the aspect of “the established fact of crisis” which matters here. This text is short in its “juvenile” (?) will to address what is essential. I add this other passage which is clarifying, in my view (p.74):

Should one acknowledge doubt as a value of a particular kind? Yes, we acknowledge [together with the issue of knowing who is “we,” F.F.] doubt as such a value. It is exactly the doubt which is at the basis of our active and effective life. In addition, it is never opposed to theoretical knowledge. This value of doubt is by no means opposed to the one, indivisible and singular *truth (Pravda)*, it is exactly it, this one, indivisible and singular *truth (Pravda)* of the world which requires it.

Indeed, the articulation between “doubt” and “truth” is posed rather than rendered explicit. Nevertheless, after all, if we were only machines that transmit information, the very notion of truth would lose its meaning. It is in this sense that we can accept Bakhtin’s statement. We could, in Husserlian terms, make out of it a truth of contingent essence: If we were not capable of doubt, our relationship to truth would not be a relationship to truth. This certainly appears better further down (p.77):

It is from the unique place which I hold that I have an opening unto the entire unique world, and for me only from there. As a desimbodied spirit, I lose my necessitating, imperative relation to the world, I lose the reality of the world. There is no man in general; there is me, there is the other, concrete, particular: the one who is close to me, my contemporary (social humanity), the past and the future of real men (of real historical humanity). [...] And it is the whole of a general knowledge which defines man in general (as *homo sapiens*) – for example, the fact that he is mortal – who finds his axiological meaning only from my unique place as *me*, the one who is close to me, all the historical humanity die⁹; and of course the emotional-

9. (*sic*). Both syntagms are subjects of die “the one who is close to me” and “all the historical humanity.”

volitional meaning of my death, of the death of the other, of a close friend, the fact of every real man's death, are deeply different in each case, as these are the different components of the singular event-being... The theoretical knowledge of an object as it is, independently of its real situation in the singular world from the unique place of a participant is fully justified; however it is not the ultimate knowledge, but only a technical aspect that is auxiliary to the latter. The abstraction that I carry out of the unique place in the being, my *akin* of disembodiment is per se a responsible act which I perform from my unique place...

This common heterogeneity like the reference to the concrete position of each one constitutes, in my view, a more enveloping notion and, at the same time, more immediate than "dialogism." Our kinship-distance in relation to others and to ourselves is irreducible. And it is this heterogeneity which stands as the condition of a dialogue (uncertain). Considering that (p.84-85):

It is this architectonics of the real world of the *act* which should describe moral philosophy, that is to say not the abstract schema, but the concrete plan of the world of the unique and singular *act*, the fundamental concrete components of its construction and their disposition in relation to one another. These components are me-for-me, the other-for me, me-for the other [...]

components around which revolve all the possibilities of evaluation. I recall that Bakhtin had already put forward (p.76) that:

Of course, when we speak of values of historical humanity, we assign an intonation to these words, we cannot abstract ourselves from an emotional-volitional relationship peculiar to them; they do not coincide for us with their meaning content, they correlate with a unique participant and are set ablaze in the light of real value.

That is to say that the relationships between these instances cannot be thought only conceptually.

However, the relationship between the subjects might also appear in literary work. Thus, on p.105, Bakhtin presents Pushkin's poem "Separation" which he analyses as a fact in some sort of successive envelopments. The universal value of the beauty of Italy is presented through the discourse of the heroine who is present only in the discourse of the hero, and the latter himself is enveloped in the author's discursive

movement. And, as long as there is value, it is expressed in what is irreducible in terms of difference between value for me and value for the other. In this case, Italy as a homeland and Italy as a foreign country. Just like the case of the centrality of “reported speech,” which is expressed in a concrete manner. Or rather the way how the discourse of one person goes through the discourse of the other. Hence, it seems to me that contrarily to what Bronckart claims, there is no contradiction between the author’s exotopy and the relations of dialogic embeddedness between the different universes of meaning. More broadly speaking, in my view, the considerations on the author’s exotopy we are about to put forward are in agreement with the acknowledgment of dialogic heterogeneity. The author can more or less totalise the hero’s entire life, particularly by saying the date of his birth and death, which no real character can do. However, this totalisation is not opposed to the possibility of expressing individual irreducibility in a work – dialogic if we want to – of such a hero, of all heroes in relation to one another and in relation to the author’s explicit thought. There is no contradiction there, only different points of view about a complex reality.

We could discuss the idea itself of a first philosophy and that of a first philosophy based on the act. However, we could or should acknowledge that even if this research cannot be achieved, it could function as a possible locus of thought orientation. And, after all, even if, practically, the human beings are largely interchangeable, in counterpart, I cannot say to myself “I should do that, but if it is the other who does it, it will be equally good.” Or rather, I do not have then a moral point of view, whose specific rationality would be responsibility.

The fact is that the considerations regarding the novel and the respective relationships of the author and the hero have manifestly constituted (at least in relation to the bulk of what has been published, or rather translated into French) Bakhtin’s major concern, along with his first “philosophical” concerns. Even if the clarification provided in these different texts is necessarily more diverse, if only as a result of the diversity of the works taken into account. Considering the mass of texts dedicated to the novel, the selection presented here was particularly made in a random way.

2.4.2 *Aesthetics and Theory of the Novel*

At the beginning of *Aesthetics and Theory of the Novel*, Bakhtin announced that he would not address a history of poetics, rather useless in a systematic work. No more than

the quotes and the superfluous references. In general, they have no methodological significance outside historical research and in a concise and systematic work, they are absolutely useless: The erudite reader does not need them, and for the reader who is not, they are vain.

This is, at least, extremely dichotomous. In any case, it is not “dialogic” in the ordinary sense of the term. (But, in fact there are some bibliographical references...).

Still, I find in this work a very large number of positions which are, in my view, historically specific to Bakhtin, but especially in movements of speech-thought, which are worth to be followed. In the article “The Problem of Content,” he, firstly, insists (p.40-41) on the fact that the cultural act (knowledge, ethics or art) is always on a boundary line. And he insists, particularly, on the fact that the cognitive or theoretical act refers to what exists already on the ethical or aesthetic mode.

However, one should not imagine the cultural field as a spatial entity bearing boundaries, but also an inner territory [...] Every cultural act lives, in substance, on boundaries; hence its seriousness and importance; when it is drawn out of its boundaries, it loses ground, becomes void, arrogant, degenerates and dies [...] It is only in its concrete systematic feature, that is to say, its immediate linkage and its orientation in relation to the unit of culture, that this phenomenon stops being an existing and plain fact, that it acquires a significance, a meaning, that it becomes like a monad reflecting everything in it, and reflecting itself in everything [...] Thus, the cognitive act finds an already constructed reality in the concepts of pre-scientific thought, but above all, already appreciated and regulated by the daily, social, political and ethical act. It finds it fervidly asserted. At last, the cognitive act results from the representation of the aesthetically ordered object, of the vision of the object [...] Reality opposed to art can be nothing else but the reality of knowledge and of the ethical act, under all aspects: reality of everyday life, economic, social and political reality, moral reality itself.

One could surely formulate the things differently. However, who amongst us could say that he or she is capable of determining, scientifically, what is his or her aesthetic understanding of the world and human beings, or that he or she calculates scientifically his or her political or moral choices? What we have there is a clearly explicit situation of non-overlapping, which is imposed upon us, without any “individualist” or religious references that Bronckart insists on. Instead, what is posed here in relation to the novel is the issue of the possibility of a “scientific” or “reflexive” approach. Starting from the fact that the novel or some novels contribute better (or in any case differently from “science”) to clarify our situation as human beings. Thus, in the manner of presenting concretely how our relation with the others and with time constitutes us. This is what what Bakhtin develops a little further (p.44):

Aesthetic activity does not create a thoroughly different reality. Differently from knowledge and the act, [in our own language, we would rather talk of action, F.F.] which create nature and social humanity, famous art decorates, mentions, evokes this preexisting reality of knowledge and act – nature and social humanity – renders them richer and fulfills them and *above all, creates the intuitive and complete unity of these two worlds, places man within nature, viewed as its aesthetic environment, humanises nature and “naturalises” man.*

In this sense, the analysis of verbal material in the novel will always be on the borderline between the properly aesthetic, knowledge and ethical concern. Ivan Karamazov’s “theoretical ideas” on the children’s suffering are linked to his ethical position, but they also express his character, his relations with Alyosha. This occurs in the “aesthetic” form of the narrative unfolding, and of course differently from the common course of existence.

Still, this specificity of relations in the cognitive, ethical and aesthetic fields leads Bakhtin to characterise the linguists’ linguistics through terms that are rather close to the ones used by Voloshinov. For him, it is not a matter of proposing another linguistics, but to observe that linguistics-science deals neither with the ethical content nor with the work (p.58):

Linguistics is science only insofar as it masters its object, language, which, according to it, defines itself by a purely linguistic thought. An isolated and concrete utterance always occurs in a cultural, semantic

and axiological context: scientific, artistic, political context and any other, or a context of an isolated context of private life. It is only in such contexts that such an utterance is alive and intelligible: it is true or false, beautiful or ugly, sincere or hypocritical, franc, cynical, authoritarian, etc. It does not exist at all, there cannot be a neutral utterance. Now, linguistics sees in them only a *language phenomenon and relates to them only at the unit of this language*, and never to that of concept, of a practice of History, of the character of an individual, etc. [we would rather say here *langue* instead of *langage*, F.F]¹⁰

He praises this position as a partial-biased position:

It is only upon liberating itself systematically of its metaphysical tendency (substantialisation and word reification), of any psychologism and aestheticism, of any verbosity that linguistics finds its way towards its object, constitutes it methodically and becomes a science for the first time.

However, inversely (p.60):

For poetry and likewise for knowledge and ethical act and its objectification within law, the State, etc., language represents only a technical element [...] Nonetheless, poetry uses language technically in a completely different manner: *Poetry needs language thoroughly, from all its sides, with all its elements, and does not remain indifferent to any of the nuances of the word in its linguistic determination.*

Certainly one may doubt about the possibility of talking about “poetry” in general. Nonetheless, we see clearly what this poetic consideration of the “total word” means.

Still, certainly, (p.61):

It is clear that linguistic analysis will discover words, propositions, etc.; a physical analysis would discover paper, printing ink with such a chemical composition, or sound waves in their physical determination; the physiologist would find corresponding processes in perception organs and nerve centers [...] But for the aestheticist, like for the viewer of a work of art, it is clear that all these elements are not part of the aesthetic object to which our spontaneous aesthetic appreciation is applied to (“admirable,” “profound,” etc.). All these elements are observed and defined only through an interpretative, aesthetic and second level judgment of aesthetic man.

¹⁰ TN. Considering the existing difference between *langue* and *langage* in French, the author finds that in this particular case, the word *langue* would be more suitable. See footnote 4.

We could add that the question of knowing to which extent these different “scientific” determinations could and should be incorporated in aesthetic reflection has no evident answer. Nonetheless, Bakhtin adds (p.66):

We should not fear if the aesthetic object can be discovered neither in the psyche, nor in the material work; it does not mean that it becomes a mystical or metaphysical substance. The multiform world of the act, ethical existence are on the same level. Where is the State? In our mind? On the parchment of constitutional acts? In the physical and mathematical space? And where is Law? Yet, we seriously deal with the State and with Law! In addition, these values interpret and arrange both the empirical material and our psyche, and give them a meaning enabling us to transcend its pure subjectivity.

Could we not add that any determination which aspires to be unambiguous would miss the heterogeneity of these institutional-concrete objects? Indeed, we could say that the State has or intends to have the monopoly of legitimate violence. However, this legitimacy will be advocated, silently accepted, secretly transgressed or violently questioned: The diversity of representations, ways of feeling, reaction modes characterise far more what is “truly” State than what a given consideration would tell us about its sole “nature.” Similarly to the relations between master and disciples, the opposition between the amateur, the critic, the dealer and the painter, all take part of the status of the work of art. However, I am not sure whether this consideration follows Bakhtin’s statement. There is even contrary evidence. If we go further back, Bakhtin wrote (p.62):

If we try to define the composition of the aesthetic object of Pushkin’s poem, “Remembrance”¹¹: *When, for the mortal one, is stilled the noisy day/ And, on the silent city’s buildings/ The easy shadow of night is softly laid...* and so on and so forth, we would say that what constitutes it is the city, the night, remembrances, remorse, etc. These are the values which are directly related to our artistic activity, it is towards them that our mind guides its aesthetic intention.

And Bakhtin adds that the formal elements of the text

are placed outside the content of aesthetic perception, that is to say, outside the artistic object; they may only serve to a second level

¹¹ TN. Translated by Yevgeny Bonver, November 7, 2003 in: <http://www.poetryloverspage.com/yevgeny/pushkin/remembrance.html> (access on January 22, 2014)

scientific judgment of aesthetics, provided that we wonder how and with which elements of extra-aesthetic structure of the external work is the content of artistic perception determined.

In my view, this position is arguable: Does our aesthetic perception relate to values as such or to values the way they are expressed in one form or another? It is as if we do not grasp the expression of a face without linking it somehow to what this expression on the face bears. In this sense, I confess that I do not know whether there is a “scientific method” to analyse the manner these “incorporated” values are revealed. At least, the dialogue with the others and with ourselves which makes us modify or, anyhow, modulate our first perception. And getting back to the discussion, isn't it also through its concrete forms and not as a pure value that we, for example, relate to the State?

Another determination emerges in the chapter entitled “The Problem of Form” (p.70):

Herein lies the difference between artistic form and cognitive form. The latter does not have an author-creator: I find the cognitive form in the object, I do not find myself in it, I do not find in it my activity as a creator. Hence, some constraining need of cognitive thought: It is active, but does not feel its activity, as feeling can only be individual, reported to a person, or, to be more precise, the feeling of my activity does not get into the objectal content of thought, it remains on the margin, like a subjective, psychological accessory, not more than that: science as an objective unity of objects *has no author-creator. The author-creator is a constitutive element of artistic form.* As for form, I must experience it as being my active and axiological relation to *content*, to be able to feel it aesthetically: Within form and through form I sing, I narrate, I represent, by means of form, I express my love, my certitude, my adhesion.

A set of questions are raised here:

- Isn't there aesthetics of scientific creation, or of such scientific creation? And the question is even more acute in the difficult field to be determined, which we will call “philosophy,” where it seems difficult to summarise contents independently of the speed of a movement.
- Could we not conceive an aesthetic perception with no relationship with the author? (I will pass over the issue of aesthetic perception of nature).

- What is the relationship between what is expressed here and of what has been presented above, where the emphasis is put on values – and only secondarily on form?
- Finally, what is the articulation between ethical relationship and aesthetic perception when the movement, the rhythm of the body, of speech or the other's writing expresses to us its way of being or rather a way of being?

Perhaps it is a necessity, anyway a risk of “theoretical discourse,” to speed up towards the general, and not defining a specific, ethical or aesthetic object? In any case, Bakhtin recognizes that the same work might be perceived according to different modalities (p.70): “[...] Thus, in the non literary perception of a novel one can suppress form and render content active in its problematic or ethical-practical orientation.”

The general idea (too general?) is that while the practical activity binds the object to human needs and that the scientific activity replaces such particular object in let's say “nature” as a whole, the work of art, by isolating form as such makes it possible to view content in itself. Or, phrasing it differently (p.72):

What we name as *invention* in art is but the positive expression of isolation: the isolated object is thereby invented, in other words, neither real in the unity of nature, nor present in the event of existence. From their negative side, invention and isolation coincide; in invention, viewed from the positive side, the activity of form is highlighted, the author's presence; invention gives me a more acute awareness of myself as active inventor of an object; I feel free, on account of my outerness, of forming and of finishing the object, event without encountering any obstacle.

This thought strikes me. At the same time, this utterance (as any utterance?) can develop only a point of view. Here, it is precisely the isolation of the creator's point of view. Hence, firstly, the issue related to the mode or modes of reading. Is it in relation to the work or to the author? At the same time, the work of art, the object of aesthetic contemplation could have the role of celebration, of worship, or even the heart of mass manifestation or hoarding. Again, this brings us back to the fact that the objects taken into account are not really isolated, they are always on borderlines.

This relative isolation is what the formalists (p.73) name as “singularisation” “individualisation.” I will not get into that again: This is an ‘understatement; I do not master the formalists’ writings, which are largely unknown to me. Having said that, we can represent to ourselves the dialogue with a written text, isolated in its form and particularly cut from the initial conditions of enunciation, of corporeality of enunciation.

In this respect, the relationship does not get established with the individual who has written, but rather, if one might say, with the author's abstraction as author.

The chapter concludes (p.75) with an account on rhythm:

From the focal point of this experienced generating activity, rhythm sprang first (in the larger sense, that of verse as well as prose) and, generally speaking, *any order of statement with a non objectal feature, sending back the enunciator towards himself, to his dynamic and generating unity.*

Here again, the question of generality of characterisation arises. In any case, it is exactly (p.76) through formal unity that aesthetic work exists as such:

The unity of aesthetic form, "style" is, for sure, equally a mode of resumption (for example, pompous or humouristic) of the words of the other or of oneself, but it is first and foremost rhythm, speed, movement in which these repetitions gain meaning.

And Bakhtin adds that in the case of the work, it is its closure which makes sense, whereas in science, "it is the scholar who starts and finishes, it is not science which does."

*

The second study is entitled: "Novelistic Discourse."

In the introduction, Bakhtin recalls that he fights in two fronts: Against "formalism," but also against the trend which seeks to analyse "ideology" as such.

After perceiving that the stylistic analysis of the novel is recent, Bakhtin further adds that (p.87-88):

The novel is a pluristylistic, plurilingual, plurivocal phenomenon [...] Here are the major kinds of its compositional and stylistic units which normally form the different parts of the novelistic whole:

- (1) Direct, literary narration in its multiform variants.
- (2) Stylisation of the various forms of oral traditional narration, or direct narrative.
- (3) Stylisation of the various forms of written semi-literary everyday narration: letters, diaries, etc.
- (4) Different literary forms, but they do not fall within *literary art*, author's discourse, moral, philosophical writings, scholarly

digressions, rhetorical declamations, ethnographic descriptions, reports and so on and so forth.
(5) The stylistically individualised discourse of characters.

And he adds:

The stylistic originality of the novelistic genre lies in the assemblage of these dependent units, but relatively autonomous (at times even plurilingual) in the supreme unity of the “whole”: The style of the novel is an assemblage of styles; the language of the novel is a system of languages.

Thus, the aim does not consist in analysing the presumed “style” of an author, but rather the multiplicity of voices that we find in the novel. And in order to avoid ill-founded criticism, one must add that these comments about the novel gain sense only through the analysis of the diversity of novels.

Bakhtin then recalls (p.96) that on the one hand, “on the top,” philosophy as well as theology and “grand poetry” have aimed at practicing a language (the “foreign language” mentioned by Voloshinov?) which is “the unique language of truth.” However,

While poetry was resolving, on the official socio-ideological tops, the problem of cultural, national and political centralisation of the ideological verbal world, at the bottom, on the trestles of the shacks and fairs, the jester’s plurilingualism would resonate mocking at all “languages” and dialects, and the literature of fabliaux and of farce, of street songs, of sayings and anecdotes was going on. There was not any linguistic centre there, but we would play the living game of poets, scholars, monks, knights where all “languages” were masks and none of their aspects was true and undisputable.

I will not go over this theme largely developed, especially in *Rabelais* and *Dostoevsky*. However, one should observe that not only this “language of the bottom” is dialogic in itself, but it is also a destructive dialogue of the monological noble discourse of the top. And then, independently of the issue of the origins of the novel (I will not go over it here either) a more and more important novelistic form based on plurivocality developed (p.102):

Instead of the inexhaustible plenitude of the object itself, the prose writer discovers a multitude of paths, roads, footpaths imprinted in him through his social awareness. At the same time as the inner contradictions in the object itself, the prose writer discovers around him different social languages, this babel confusion which is expressed around each object; the dialectics of the object entwines with the social dialogue around him. For the prose writer, the object is the point of convergence of various voices, amongst which his voice should also resonate: It is exactly for it that the other voices create an indispensable background, out of which the nuances of his literary prose are neither liable to be grasped, nor “resonant” [...] Only the mythical Adam addressing with his first speech a virgin world not yet questioned, only Adam-the-solitary could completely avoid this dialogic orientation on the object with the speech of others.

Bakhtin adds that the novel works only through the more or less important mixture of these various voices. Nonetheless, ordinary dialogue is oriented towards the heterogeneity of the other (p.103):

In ordinary spoken language, living discourse is directly and abruptly oriented towards the future discourse-response: It provokes this response, senses it and moves towards it. Being constituted in the atmosphere of the “already said,” discourse is determined at the same time by the response not yet uttered, nonetheless requested and already foreseen.

In other words, dialogism is “inner” to the utterance, not simply present in the succession of responses. There is therefore, an intimate relationship between the novel and the very life of daily dialogue, Bakhtin observes here that a specific form or better specific forms of dialogism are found in Tolstoï (I recall this fact so as to avoid the pet theme of the bad monologic Tolstoï and that of the good dialogic Dostoevsky) (p.105):

The dialogic relationship with the speech of others in the object, and with the speech of others in the interlocutor’s anticipated response, which are in essence different and capable of generating distinct stylistic effects in discourse, might nonetheless get very tightly intertwined, becoming thus very difficult to distinguish one from the other for stylistic analysis. Therefore, discourse in Tolstoï is distinguished by this clear inner dialogisation, both in the object as well as in the reader’s perspective whose semantic and expressive peculiarities are perceived in an acute manner by Tolstoï.

On the contrary (p.107):

In poetic genres (in the strict sense) discourse natural dialogisation is not used in a literary manner, discourse suffices to itself and does not presume the utterances of others beyond its limits.

Then, he adds (p.118) that the unity of rhythm is not favourable to the manifestation of this heterogeneity. And indeed, at least in the traditional forms of poetry, we hardly imagine the poet introducing a reflexive comment of the kind “But what am I saying?”.

The rest of Bakhtin’s text addresses the issue of historical genesis of the novelistic form. I am not going over that again. Bakhtin observes that, whatever differences there might be between the novels, we find in them “obstacles,” while the epic hero places himself beyond any obstacle. There will be the challenge of achievements in Balzac and Stendhal. In Zola, “the obstacle becomes the aptitude to live, physical health, man’s faculty of adaptation.” Adventure novel is based on the idea of obstacle. And the novel of obstacle becomes novel of education. This central role of obstacle as a characteristic of the hero is related to the developments regarding the chronotope which will be discussed later.

2.4.3 *The Aesthetics of Verbal Creation*

I have no “theory” on the relation between *Aesthetics and Theory of the Novel* and *The Aesthetics of Verbal Creation*. The latter is much longer. After dealing with (I) the relationship of the author and the hero, it addresses (II) the hero’s spatial whole, (III) the hero’s temporal whole, (IV) the hero’s signifying whole, and goes back to the author and hero in (V). Only some elements will be presented here.

2.4.3.1 The Author and the Hero

The starting point is that in practical life, we deal with such or such way of being of our others. Similarly, we can never totalise what we are. On the contrary, in the work of art and particularly in the novel, the character’s own totality manifests itself as aesthetic. There are, therefore, two different (relative) totalisations (p.34):

An author, not only sees and knows everything that a hero sees and knows in particular and all the heroes on the whole, but still, he sees and knows more by seeing and knowing exactly this, which, in principle, is inaccessible to the heroes, and it is exactly this *surplus*, always determined and constant that the author's vision and knowledge in relation to each hero benefit from, which provides the principle of completion of a whole – that of the heroes and that of the event, in other words, the whole of a work [...] The living depository of this unity which establishes completion is the author, in opposition to the hero, the depository of the unity which sets the open event, and not liable to completion from inside, which constitutes life [...] It is the author's exotopy, his own love blurring outside the hero's existential field and the exclusion of everything in view of leaving this field free for the hero and for his life, it is comprehension which takes part of the completion of the event which constitutes the hero's life, occurring from the real-cognitive and ethical viewpoint of a spectator who does not take part of the event. [...] The hero's consciousness, his feeling and his desire of the world – his material emotional-volitional intent - is involved from all sides, taken as in a circle, through the consciousness that the author has in relation to the hero and his world whose completion it ensures; the hero's discourse about himself is permeated by the author's discourse on the hero; the (ethical-cognitive) interest provided by the event regarding the hero's life is included through the interest it represents for the author's artistic activity. It is in this sense that aesthetic objectivity works within a perspective which distinguishes it from cognitive and ethical objectivity: The latter relates to a neutral judgment, which is indifferent to the person and to the event, and which is performed from the viewpoint of an ethical and cognitive value, of a broad significance, or considered as such, or which tends towards this broad significance [...]

The text is problematic, as we do not see clearly what might happen to the articulation from the cognitive or ethical point of view, except in the corrections of their relation with generality. However, who could characterise “cognition” and “ethics” in one line? There is still an issue which, in my view, is essential: the irreducibility of three perspectives and the dialogal articulation in the novel of the hero's and author's perspective. From that point, three large figures of the relationship between author and hero are presented in a schematic manner. Therefore, the first possibility is the case when the author can “see the world and things differently, only through the hero's eyes...” (p.39). In this case, “The background is not addressed, it is not clearly seen by the author-contemplator and it is given to us in an uncertain hypothetical manner, from within the hero, in the way how the background of our own life is given to us.”

However, even under this perspective, the author should provide a principle of external completion. Otherwise, the work becomes “a treatise of philosophy or introspection-confession.” Or else what matters is not the agreement or disagreement between the author’s and hero’s perspectives, but that the hero’s perspectives are given (p.40) within “the possibility of seeing [the hero] thoroughly, in all his current plenitude and admire him” (which does not imply agreement or disagreement). And Bakhtin adds: “Almost all of Dostoevsky’s heroes belong to this type, likewise some of Tolstoi’s heroes (Pierre, Levine), some of Kierkegaard’s, of Stendhal’s, as well as some of the heroes of other writers whose characters, partially, tend towards the extremes of this kind of character.”

A second possibility occurs when it is the hero who is in charge of these outer capacities of objectification. Here again there are two possibilities (p.41). In “false Classicism,” either the hero is presented from the outside, or the hero is autobiographical:

Having made the author’s self-projection his, which ensures completion to him, the global reaction which ensures to him a form, the hero incorporates it to his own experience and overcomes it; this kind of hero is refractory to all types of completion from the innerness, he internally outweighs everything which could determine him thoroughly and which he considers as being inadequate for him, he experiences all concluded integrity as a limitation and opposes to him an indelible inner mystery [...] It is the hero of romanticism: The romantic fears to betray himself through his hero and always leaves for him, somewhere, within himself, a kind of ventage through which the hero could stand beyond his own form of completion.

Anyhow, here, the problem of totalisation no longer appears as the only possible one to think the work, considering that “the dominant organiser of the text” is, on the contrary, the assumed impossibility of totalisation.

Finally, the last quickly evoked possibility: The one where the hero (p.42)

is his own author, he thinks of his life aesthetically, one would say that he plays a role [...]; differently from the infinite romantic hero and from Dostoevsky’s impenitent hero, this hero is self-satisfied and his completion is full of certainty.

However, Bakhtin does not give any examples...

Having said that, the chapter ends with a very explicit synthesis (p.43):

In order to be fulfilled, the aesthetic event needs two participants; it presumes two consciousnesses which do not coincide. Where the hero and the author coincide or are situated side by side, sharing a common value, or else get opposed as adversaries, the aesthetic event comes to an end and it is the ethical event which takes over (pamphlet, manifesto, indictment, panegyric and compliment, insult, confession, etc.); where there is no hero, albeit potential, we will have the cognitive event (treatise, lesson), where the other consciousness is the one of an omnipotent God, we will have a religious event (prayer, worship, ritual).

On the one hand, it is a beautiful synthesis, but at the same time, doesn't the question of distance of the one who speaks or writes and also the one who is under another perspective subsist in the entire life and not only in the novel? Furthermore, is the text itself "scientific" or what...? Or even further, what about – I believe I will get back to this issue – the articulation of this "aesthetic" perspective and of what could be our capacity to narrate ourselves to ourselves or represent to ourselves in a narrative form our relationship with others and with ourselves? What is the relationship between what happens in the novel and the way we evoke what we have been, what we have done and have felt? Or with our way of narrating ourselves, in something which, more or less, resembles a narrative, to others and particularly to what we perceive about the way they perceive us. What is then the relationship between what would be cognitive, ethical or aesthetic? Does our heterogeneity, necessarily, go through that distinction? If we think it does, the question of knowing under which form remains open. And then, does our narrative awareness occur according to a modality which somehow resembles one of those which might exist between the author and the hero? In any case, of course, whether it is the novelistic narrative or the one which is produced in our daily life, they do not fall within the scope of "science," even if they might incorporate some fragments.

Furthermore, it seems that the issue of the reader's position and particularly of the nature, the distance and the specificity of interest (of pleasure?) that he might have in relation to reading does not emerge here. In any case, the problem of totalisation, be it effective or not, makes it possible to address two questions, the one related to the hero's spatial whole, and then the one related to the hero's temporal whole.

2.4.3.2 “The Hero’s Spatial Whole”

I make mention of few points only. The chapter starts with considerations on daily life and not directly on literary work (p.44):

When I contemplate a man placed outside myself and in front of me, our concrete horizons, the way they are effectively experienced by him and me, they do not coincide. No matter how close to me this other might be, I will always see and know something in relation to the position where he is and which places him outside me and in front of me, which he himself cannot see: the parts of his body which are inaccessible to his own sight – his head, face, the expression of this face -, the world behind his back [...] When we look at each other, two different worlds are reflected in the pupil of our eyes. Owing to appropriate positions, it is possible to reduce to the maximum this difference of horizons, but in order to completely eliminate it, there should be a fusion in one body, become a one man.

Bakhtin addresses again this specific relationship with regards to the other in the case of childhood. To my knowledge, this consideration is rare in his work (p.67):

Sparse in my life, all the acts of attention, of love, which originate from the others and recognize me in my value, seem to have shaped for me the plastic value of my outer body. Indeed, as soon as a man starts to live himself from the innerness, he soon finds the acts – his next of kin’s, his mother’s - which anticipate him: Everything that determines him first, himself and his own body, the child receives it from his mother’s mouth and from his kins.

Further away (p.100):

From the point of view of effective productivity of the event, when we are two, what matters is not the fact that, apart from myself, there would *still be another* man, similar to me (two men), but that for me, he is the other, and this is what makes his sympathy for my life not as our fusion in one single being, not as a numerical duplication of my life, but rather as an enrichment of the event which is my life, as he lives it in a new way, in a new category of values – as the life of the other, which is perceived differently and which receives a *raison d’être* different from his own.

We find again here Scheler’s idea expressed in *The Nature of Sympathy*, according to which sympathy is not a fusion, empathy. On the contrary, it supposes

maintaining the distance between the other and me. But of course, it is expressed here in a context and in a manner which differ. In any case, we could propose similar considerations about my death and the death of the other which cannot coincide. Likewise about the distance which necessarily exists between the author and the hero in the case of autobiography.

By the way, I wonder whether it is not part of our own experience to bear a circulation of meaning between our own experience in the strict sense, the more or less explicit comment which goes along with it and our manner of perceiving literature. As, after all, life and fiction are not separated by an impassable barrier, especially that we spend our life awaiting, fearing, remembering, comparing what is or will likely happen with what might be. This means being in a world woven with the unreal, a bit like the world of fiction where the proximity-distance in relation to the other never disappears.

As for “The Temporal Whole of the Hero,” I thought I could present it more synthetically from the *final observations* of the chapter devoted to chronotopes in *Aesthetics and Theory of the Novel*

2.4.3.3 “The Temporal Whole of the Hero”

Firstly, (p.384):

All the spatial and temporal definitions in art and in literature are inseparable from each other, and always bear an emotional value. An abstract reflection might, obviously, envisage time and space separately, and move away from emotional values. However, living contemplation (equally reflected, but not abstract) of a work of art does not distinguish anything, does not move away from anything. It comprehends the chronotope in its entirety and plenitude. Art and literature are permeated with chronotopic values in various degrees and dimensions. Any cause, any privileged element of a work of art is presented as one of these values.

This passage reminds us that first of all one should avoid considering the chronotopes as types of pure cognitive or “representative” realities. Chronotopes are felt. They are at the heart of existence in the novel just like in life. Separating here the “known” from the “felt” does not make sense. Nonetheless, the issue of diversity of these chronotopes remains. Then, at the same time, the question of difference between

the manifested chronotopes in the novel and those which characterise our existence remains. Certainly, they are presented from a distance in the novels in a less constraining manner. We contemplate them more freely. Somehow, one could talk here about the reader's "exotopy." However, does this refer to, we will come back to it, a typology (absent in my view) of reading styles, be it correlated or not with our styles of existence?

Still, Bakhtin recalls that from the origins of the novel, the chronotope of the *encounter* has prevailed. It continues being so frequent and it prevails just as much as "existential" in the very life we lead. Or else in the narration we make out of it, for example, when we report what could have caused the change in the course of our life. He adds:

In the novel, the encounters, normally happen, "en route," location of choice of fortuitous contacts. On the "main road," the paths of a number of people pertaining to all classes, situations, religions, nationalities and ages intersect on the same point of spatial-temporal intersection. There, people normally separated by a social hierarchy or by space might meet randomly, and all sorts of contrasts might emerge, clash and various destinations might get entangled. The series of destinies and of man's life under their spatial-temporal aspect might experience varied, complicated combinations and be achieved through *social distances*, which are surpassed here. At this point, the events are formed and get accomplished [...]

After mentioning the chronotope of the *castle*, Bakhtin carries on (p.387):

In Stendhal and Balzac's novels, a new and notable localisation of adventures emerges: The *salon* (in the broader sense). Obviously, they are not the first ones to talk about it, but it is in their work that it acquires its full and whole significance, as a place of intersection of the spatial and temporal series of the novel. From the point of view of the subject and the composition, it is exactly there where the encounters, which no longer have the old specific characteristic of the fortuitous meeting held "en route," or in "an unknown world," occur. Intrigues develop and ruptures occur frequently there, in a word (and it is very important), dialogues filled with a very peculiar meaning are exchanged there, the characters' personalities, "ideas" and "passions" are revealed there [...] The levels of the new social hierarchy are rather thoroughly represented there (and gathered in the same place, at the same time). Finally, under its concrete and visible forms, the omnipresent power of the new master of life emerges: money!

Then, he evokes the small town of the province where *Madame Bovary* takes place, which we will find, however, in a number of Russian novelists like Gogol, Tourgueniev or Tchekhov:

Such a town is the place of cyclical time of daily life. No event takes place in it, nothing but the repetition of “the ordinary.” In it, time is deprived of its historical progressive course. It goes forward in narrow cycles: the cycle of the day, the week, the month, of all my life... During this time, people eat, drink, sleep, have wives, mistresses (without being novelistic), give themselves over to petty intrigues, are seated in their boutiques or their offices, play cards, bark. This is cyclical time of common, current, daily life...

Bakhtin adds then the chronotope of *threshold* (p.389):

It can be associated to the theme of the encounter, but it is remarkably more complete: it is the chronotope of *crisis*, of *the turning point of a life*. The very term of “threshold” has already acquired in the life of language (at the same time as its real sense) a metaphorical meaning; it has been associated with the time of sudden change, of crisis, of decision which modifies the meaning of existence (or of indecision, of fear to “cross the threshold”)... For example, in Dostoevsky, the threshold and the chronotope of the staircase, the anteroom, the corridor, which are adjacent to it, as well as the ones of the street and of the main square which prolong them, appear as the major places of action in his work, a place where the event of crisis, of fall, resurrection, renewal of life, clairvoyance, decisions which change the course of an entire life are achieved.”

Then, he talks about the *figurative* significance of the chronotope (p.391):

In this way, the chronotope, major materialisation of time in space, appears as the core of figurative realisation, as the incarnation of the whole novel. All the abstract elements of the novel – philosophical and social generalisations, ideas, analyses of the causes and effects, and so on and so forth, revolve around the chronotope and through its intermediary, they acquire flesh and blood and take part of the pictorial character of literary art. That is the figurative significance of the chronotope...

He adds in a rather elliptical way (?):

[...] the inner form of the word, that is to say the mediating sign which contributes to carry the initial spatial meanings within the

temporal relationships (in the broader sense) is equally chronotopic. This is not the space to address here this rather peculiar problem. We should refer to the chapter corresponding to Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*: From a rich material, he analyses the reflection of time in language (its assimilation by language).

Then:

Within the limits of a single work and art of a single author, we observe a number of chronotopes and their complex interferences which are specific to the author and to the work. Besides, it happens that one of these chronotopes covers everything or predominates. (They are the ones we have analysed in the first place.) They can bind with each other, coexist, intertwine, follow one another, be juxtaposed, opposed or found in more complicated reciprocal relationships. The general feature of these interrelationships appears as dialogic (in the broad sense of this term). Yet this dialogue cannot penetrate into the represented image nor in any of these chronotopes: It is outside, although it is not excluded from the whole work. This dialogue gets into the author's world, into the performer's, as well as the listeners' and readers' also chronotopic worlds.

Bakhtin addresses again the relationships between the "real world" and the "world of the work" (p. 393):

Clearly, authors, listeners, readers can be situated (and they are frequently situated) in different times and spaces, at times separated by centuries and huge distances, but it does not matter: they are all gathered in a single, real, completed, historical world, separated by a brutal borderline of the *world represented in the text*. We could then talk about this world as the *creator* of the text: All its elements – the reflection of reality as well as the authors, the performers, if they do exist, and lastly the listeners-readers who reconstitute, and by doing so, they renew the text. All take part equally in the creation of a represented world.

We could then acknowledge first that the author's and reader's dialogism is the framework in which is placed the "dialogism" of the common world and the represented world, both characterised by their evaluative chronotopes. The question is to know to what extent Bakhtin (or ourselves) are capable not only to evoke, but also to represent this double relationship.

I limit my quotes here. The notion of chronotope illustrates first the impossibility to separate space from time. However, above all, these chronotopes are inseparable from the global world where the heroes, like ourselves in another plan, act,

feel and think. It is on the basis of these chronotopes that the different kinds of speeches, dialogues can be manifested. And these speeches will not be the same, cannot have the same kind of meaning at the crossroads, in a salon or on the “threshold.” It seems to me that the novels condense here what makes the ordinary course of our forms of life in a more “lively” way, which cannot be provided by an abstract conceptualisation as in generic discourse on conflicts of class, age or sex-gender. After all, isn’t¹² it this characteristic of novels which makes them to be read more than treatises as they put near us ways of existing alternately close and far, which, certainly, doubles somehow the “concrete psychology” that we practice daily.

2.4.4 Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics

I have hesitated to present texts from the *Dostoevsky* dated 1963 due to the doubts expressed by B. & B. But after all, these texts exist, whether we want it or not. And they reveal a thought which agrees with the one we find in many other texts by Bakhtin. Only a quote then, withdrawn from the very beginning of the book, is presented. In it, it is recalled on several occasions that Dostoevsky is one of the promoters of polyphonic novel where the voice of the characters prevails (sometimes, the reference to the other authors disappears) (p. 10):

Dostoevsky, like Goethe’s Prometheus, does not create mute slaves (as with Zeus), but *free* men capable of taking place *side by side* with their creator, of withholding their agreement and even to stand against him.

The multiplicity of voices and independent and non confusing consciousness, authentic polyphony of voices fully valid is indeed the deep peculiarity of Dostoevsky’s novels.

Some examples withdrawn from *The Brothers Karamazov* are presented. Firstly, the author’s exotopy is expressed in the manner – which we might find a bit heavy – how speech is firstly given to a “good citizen,” fictitious narrator from the small town. Above all, it is precisely this author’s exotopy which enables him to present at the same time the collective admiration for starets through the specific admiration that Alyocha

¹² TN. The sentence bears a hypothetical and interrogative meaning. However, the author does not use a question mark.

devotes to him and the opaque fact of the cadaver which starts stinking, while the debate has never been concluded: doesn't this stench question the character's sanctity? Likewise, in the narrative of the Grand Inquisitor's apologue, as narrated by Ivan Karamazov, there is, if I might say, a preference for the character of Christ rather than for the Grand Inquisitor. However, Dostoevsky leaves this possibility that the Grand Inquisitor is probably right, or rather that Christ has probably demanded too much from men.

It is certainly one of the core meanings of "dialogism." There is no need that a univocal perspective puts an end to the debates, in the novels as well as in life...

I get back to Todorov's text for a while. He finishes his introduction with some remarks on Bakhtin's philosophical anthropology. We can notice with him that the issue is not to attribute to Bakhtin only the idea according to which "the other" is constitutive of "I." In his note on p.151, Todorov recalls that this theme has already been dealt with at least in Fichte, Humboldt, Feuerbach and the fact that Bakhtin had read and admired Buber's *I and you*. Regarding this theme, it does not make much sense to seek the "originality" of such or such thing. It seems to me that the issue is rather a matter of seeing how the theme in question remains as vague generality or, on the contrary, it becomes real. Thus, it manifestly becomes real in Bakhtin especially in his analysis of the novel and of the articulation between the author's voice, the narrator's and the heroes' voices, in the styles and the varied chronotopes of the different novels.

By the way, I wonder whether the relationship between the multiplicity of voices and the author's voice is not as overt in other works as in the novel. If we listen to Mozart's *Don Juan*, indeed, we hear first "the Mozart." However, isn't it exactly the differences of the sung voices which make the independence of the different heroes stand out? One does not have to choose between them. They get imposed in their originality. This would not be the case if we took part of a real action. In the work, this need to "take sides" is suspended. And this is certainly what shapes the characteristic of "aesthetic representation" as well as of its ethical specificity.

And then, particularly, from Dostoevsky's example and his characters, are we not confronted with the notion of *style*, styles of characters as styles of reception? Like everything in life where the styles of "our" others and our ways of comprehending them get confronted. Besides the fact that this notion makes us withdraw from the

dichotomies voluntary vs involuntary or outer vs inner, it does not allow us to consider ourselves like the so-called scholars who would say the truth about books or about the others. We are not in a position of overview to talk about the relationship of our style of reception in relation to the styles that we are talking about. We can only become a bit aware of our specificity when we are confronted with the evidence that precisely the third party does not share our evidence. In this sense, the relationship between our reading style and the author's style would be an impassable form of "dialogism."

2.5 Conclusions or "Opening Remarks"

I would like to firstly present some general observations on the mentioned authors, and then address again more precisely the relationships there might be between the reading of their texts and the question of "concrete psychology" insofar as I have somehow the right to evoke it.

2.5.1 A Quick Return on my Reading of the Referred Authors

Firstly, the historical and philological critique is clearly legitimate. Adding to that the change of perspective it raises in order to reconstitute a "spirit of time" or to give prominence to the forgotten authors. For example, currently, Jakubinskij is not acknowledged in France, and the same happened to Medvedev until very recently. However, it is not historical or sociological knowledge which can tell us how we could or should read such work.

Just a few words will be mentioned on the confrontation of Voloshinov and Bakhtin (and incidentally Vygotsky). Medvedev's text, to me, does not seem to pose any problem. It contributes to highlight the common relationship that the three authors have with regards to "formalism." I am not in a position, I insist on that, to provide with precision the sources of these authors, nor to say how their interaction has been. I only do my best to comprehend the movements of thought which make them get closer or distant, and comprehend as well what they mean for "me," "possible representative from another period."

In any case, the three authors are contrary to the wish to isolate the supposedly common “language,” which could be studied in itself. On the one hand, to mention the relationship of the interlocutors and, possibly, the presence of other voices in the author’s voice, hence, globally speaking “dialogism” (Bakhtin’s text is overtly more explicit). On the other hand, one finds in each one the passage from language analysis to genres of discourse. In my view, there are at least two bridging points.

Inversely, the conflict is evident between Voloshinov’s sociological-Marxist discourse and the discourse of finitude and heterogeneity in Bakhtin. It is so even if one might think that there is not necessarily a distinction between the two types of discourse. Trying to think of its contingency, its finitude, in my view, bears also the need to “think of oneself in one’s time.” And finally, of course, it is only in Bakhtin that the history of the novel is analysed, above all the variety of chronotopes.

By the way, getting back to the problem of authorship, I wonder about what could be the value of the argument: “All this does not change our relationship regarding “dialogism” or in relation to the significance of the global text of “BMV’.” An argument of this kind might be valid when it comes to stating that one can read Homer or Shakespeare without knowing whether it is a man only or several. However, there is still the question of knowing whether one could or should totalise a global doctrine which could be named “dialogism,” or whether one should rather recognise a diversity of inspiration. It seems to me that one should recognize, at the same time, the “family atmosphere” of the three authors and their differences.

After all, one finds the same problem at the level of a single author: Should one insist on the continuity between *German Ideology*, *The Capital* and Marx’s historical reflections on 1848 and the Commune? Or else what is the relationship between Marx’s thought and Engels’ great syntheses like *Dialectic of Nature*? Here again, one can find in these works the “normal differences” that one encounters in the evolution of any thought, especially when it is not applicable to the same objects. Or else one could set an “epistemological cut-off” or some other form of absolute difference.

I quickly get back here on the difference, the opposition or the “contradiction” between the positions which might be attributed to Voloshinov and to Bakhtin

However, firstly, another remark, I doubt it whether there is an objective knowledge which could tell us what is exactly to understand a work. For example, what

does it mean to find “contradictions” in a given author? They are not defects of logical thinking in the sense of simultaneous assertion on the same object and from the same viewpoint of statements of the kind *p* and *non-p*. It is rather a matter of divergent perspectives. However, bringing together divergent perspectives might be a constraint imposed on the author who recognises a difficulty which is beyond him. And then, the “contradiction” might emerge from an interpretative weakness of the reader who does not know how to seek the perspective which would make it possible to come to an agreement on what seems “contradictory.” However, do we know what *the* “good reading” would be? The question is endless. The one which would render possible the agreement of all readers runs the risk of providing us only a mediocre common denominator. However, even if we do select, in contrast, what strikes us, it does not exclude the fact of raising questions about the heterogeneity of the viewpoints, without forgetting that “our” point of view is not necessarily univocal.

As put forward by Bronckart, the contradiction would involve Voloshinov’s “Marxist” and “sociological” approach (incidentally “the good one”) and Bakhtin’s “individualistic” approach (incidentally “the bad one”). I do not perceive the things this way. Firstly, because I do not think that Voloshinov’s “sociological” explanation is necessary and sufficient. I am not getting over Sériot’s criticism again, largely justified in my view, regarding Voloshinov’s “sociologism.” However, whichever sociology it might be, it will remain a dialogue with what it studies, and the researcher’s position should, in turn, be object of elucidation. On the other hand, above all, to me, Bakhtin’s position does not seem to be “individualistic.” Taking into account, especially, what the individuals have as being specific is not, as a matter of fact, an epistemological sin, but it rather reflects, in my view, a need which is imposed upon us. It seems to me, I repeat again, that Bakhtin’s position expresses that there is not a “knowledge” which would resolve human problems. Therefore, the issue is to insist on the irreducibility of the perspectives which are imposed on everyone, which is a completely different matter. I will get back to these two issues.

2.5.2 Sociology, Social Determinism or...?

Regardless of the power of “science,” a high level of contingency subsists. No one can perfectly understand (or explain) why such text is this way and not otherwise, and much less what has led the author to write that and in that way. Likewise, the reader does not have knowledge of himself which would explain why he perceives a text this way and not in another way. Surely, multiple clarifications are possible.

Furthermore, I have neither the time nor the expertise to give an overview of what could be the sociology of literature. However, like sociology applied to “common life,” one could say that like the owl of Minerva mentioned by Hegel, it comes after the event, it discovers the connections between the work and the environment where it was produced and cannot foresee which work *should* be produced in such society. Nor it is capable of anticipating the crises or the events.

Again, I would like to make here a parenthetical remark on the significance of what could have happened to “Marxism.” Here, I do not raise the question of what it is to be “Marxist” in general, nor being Marxist nowadays. Even though it does seem to me that at least the “people of my own age” (or some of them) have been strongly marked not only by the revelations regarding police violence in the Soviet Union, but also because of the resounding failure of the claim of having the thorough “good theory,” which would, particularly, make it possible to explain human phenomena, fascism, religion, for example, and capable of organizing rationally the action leading to the liberation of humanity. However, I will not address this issue: there might surely exist “modest Marxism.”

I wonder in a more limited manner, but still, surely in a wide manner, what it means to be “Marxist” in relation to such text, philosophical or literary one, for example. Thus, exactly, how can one handle correctly the notion of “ideology”? We cannot content ourselves with supposing there is a base, “modes of production” and “relationships of production” and - then - a remainder which somehow would reflect or refract this base. Certainly, saying that “men are the ones who make history, but they do not know the history they make” is related to evidence that we could all share. Certainly, it is exactly because there is no simple link between the different institutional or individual levels where our life occurs. Adding to that the fact that we do not know *a*

priori on which side we should look for what will contribute to intelligibility (anyhow, there is no “thorough explanation”) of any event whatsoever. If only because the different kinds of phenomena have their own temporality.

Resuming the discussion on the works, one will wonder, first of all, about what the possibility to understand a work published in a distant society could mean. However, more importantly, about what makes this work be more “important” for us than a work which currently deals with urgent matters, which are common to us. If one does not resolve this problem, sociology will become “sociologism.”

Furthermore, I have neither the expertise, nor space to mention here the different authors who have more or less addressed the issue of articulation between literary production, conditions of reception and social standing.

2.5.3 Sociology and Psychology

I do not envision here the problem as a whole (I would be incapable) but rather from the reproach that Bronckart expresses in relation to Bakhtin (p.565) for

trying to mask or attenuate Voloshinov’s fundamentally sociological approach, and to compensate it by introducing psychologising considerations, according to which, for example, the variety of genres would constitute (also?) a reflection of the differences which exist between singular people.

I do not grasp thoroughly the meaning of this reproach. There are individual differences in any society, varied forms of pertaining to society and, particularly differences not only language wise, but, above all, in the manners of relating language and non language. There is no good social approach and a bad individualistic approach.

First of all, because one cannot nullify the way in which class belonging, macro-sociology is expressed through familial micro-sociology or through micro-group. And then, how all this, necessarily, goes through bodies, individual stories, specific modes of reacting in the ways of acting, feeling, saying.

It is not a question of “individualising reorientation.” I rather think that we should take into account the fact that every story is always collective *and* individual. If we consider a war, it could be seen from a distance, for example in the destructions it

has generated. However, it is equally legitimate to consider how it did emerge in such or such person's life. And above all, there is no history which would be the winners' history, any sense of history. There is the contingency of men who try, more or less obscurely, to give sense in different ways to what happens to them.

2.5.4 A Return on Heterogeneity as Background of Dialogism

To come back to the issue on "contradictions," there would be no contradiction between the viewpoints or rather the doctrines only if one aimed at explaining thoroughly such conduct and if the other aimed at explaining thoroughly the same phenomenon in a different way. However, we have "good reasons" (always the negative evidence before the positive one) to think that it does not happen this way. In addition to this, there is certainly contradiction between two practical choices, anyhow when faced with the same problem. There is no contradiction, but only differences between the perspectives which emerge to two human beings in their lives. Likewise, there is no contradiction between two novels or two portraits of the same person. In this sense, aesthetic visions of the world are more precisely the ones where heterogeneity can manifest itself, since we are not forced towards practical choices. (Even if aesthetic visions might lead to act in one way or another.)

Like the difference of our behaviours in solitude, private and public life is patent and, somehow, inevitable. Just as one cannot presume that our speech, our actions, our ways of feeling, our subsequent reflections are such that they should coincide. Distance is inevitable here. The question is rather to know which dose of difference should be considered as being "normal." And what there might be as contradictory, in the blameful sense, in changing position too quickly or too often, or in the way of not fulfilling one's own commitments except in the event of "force majeure."

2.5.4.1 Hétérogenity, but which Heterogeneity?

We have seen that Bakhtin had certainly distinguished according to Kantian tradition, the three fields of science, of practice and aesthetics. One could certainly acknowledge the irreducibility of these three fields. This does not exclude their

correspondences, their “dialogue.” However, we can already notice that each of these fields is in itself heterogeneous.

There is not much relationship between the establishment of “laws” in physics and the capacity to write the story of a group or an individual. There is not much relationship between the collectively set up moral practices and the manner how an individual seeks to guide himself in life, nor between morality of daily life and dramatic choices. Likewise, the least one could say is that speaking *about* the novel or *about* painting lacks seriousness. This could get multiplied through the reflection on reading modes.

Under multiple forms, the issue of non-overlapping is required. None of us can reasonably think that the management of one’s life would or could be “scientific.” Nor the fact that an “objective” account of one’s life, either currently or after one’s death, would give an account of its “true nature.” Similarly, we “know well” that our perception of ourselves by ourselves is not either the expression of our truth, even if we could say that such expression is preferable to another one.

In this sense, it seems to me that we are indeed Bakhtinian. Or that we can, in any case, (or we cannot afford not to) get inspired by his approach and acknowledge particularly the novel as one of the places where human heterogeneity manifests itself.

For example, in relation to “contradiction” (or to “dialogue”?) not only in the novel, but in everyone’s life between the status of the one who says “I” and the different voices revealed in him, not necessarily identifiable, but also in contradictory ways of being, of feeling which do not necessarily acquire the form of “voice.”

Then the questions might get multiplied: How can heterogeneity, the non-coincidence of oneself in relation to oneself be expressed outside the triad: science, ethics, aesthetics? Could we not as well separate privacy and public life? Or...

- Both in relation to the work of art as well as morality and science (in different ways), does Bakhtin take into account the different kinds of the collective who speak and are manifested in us?

- At least in his introductory presentation, the work of art is characterised as the one which enables totalisation through presence in an ascribable manner. However, is it reasonable to say “art, is...”?

- And then we can return to the role “of the” novel. Firstly, could we determine according to which modality our own reality can be clarified through the reality of such or such novel?

- After all, to what extent does the passage through written language make it possible to find the modes of corporeality, mixture, orality-specific temporalities or the multiple behaviours called “inner language,” especially that they are not woven only of language; and what distinguishes them, precisely, from explicit monologue, in the oral form and even more so in writing?

There is a totalisation (surely fictitious) of the experience through oral narrative and even more so the written one, but which does not exclude, on the contrary, the question of what is badly said, difficult or impossible to say. It is not contradictory with the power of language: Everyone might be in a horrible situation and say to oneself “later...” Nevertheless, one cannot set up a definitive list of genres of discourse, or rather, relations between language and everything which is not language.

Another language feature pointed out by Bakhtin as well as Voloshinov circulates between daily life and the novel: reported speech, be it either reported speech as such or discursive mixture. I make only one remark. One could take into account the way how precociously the young child plays with taking over other people’s places or the possibility as well for a painting or an image which involve an imitation or an allusion. In any case, the repetition of what comes from another person and, somehow, the quotation do not constitute a specificity of language.

2.5.4.2. Thought, Sign, Language

Certainly, by willing to be materialist, Voloshinov tries to substitute the word “thought,” surely obscure and difficult to work with, by “signs.” However, this does not resolve the problem of the source of our capacity to distinguish true or false, sound or absurd statements. Or else the possibility to respond by adding, reformulating, distinguishing, in short by having a responsive understanding, in an open field where it is not necessarily a matter of putting an end (except for practical urgency). In summary, what we normally call “to think” is different from the capacity to produce utterances (which might always, more or less have to do with automatism). And the problem is not

solved when one says that the meaning of the utterances depends on the “context,” as the status of the latter is not clarified either.

I wonder whether there is not a double correlative overvaluation of language and of the global social being in Voloshinov as well as in Medvedev. Certainly, for controversial reasons: It was, on the one hand, a matter of distancing oneself from formalism as an isolation from the linguistic subject, supposedly, the only source of aesthetics, but without referring to an introspective “thought” viewed as “subjectivist individualism.” However, there is meaning and thought in/for the animal’s body, without language in the human sense (even if it does communicate through other channels) and without introspection: it is capable of trials, errors, intelligence, surprise, play. In short, it makes sense in its relation with others and with the world. Similarly, before getting into the world of language, the small child makes sense, interacts with others, with things and with himself in many different ways. Similarly, the child is confronted with familiar or strange worlds and not to stimuli. Or else somehow, the child is related to a past, a future, to the community-distance towards the others before language. Furthermore, it is on the basis of these initial forms of meaning that the child will be capable of linguistic meanings, which will always be in collaboration-conflict with the sources of meaning, the non-language meanings-strengths. In Vygotsky, language becomes a multiplier of psychic capacities, not a creator. On the other hand, taking into account the social being does not imply that the social subjects (we have already seen this further up) are social in the same manner, that they take part of the same world in the same manner.

Moreover, we could certainly observe that each group of individuals, then each individual has, more or less, his own style of establishing a link of extra-language meanings and more specific language meanings. However, no one will ever know how one person’s formulations will make sense in the field, which is the corporeal-psychic life of the other, in a relationship of “multiple contingent meaning,” partially opaque, at times clarified and at times rendered obscure through the discursive formulations.

2.5.4.3. Some Partially Conclusive Remarks

Firstly, I would like to point out two aspects, which could complement what I have grasped from reading Voloshinov as well as Bakhtin.

2.5.4.3.1 Thought and Field

One could introduce here, at least a negative requirement: acknowledging that to grasp the meaning of an utterance (as well as an act) consists in substituting it in a field or rather in the intersection of different fields. This is equally possible in the field of the present as in the field of what is absent, of the past as well as that of the future. Furthermore, it is a fragile construction, to be taken on endlessly. (I will resume the “field” issue later on.) In any case, not more than an act, the text itself does not tell us how one should read it, what is important or secondary, to which “kind of absents” it refers to. Particularly that a text is made of movements that are not directly assignable and not made of sentences. Probably another aspect of the “reader’s morality” would be to take into account what in the text is far from him and not what seems to him immediately close. How should one read authors whose basic beliefs are different from ours? There is no theoretical response, only a practical one. Together with the caution constituted by the remembrance of old and variable distributions of our relatives, or of our otherness, like the fragility of ideological constructions which separates for good the “good ones” (we) and the “bad ones” (the others).

Speaking about fields poses the question of their spatial temporal-affective aspect (like for the chronotopes, but the chronotopes have an assignable figure, while the fields are not limited, nor assignable in their transitions). We can count the chronotopes, not the fields. Even if we can oppose them as field of the present or the absent, shared fields or not... (Could the works of fiction be, at least sometimes, the ones where one can easily share the fields which are not ours “in reality”?)

In any case, this indeterminate status of fields has an affinity with the reflection on our own heterogeneity as well as on the natural impurity of our situation as interpreter, which, once more, can never become a knowledge which would dominate the field of the other’s thought, nor would tell why I perceive or read that way.

2.5.4.3.2 Thought, Meaning and “Strength”

Furthermore, it seems to me that in none of the authors addressed here, the question of what could be called “meaning-strength” - there is no better term for it - has been developed. One could at first sight bring it closer to the inseparability of what relates to “(re)presentation” and “feeling.” Thus, one can imagine the agreement of two interlocutors on a *value statement* “Oh! the soup is good,” with a referential form of agreement, plus an absolute difference between the one who sets it into motion and the one who sees all this “from far.”

Similarly, we could agree on “torture is abominable” without necessarily having an effect on us with the same strength. However, this difference of “meaning-strength” relates, at the same time, to the field of possible reactions (acting or remaining in one’s armchair), to the corporeal way of feeling, as well as the field of what has been evoked, represented, which is part of the strength in question. In any case, on the one hand, one cannot locate *the* strength in one point of our reactions, and much less measure it. And then, further interlocution or the passage of time alone could make this reaction vary even more. This is why, by the way, I question Vygotsky’s formula which assimilates the work of art to a “social technique of feeling.” This is not only a matter of feeling, but rather of reacting in a specific field. Firstly, in one of the many forms of space of suspension which characterises the work of art. I neglect here, or rather I leave it here parenthetically that the work of art might be ostentation of wealth, a political motion, an invitation for meditation or erotic provocation. And that all these forms of repercussions might as well vary within/for each one of us.

In any case, it is a matter of getting out of the image of signs which would be worth an object, “would represent” it in the double sense of the picture which represents or the one which represents the absent personality.

Is it reasonable to speak of “strength” as something that sets us in movement? Yes, if we think of the insult which makes us jump. Then, it is not the same form of “setting into motion” if, on the contrary, we think of what leads us to question ourselves. However, there is also the strength of resisting. And there are just as well forms of “strength.” It should be understood that it is not because language offers us a word that it necessarily implies that there should be a corresponding notion. We could

then call, negatively, “strength” everything which makes us withdraw from a representative value in the narrow sense, which changes the field, the mode of perception, the attitude towards everything which is, in turn, weakly speakable, representable. However, for sure, we do not have a ready-made theory which would tell us how to represent ourselves, render explicit the strength with which a given fact, an image, a situation, a discourse act upon us. And all this, on the spot or later.

In itself “strength” is equally insufficient as when one speaks of “emotional-volitional.” Or rather that the words function only when they exactly set into motion the capacity of imagining particular cases, conflicts, restrictions, modulations. In short, what could be named as “responsive comprehension.”

Probably we could relate “strength” and “ideology of daily life,” a term, which leads us exactly to raise the question on the way how large discourses get transformed in us according to our daily practice. Probably, we could even find there a central form of “dialogism.” The one between the *hic et nunc* of our body, of our familiar surrounding and the form of the distant ones. Be it the cultural distant ones, the dreams or dreaminess ones. Or else the “main ideology” of public discourse ones. Hence, the electoral speeches that we hear currently¹³ affect us in their relations regarding experienced situations which are close to us, for example, in relation to job insecurity. There is “strength” only in one field. And then, this field of the present is, in turn, replaced in the field of the past, of vain promises, for example. There are common points between us on this aspect. We only need to be in a situation of explicit dialogue so as to make *something* common and *something* different between us emerge alternately (*something* common and *something* different and not *the* common and *the* different which can never be depleted). It occurs in an always random measure where speech reflects-modifies-creates somehow our point of view and its “joint strength.” However, without having a meta-discourse which would enable us to define the relationship between our discourse and this background. Or rather, we only have a “relative awareness” or “a negative one,” which makes us say or keep for ourselves something like “I am exaggerating here.” This raises the question of the relationship between the judgment that I make about myself and about the one, also explicit or implicit, that my interlocutor makes or the absent third party who, for example, reads

¹³ This text was written during the presidential election campaigns followed by the legislative ones in the first semester 2012.

the recording of the conversation. By excluding here the possibility of a definitive knowledge which would explain “who is speaking in me” (is it the voice of “we” or of which “I”?) and even more about the reasons-causes which make me think-speak-react this way. There are always only trials of clarification and, fortunately, a time when we reach the conclusion that “it is enough.”

Anyway, getting back to the “ideology of everyday life” as a “reaction mode” presupposes that we do not seek to isolate on the one hand, objective “sociology, and on the other hand, psychology” which would deal with the subjective dimension, and thirdly, linguistics or semiotics which would pose the question on the manner how a discourse changes its object or whose speaking body reinforces-modifies-contradicts the meaning that the utterances bear.

One could presume that “reflection” stems from our current position and tries to come back to the contingency of our own point of view. However, don’t we run the risk of perceiving the social or emotional constraints which are imposed on the other far more than our own? But also in the case of our perspective about the other, resorting to the term “ideology” always runs the risk of meaning a sort of position of superiority of the one who discovers and this conditions the evidence of the viewpoint. Anyway, there is no end of the story which would tell the truth. Much less do the winners tell the truth of the losers, especially that, whether it is us or the others, we do not have a general criterion to determine “good discourse.” There is no simple choice between the absent and the present, the common and the specific, the habitual and the irruptive, the easily formulable and the one which is not. A mode of perception is an equally objective reality as the common real assumption within which we would immerse ourselves. Likewise, the same discourse might be seen as platitude for some, and “revelation” for others.

2.5.4.3.3 Thoughts, Practices and Genres

Furthermore, independently of the questions of attribution between the two authors, in my view, it is part of their common heritage of having substituted the problem of language by that of genres of discourse, as being related to different social practices. However, likewise with “strengths,” the question of “genres” remains an open

question. Firstly, because we might have doubts about our capacity to establish a definitive classification of genres. Also, because there are some genres of reception which are as different as text genres. Finally, because establishing genres does not tell us about which types of emphasis, of relationship between the spoken and the unspoken are assumed. In this sense, “effective genres” are quite different from established genres.

Could we not distinguish genres of discourse according to their types of relationship regarding what is non language in “thought”? Or, and this amounts to the same thing, could we call “thought” exactly, this partial totalisation of the present and the absent, of the spoken, of the felt and done which is done incessantly through our body?

2.5.4.3.4. Some Remarks about us, our “Ancestors” and, a bit about my/our Situation

To conclude, momentarily, about our relationships with the authors mentioned here, we could firstly recall the ambivalence of the status of “son” (even if we admit that the advantage of the cultural world implies the fact of being capable to have several fathers). And then, the question will be to know what the authors, who do not speak directly to us, could tell us: regardless of the differences of backgrounds and assumptions, meaning is made between them and us. And this, certainly, clarifies the illusion that the communication between us should require a coincidence of perspectives or implicit aspects. However, we do not have an ideal measure which would enable us to judge the quality of this conversation with our ancestors (with our contemporaries, nor with ourselves as a matter of fact). And then, what about the possibility of “thinking afterwards”? The considerations on dialogue (should one say “dialogism”?) have become banality. Are we condemned to repeat or could we get back to dialogue, for example, from an approach of “corporeal dialogism”? Of course, we cannot answer without trying exactly to represent effectively at least a little bit this “corporeal dialogue.”

It is true that, somehow, we are “dwarfs mounted on the giants’ shoulders.” However, are they the ones or is it us who decide about which direction would be convenient to follow? Still, we might wonder quickly here (we will get back to it) about

what makes this reading necessarily specific, according to our position. The least we could say is that we do not have in front of us the brilliant future that Voloshinov certainly envisaged. Moreover, we are involved in a global development of “scientific” discourses that we cannot master, particularly, in a conquering scientism, violently illustrated by the problem of measurement and evaluation. And yet, even if we are careful in relation to “dialogism for anything and everything,” it seems to me that the question of *the* dialogues, particularly between what goes through speech and what is “said” somehow without speech is still intriguing to us. Are we making progress? Can we make further progress? This is another question.

3 A Return on “Concrete Psychology”

From the reading of the authors presented here, we get back to the question raised by Katia Kostulski during the seminar in relation to what could be the status of “concrete psychology” or rather “the statuses of concrete psychologies,” as the unity cannot be presumed, both in its “dialogical” and narrative dimension.

It is uncertain whether this object could be determined. We could, however, have negative evidence in relation to what “concrete psychology” cannot be. I have received the announcement of a conference where the author explains that he will be presenting an *algorithm of David Liberman*, “a method of systematic discourse analysis in psychoanalysis which makes it possible to study libidinal impulses and the defense in the three levels of language: the word, the sentence and the narrative”... This makes me confused.

Then, what could one say about the word “psychology”? Shouldn’t one say rather “approaches as concrete as possible of ‘human things’” without being more related to psychology, sociology, semiotics or whatever other real or possible science? Also, without presuming that it should be a matter of “science”?

3.1 To Start with: A (very long? very brief?) Introduction on my / our Situation

Speaking about “my or our position” bothers me. Firstly, as a result of hesitation between “I” and “we.” (However, doesn’t any discourse held by an individual in the

name of the collective, even if it is between two people, have something disturbing?) And then, say that this presumed common fate in few pages is certainly pretentious. Yet, there is indeed a “common fate” which will not be forgotten and that one should try to clarify it, even if the ways of perceiving it, of emphasising it vary. Thus, there is indeed something like “coming after the authors whom we have just mentioned,” with all the difficulty of being “sons (daughters) of.” It is clear, we have recalled it, that we do not share the intellectual-affective climate, the revolutionary enthusiasm of the growing USSR (not even the more fleeting one, in 1968). However, we have “a kind of relationship” regarding the thoughts expressed in those periods. Just as we cannot say what our participation to our spirit of time unveils or conceals to us. We can only reflect a little bit upon our historical situation (without forgetting the articulation between global history and the significant temporality of individual ageing).

Thus, we are caught in a reality of a “globalisation,” of liberal economy, that of information technology, that of a less and less localised intellectual life, which does not exclude the fact that we “corporeally,” “affectively” live “in our practices” where we are with our relatives and our familiar ambiance.

This globalisation has been accompanied with a technological progress which has profoundly modified our lives. Even if at the same time the historical catastrophes and the threats related to technology itself lead to the fact that, for us, technological progress is no longer related to the image of ensured progress of humanity.

The development of sciences, the practice of more and more precise measures, under no circumstance, provide to us a means to foresee anything both at the level of global history as well as that of local history. Everyone knows that the laws established by the economists are decoys and that the course of history cannot be explained through laws which would express the relation of productive forces and production connections. One can evoke the USSR military violence towards other “popular democracies” in the very recent past together with the importance of national resistance as well as the role of religion in Russia and elsewhere. Or else the national conflicts between the USSR and China. We are not dealing with causes, laws or structures, but rather something like parcels, “complexes” where we never know what will be determinant.

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And what about my position? You are a practicing psychologist. And your questioning on the meaning of this profession is motivated by some urgency on this side. Besides the fact that I no longer practise any profession, I have never been a practicing “psychologist,” except by accident (a happy one) related to a “hideout” during the military service. Therefore, where from would a potential legitimacy emerge? However, after all, an outsider to a given profession has the right to wonder what an analyst, a teacher, a physician, a deputy “is good for.” One can observe that the question is posed especially for the professions which are largely related to language. It seems that in the case of the plumber or the dentist, some evidence suffices. This kind of questioning is certainly not “scientific.” It has no “philosophical” claim. One would say that it is a matter of commonplace practice of “reflection” as “a return on.”

3.2 Some Questions, firstly on “Community” and “Difference”

Besides the issue of problematic existence of the said “reflection” and of its limits, a starting point, surely a very general one, could be of wondering about the relation of “community” vs “difference” between each one of us and the others, as with between oneself and oneself in the said reflection. The fact that there is a common point between us and in the world with whom we relate to is somehow assured. The fact that this common point could be perceived differently (could be perceived only in a different way), be object of different “valuations,” of “emphases” is equally evident.

From then on, do we know how we have access to the others’ difference? Be it with our common interlocutors, with those with whom we have statutory differences or those whose reaction mode seems thoroughly strange to us. One should add first that our relative familiarity with ourselves does not mean of course that we would be clear in relation to ourselves.

Furthermore, one cannot presume that the aim is to achieve an absolute “cognitive clarity.” After all, without explicit representations, young children know very well how to be resourceful with adults, who are very different from them. The aim is not to eliminate every element of anxiety, surprise or strangeness. It is rather to find again the double movement where the strange takes place for us and where we get concerned with what seemed to us “quite natural.” It is therefore about the regimes of

community-otherness that we would like to wonder here (of course, this should not necessarily lead to a “definitive solution”).

Before anything else, if we are not in a position to eliminate either the contingency of the position of the individual who is speaking, we will not be able to clarify “thoroughly” what makes this or that seem clear to us, worthwhile, or to be ignored. We might even not think of taking it into consideration, without having a good theory in front of us, a “definitive” theory of “the subject’s constitutive heterogeneity.” Thus, Bakhtin’s figure of it (or Freud, another example) is surely not definitive. We are not sure either about the opportunity there might be for the use of the word “subject,” which like every word, a potential representative of “notion(s),” refers to emphases, connotations which cannot be identical in any community. Such definitions are far beyond the ones we might give to them.

I do not have (“we do not have”?) either a “good method” of analysis, a secure way of eliminating the bias introduced by such or such “way of thinking.” Anyhow, even if we do not know what is exactly “to think,” nor how one should “think,” it seems clear that every “thought” involves, at least in part, a number of “notions.” Hence, the following question, certainly a lot broader.

3.2.1 Overview about Some Notions

Firstly, a word on the notions themselves. How can one distinguish the “good” ones from the “bad” ones?

Raising this question certainly introduces at least a doubt. There are no good notions in themselves. Therefore, aren’t we supposed to look for absolutely simple notions? Or ultimate principles which would be the core of every explanation: inventory of “impulsions” or “survival of the more adapted” for example. We are rather in a situation of guiding ourselves in the heterogeneous mass of the already-existing, the already-existing of life where we are thrown into just like the already-existing of the discourses which circulate around us.

Moreover, there are problems which might be clarified in one way or another, but “it is not reasonable” to think that we can clarify them definitively, and much less that we should resolve them before raising other questions. The anxious potential

interlocutor could ask me/wonder about how I know all this. It seems to me that initially, the ideas “come” to me as well as to the others and that the rest of the course of thought or more widely “facts” that we face, hold them in position, modify them or end up leaving them behind. There is no first principle, but there is not either any demonstration, or rather reciprocal clarifications between notions, between notions and ways of feeling, between notions and statements or narratives.

Thus, does Descartes try to “think all alone” and does he neglect, want to neglect, pretend to neglect (?) that he thinks with words or in any case that his thought becomes ours only through his words. However, inversely, those who wish to say “everything is language” or “thought exists only through signs” (this is what Voloshinov says or tends to say, if I am not wrong) neglect what seems to me an important obstacle. We have mentioned it earlier. It is not only through the recourse to other formulations that we are capable of resolving the question: Why such discourse makes sense, tells us something, questions or shows something and why the other discourse does not tell us anything (being understood that the issue here is not the good formulation, fidelity to the grammatical norm, nor the very fact of belonging to the same “semantic field”). Anyhow, in contrast with discourse which does not tell us anything, there is also the discourse which “makes sense” as it obliges us to take into account what we do not pay attention to spontaneously, as, in brief, it illuminates us or in any case, it makes us change from perspective.

From then on, we would only say that some words which, in my view, are good representatives of notions will not be viewed as such by my interlocutors and reciprocally. Some examples are shown here. After Vygotsky, “we” speak of *functional psychology*. However, is *function* a utilitarian metaphor, meaning more or less “in view of what does this exist?” Or simply “how does it function?” Hence, we would say the *function* of thought consists, for example, among other things, to articulate the present or the absent or my experience and the discourse of the others (of course, one could clarify even further), without necessarily having this function develop for something, with a goal. Therefore, should one keep the word, or substitute it by, perhaps, a less dangerous one, *functioning*?

Likewise, we speak of *development*, always within the Vygotskian inspiration. However, does *development* mean, more or less, “regular progress or in stages,” like in

Piagetian psychology? Or is it a process which comprises disasters, declines, unexplainable changes? But then, why does not one rather talk about *history*?

Here, it is rather a matter of word choice. Things can be more complicated. Thus, the history of psychology has been marked by conflicts targeting the development of *outer* and *inner*. However, are the words *inner* or *innerness* as well as their correlatives “good words”? The meaning of an object, an action, a word is not an assignable physical reality. Should we then put it “within ourselves”? To me, it seems it would not help us to “think well.” For sure, something like an “intention” might be underlying the unity of an action or a discourse. However, besides the fact that this unity might be routine or full of modifications, what are the relations of the “intention” towards the totality of the act, of the organism and the field, a totality which is neither “inner” nor “outer”? And, indeed, we have evident reactions and, on the other hand, a discourse, ways of perceiving, feelings that we do not express. However, are they inner like the brain is *within* the cranium? Does this have severe theoretical consequences or do we “know well” that *inner* means no more than “what we do not express”?

One last example. Grammar gives us “persons.” However, even if many have done it, to me, it seems difficult to isolate a psychology in the first, second or third person, as well as in “we.” Thus, in the case of the first person, it is equally about “my” body as well as “my” past or “my” friends, who are not “mine” in the same manner. When I reproach myself, do I speak to a “you?” When I try to make a balance of my past, is it about a “he?” Does resorting to “first person” have a univocal meaning? Furthermore, the relationships between the “persons” are mobile: We say and understand easily: “I feel pain, but you do even more,” even if the pain of the other is not present for us like ours. The relations of “real persons” are certainly less simple than the ones of “grammatical persons.” Even if we could alternately be “I,” “you,”¹⁴ “he,” “we,” “you,” etc., “there are implications” and that, particularly, there will always be tension between what is said to us in “you” and what we do with it in explicit “I” or within our “inner-selves.” As there is no overlapping between the grammatical persons and what happens when we call out someone or when we say to ourselves: “Idiot, how could you do that!” If there are three persons, we cannot consider them independently of the metaphors which condition their usage in such or such situation.

¹⁴ TN. ‘You’ stands for second person singular. See footnote 3.

We could say the same thing about the “instances” rather than the “persons.” It could be a way of presenting the clear existence of tensions in ourselves. However, what do we do when we oppose the villain tempter devil and the good guardian angel or the bad *this* and the even worse one (but in another way) *on me*? Do the notions have an explanatory value or should one be happy with describing for example the “double game” of the child who extends the hand towards the object and looks at the adult while waiting for a look or a discourse of approval or disapproval?

However, this sole description, with no words to denote instances, does not eliminate the question of “strengths” that we are trying to figure out. The fact that there might be more or less good words does not mean that one should try to no longer have notions of the whole. There is no need to be for or against the generality of notions. I write “passivity,” but what is the relationship between the passivity of the beaten man who does not react and the one related to the observation that our ideas emerge in us instead of us making them? There is “work of language,” but one should rather say “work on the occasion of language use.” Associated to that is the danger of all what happens in every invention or transmission of notions. Just as when Freud has successively proposed “libido,” “impulses of the self,” “instinct of death.” It is a bit like when one says that when someone resists to what is supposed to overwhelm him, there is “resilience,” or when we understand the others, there is “empathy,” which seems rather molieresque. It is so even if there is a possible elaboration around these words. In this sense, putting it plainly, a notion is not good or bad in itself, but rather because it enables or not the work. But at the same time, it also ensures the prestige of the “subject who is supposed to know,” the belonging to the group of those who know, who have the right to handle the noble “foreign language” mentioned by Voloshinov, whose harms have not been much analysed by Marx and Lenin since, as a matter of fact, it seemed to them “normal” that the proletariat have a vanguard that speaks on their behalf, with all the risks of this monopoly of speech which counts. Here it is no longer a matter of Marxism or psychoanalysis, but rather a questioning about what threatens us all: Behaving as the supposed knowledge holders (psychology, inter alia).

Perhaps, one should distinguish cases where the meaning of the words “does not work.”

We go to the dentist. We say “I feel pain here” There is no point defining the intensity of pain or the underlying fear of a sudden infection. The “contextual meaning” in the narrow sense where “context” is equivalent to “current situation” suffices. But how do we make sense or not when we say “I like freedom above anything else” or “he wanted unconsciously...?” Is it only an issue of context? Frequently, there is no doubt. However, it is necessary to specify “context.” The latter also bears in it “attitude towards the one who says that,” a way of wishing to understand. Just like the whole of our cultural past or of our experiences. In this sense, “context” becomes a problem far more than a solution: Do we know how we orient ourselves in this “context?” With words or otherwise?

This leads me to say few more words, perhaps repetitive, on *language*.

3.2.2 Language?

We are obliged to move from the presumed simple object *language*¹⁵ to the heterogeneous object *language*. The words and models of sentences are transmitted to us. However, not in the same manner, there are discourses which make sense and those which do not. Fortunately, there are no preexisting rules of the “good making of speech” which we can pronounce, write, or say in a given situation as opposed to the sure rules which govern the “good formation of correct utterances.” We might certainly recall that between both, the features of the semantically well formed “utterances” are at least unstable. Jakobson’s repetition of Chomsky’s example “*colorless green ideas sleep furiously*” is there to remind it. It is not the inner feature of the utterance which will make it or not gain sense, but rather the work of placement in different fields that the listener does or does not. This will depend on his availability and on the variable articulation between this work of meaning and the mass of “available meaning.” This is expressed, for example, in children’s amazement in relation to what for us is evidence. Thus, when they listen to their parents saying: “Me too, I had parents” or “you too will have children,” or even “you too will die.” We will not resolve here the issue of relationships between the conditions of meaning which would be more related to dictionaries and those which would be related to encyclopedia. It is possible that the

¹⁵ TN. Cf. footnote 4 for the distinction between *langue* and *langage* in French.

distinction makes sense only for those who absolutely want to isolate the totality of language and its mode of functioning, which would be “properly linguistic.”

However, at the same time, we are faced with the impossibility of addressing the “problem of language” in all its general nature, by responding globally to the question: “What does man do with language?”, which implies “What is he capable of doing without it?”, but would not know how to formulate: “What does man do with language and solely with language?”. There are different ways of handling language, varied forms of resorting to language in order to show, insinuate, suggest. However, could we or should we class these “genres”? Certainly, it is not only according to the social conditions of usage. In any case, “language” acquires meaning only in relation to non-language “outside” it. And the thorough description of this “background” would be an infinite task. In that respect, language is both the site of possible clarification and also what constitutes the problem.

After all, if like Politzer, we give to ourselves the word of order of a “concrete psychology,” or, even worse, of a “concrete science of man,” it comes to the mind of the malicious reader, or only very little critical, that pronouncing the word “concrete” does not give us any “concrete reality,” that it is the worst of abstraction. Our words constitute a source of risk:

- In their long history,
- In our difficulties to know what would constitute the good usage,
- In our incapacity to determine the ways how our speech is understood, neglected, taken as absurd or incomprehensible.

This is so particularly considering that there is always the obstacle of irreducibility of practice to theory, but also in relation to the concreteness of such particular object which escapes to the general nature of our words. However, not always in the same fashion, particularly depending on the interlocutors’ shared or unshared implicit elements, even if words are less difficult to handle than things.

I get back to the two notions of “field” (or of “background”) and of “style” already mentioned above, as sites of meeting of language and outside-language.

3.2.1.2 “Background,” “Context,” “Field” and “Values”

There is a problem right away: One could admit that understanding the meaning of an act or a discourse implies firstly to substitute it in its field, in our way of perceiving the field of the other or, in any case, in “a field.” However, one has to add that once we have said “field,” we have not said much. If there is a “field” it is not a homogeneous background, but rather a heterogeneous world populated with the current and non-current, with the common and the specific, with lines of strengths, discourse, action or the event which reorganises the field in question. Furthermore, there is the issue of its mode of presence, neither conscious in the sense of explicit (exactly the one which is detached from the background) nor “unconscious” in the repressed sense: Is it something like “preconscious” or relating to a form of latent consciousness? In addition, the field in question is plural, for example, the perceived comprises a horizon of what is feasible or unchanging, recognized or strange, sayable or effectively said. It is similar to when the child’s look shows that the action he is performing is prohibited (or momentarily tolerated) by the adult. In other words, this background is filled with values which link the living being (not solely the human being) to the outer world: What will be taken, eaten, put in the mouth, what we get away from, what is expected or feared... The field, the world or the surrounding (it seems to me that the terms are substitutable) is firstly given to us with our own evaluation systems. Even if the common action or discourse make us take into account the “values” of the other (what does walk mean to me and to my dog? It is both close and separate). Just as we can establish a “same” common world to the ant, to us “modern men” and to “cave man.” However, this is only a point of ideal escape: Indeed, it is “our” world that we are dealing with, or rather with our worlds. And just like the astronaut lives in a world where the sun revolves around the earth, even if he thinks in another one; the physicist or the chemist live as well in a world where what we see in the front of a food shop is either tempting or disgusting or... and not in a world of electrons or chemical substances. Even if sometimes the hygienist discourse on vitamins, cholesterol, lipids, etc., might have a retroactive effect on our “experienced” manner of perceiving food. (Through popularisation and advertising, “science” has been transformed into “ideology of daily life.”)

Thus, this background is, at the same time, relatively shared by all of us and, more or less, specific to such or such community or to everyone. It manifests itself differently in the practical space of the task to be accomplished, that of the conversation or the discourse about the absent. Just as there is a variation in what distinguishes the field of the possible, the impossible or the improbable: It occurs differently under heaviness, death, the obligation to choose, the fact that everyone is replaceable by another one so as to carry out a given work, although not fully. And this replaceability or irreplaceability manifests itself differently in sexual life or tender attachment.

In any case, there is no discourse which renders explicit, perfectly and once for all, the field underlying to action or to feeling. Hence, the permanent possibility of return to make comments or to re-interpret. Be it a return on ourselves (and/or on our manner of perceiving the others and the world) or on the others' (possibly) surprised comment about us. And all this equally in relation to the field of daily practice as well as our relation regarding the distant side of our culture or our memories. Could we not say then that this permanent possibility of rectification matters more than a reference to the possibility of achieving a possible "truth"? We experience at the same time what constitutes the rectification of a first apperception and of the impossibility to say: "This time we have achieved a form of definitive truth." Nonetheless, in my view, it is the necessarily open aspect of the background which, above all, accounts for the impossibility of putting an end to the field of interpretation. (Is it a definitive truth?) Even if the relationship with the background combines with the always uncertain relationship between what we do or feel and the way of saying it, like with the forced variation of the meaning of our speech towards the other. This unstable status does not impede the fact that at a given time a limited interpretation might be absolutely insufficient, more precisely that an interpretation acknowledged later as erroneous or partial could have enabled a saving action.

3.2.1.3 A Return on "Style" as a Way of Expressing Somehow our Relationship with the World and with Ourselves

Besides the content of a discourse, the result of an action, there are ways of saying or doing which certainly express particularly the manner with which the one who speaks or acts stands in his or her world. Thus, in relation to the translatable content of a

theoretical thought, to what an author has said as well as the always possible summary of a “story,” in my view, it is the style, the appearance of the text which gives us, at least partially, what makes at the same time the interest of the text, its connection with us, but also its relationship with the world. Isn’t it what Vygotsky’s passage, mentioned earlier, on the contrast between form and referent means? Nonetheless, Vygotsky does not delve into reading style, the dialogue with the text.

And indeed, there is an assured, deductive, provocative, interrogative style of theoretical thought... However, isn’t it particularly in the manner how an author tells the very becoming of his thought that his own style will emerge? One could think of the narrative that Descartes does of his story. Or else what would be the *Traumdeutung* without the narrative of “Irma’s injection” and the clarifications through the associative fields which emerge little by little? Or rather, couldn’t one say that both in Descartes and Freud there is a dialogue between the theoretical development and narration, a dialogue which nurtures the dialogue with the reader?

In a similar way, the effective concrete life of the one who has to take sides, to decide, to act in everyday life does not occur towards “class relationships” as such, but rather of such hierarchy where the deputy-head might be worse than the head, where the relationships of age, gender, nation, skin colour, language might be more important than class relationships solely. Or rather, where all these relationships will mingle in a complex which can be narrated, evoked – in a more or less successful way – but not reduced to a theory, which will be better expressed in a novel rather than in a treatise on sociology. Likewise, I cannot say absolutely “I think,” as if “I” were the simple cause of its thoughts, nor as if it were a completely strange machine “there is thinking in me,” even if the surprise in view of what emerges might justify the expression. Similarly, it is not an abstract freedom which has led such or such to act, but rather a way of being, be it common, one’s “habitual style,” or be it, on the contrary, the emergence of a new way of being. In other words, besides field and style, one has to add the specificity of the event.

3.2.1.4. “Concrete” and “Event”

This is what we find just as much, of course, in the historical narratives. I am repeating, but in 1914, the two German and French proletariats, which were powerful, organised and hostile towards the “capitalist war,” embarked massively in the fresh and joyful war (even if there were some opponents). Therefore, there must have been “something else” rather than class consciousness meant to unite the proletarians of all countries. Inversely, just as something different from nationalism or violence of discipline has led to the multiplication of mutinies and fraternisations. In both cases, there might be an overall comprehension of the possibility of what has occurred. This does not impede the need of concrete historical comprehension. Which range of conditions does respond, at least partially, to the question: why does this fraternisation occur in one place and not in another one? Still, in our endeavour to understand the other or ourselves, it is not a matter of finding the good theory, but rather to dialogue with the history of everyone or every collective, the “complexes” of distant or closer elements which contribute to clarify the global style of happening.

3.2.1.5 A Return on “Dialogue”

Once the diversity of styles of thought, action or manner of being has been acknowledged, does not the concrete psychology of everyone, not just that of psychologists, consist in dialoguing with the style of the others or one’s style, in an implicit or explicit “work of meaning?” Coincidentally, this poses again the question of the thoroughly relative clarity that we might have about the movement of our own thought, our style or irruption of modes of thought or action which surprise us. However, isn’t it exactly this relationship between events, styles and fields which makes literature and, especially, the novel work?

3.2.1.6 Literature and “Psychology”

One could get back to the specificity of the field of literature as being different from the one on theory or practice. Hence, we recall that Vygotsky insisted on the

strangeness of the commentators who wonder about what Hamlet really thinks or about the effective duration during which he puts off the obligation to avenge his father till the following morning. There is a space-time which is inherent to the play, like the short story that he analyses. And it is the distance between the reality of the fable and the force of the movement of the text which produces feelings in the spectator or the reader or rather the resounding effect of a manner of perceiving which is different from what “reality itself” would have provided us. Similarly, within another order of ideas, we “know perfectly” that Rabelais’ feast was not a “destruction of acknowledged values” in Rabelais’ life or even thought. We are rather in an opposite relationship with regards to the one where we stand when we complain – legitimately – in relation to how our language is incapable of rendering the experienced reality itself. However, the author’s exotopy-creativity is not solely power in fiction. These “fictions” have indeed (or “might just as well have”) for the reader a relationship with his way of perceiving his own reality or the reality of the others. The unreality of the heroes Olga, Hamlet, Gargantua irrigates or might somehow irrigate (the whole issue being of rendering precise the “somehow”) our relationship with the “reality” of the others and our own. It is different and certainly better than what a treatise on characterology or a model of psychic structure could do.

We have seen that for Bakhtin the work of art presented to us a totalisation that neither science nor morality as infinite task are capable of providing us. However, there is no determined “nature” of the works of art, especially the literary ones. As such, we will be imbued in their multiplicity, their unpredictability. And, particularly, Bakhtin recalls everything which does not constitute totalisation in the novel. However, it also appears to me that Bakhtin does not seem to largely take into account the diversity of manners of receiving and feeling the texts. In addition to this, particularly the issue of non-symmetry between the relative exotopy of the author and that of the reader, as well as the specific modalities according to which we perceive the horizons of meaning of the others.

However, doesn’t *the* novel (whatever might be the strangeness of this generic), whether it is *In Search of Lost Time* or *The Idiot*, express what would be absurd in terms of opposition between a sociology, which would be related to the outerness and to the collective, and a psychology which would deal with the peculiar and the intimate?

“The” novel constitutes exactly one of the places where the relationships between the collective and the particular, the inner and the outer, the spoken and the unspoken, are established according to different styles. In addition, these styles outline, indicate within the diversity of sub-genres which constitute “the” style of the novel, as Bakhtin has highlighted, the atmosphere, the field which constitute the irreducible aspect of such “experienced world”

This is not given “in” the novel, but rather in the dialogue between the novel and our reading. I wonder whether the double dialogue – dialogue in the novel of heterogeneity of its components and dialogue between the novel and us – cannot clarify, a little, the problem of what is the comprehension of others and of oneself in “real life.” Be it the “psychology” of everyone or that of “psychologists.” No answer will be given here to the question: through which strange mystery, would “concrete psychology” be private property of “professional psychologists”?

However, like any link, this one bears some limits. In the novel, we could say that the author has done all the work for us. It is his sovereign exotopy that has decided what could or should be taken into account. Even if this leaves the possibility to the reader to highlight in one way or another, to link such element to another one, whether it is in the novel itself or in what it gives us to think.

It seems to me that all we do is to evolve around aspects of this dialogue, which would not be effectively conceptualised. I leave aside the issue of knowing whether we could call “dialectic” the action of taking into account the heterogeneity of the components of this dialogue. I quote here what, in my view, is not only Bakhtin’s jest in *The Aesthetics of Verbal Creation*, p. 368:

Dialogue and dialectic: We withdraw from dialogue its voices (separation of voices), its intonation (emotive-personalised), the living word and the reply, we extract from it abstract notions and reasoning. We cram everything into an abstract consciousness and we get dialectics.

Bakhtin’s criticism is convenient enough for me, insofar as it seems to me that the opacity derived from heterogeneity as well as from the corporeal significations and the spoken significations, from our differences of perspectives rather than the contingency of temporal development resists and that we do not have “tricks” of thought, dialectic or not, to reduce it. Adding to it a doubt: Doesn’t every theory always

run the risk of being this sad abstraction? Shouldn't one say then that theory is "living" only for the one who, precisely, lives it in his relationship with a concrete content? It would be then in virtue of a style of its own that such psychology would establish or not a link with the "theoretical" and the "current," in an "inner dialogue."

3.2.2 A Double Return on "Narrativity" and "Reflexive Return"

After all, in the face of "thick" constraints of real life, isn't the time of return to oneself, of solitary reflection where we are close and, at the same time, far from oneself, analogous (not identical) to the space of fiction? Furthermore, during this time of reflection, don't we, for that very reason, become not others than ourselves, but rather a bit different from ourselves? This could happen in absolute solitude, the relative solitude of reading, but also in the space of suspension where different interlocutors get back together on a narrative, on a resisting fact. The issue of resemblance-difference between these three dialogue situations remains open. Likewise between the different styles of dialogue.

3.2.3 A Parenthetical Remark: to what Extent, does "Scholarly Knowledge" Help (or not) Comprehension? A Final Word on Literary Reading

In the face of the existence of a work or rather its reading, the issue related to what "scholarly knowledge" could bring to its reading or not remains open. Certainly, historical work always ends up encountering sources, origins, kinship. Furthermore, in the works like in life, it is sheer platitude to observe that everyone, either child or adult, is held in the spirit of time or finds, more or less, his ideas in the others, and in any case, in retrospect, everyone has predecessors. It is always legitimate to replace an author in the circulation of discourses or the material conditions of text preparation. After all, each one of us knows well that "thought" does not come out thoroughly armed from one's brain. However, shouldn't one take this observation as a starting point: Be it anachronism or not, are the more remote narratives capable of making sense to us, have an effect upon us in the first reading, not "clarified by science?" And, surely, a (more) scholarly reading enables one to specify the living conditions of the "heroes" (real or fictitious, that is not the question) Oedipus, Achilles, Christ, Don Juan, Marx or Stalin.

Would this scholarly reading render them “more alive?” There is no scholarly knowledge which would make it possible to say in which case scholarly knowledge helps reading – or the understanding of a concrete case (whether it is literature or “real life”) and in which case it prevents it. Anyhow, the issue of relationship between “the” narrative and “the” theory further expands the question of “dialogism.”

We could stop here the presentation so as to open the debate on what could be a “concrete psychology.” I am adding, randomly some separate notes, which in my view, clarify the question, but it is up to the reader to say it.

4 Separate Notes

4.1 Time and Temporalities

The reflection on the chronotopes introduces a first consideration on the diversity of “temporalities” in relation to the irreversible unity of time which elapses.

One could perhaps oppose two aspects of temporality, both being distinct from continuous and irreversible time. On the one hand, the manner how an individual is temporal in his style, his look, what characterises him, which makes us recognize him. On the other hand, there is the temporal heterogeneity of everyone. We do not know with what exactly one should start in this heterogeneity. There is temporal heterogeneity according to the social moments of life, the kinds of activity (and first of all wakefulness or sleep).

However, one could also wonder about the mixture of the present and the absent, together with the contrast of non-explicit memory in the recognition of objects, of the world, of partners and of memory in the shape of remembrances; likewise the various modalities of the presence of the future, of the possible, of the impossible. Or else wonder about the contrast between the waiting time and the shock of irruption of the unexpected real. Or wonder about the enthusiasm during the action and the reflexive return: “I was stupid.” Or else wonder about the opposed relationships of the “inner” world and of practice. When the inner world is still underlying to practice (“You are always day-dreaming” as we say to a distracted child). Or when, on the contrary, the event which is irruption: “But what am I doing here?”

By the way, it is clear that whether we speak of event or drama, it is not a matter of favouring what emerges as being more important (more worthy of being told, it is something different) than what remains. (With the danger of a given type of sociology or serious story which decides in a controversial way, while disdaining “the anecdotal” of favouring the lengthy period in relation to what emerges.)

All this is taken within the large temporality of individual history, which in itself is taken within the largest temporality of collective history. And the different perspectives overlap without really being capable of getting connected. Likewise, one can find analogies which make it possible, to a certain extent (which one exactly?) to find again the “(a bit) similar” in the course of different stories.

4.2 An Anecdote

I have had a number of students from Tunisia and I get via Internet a Tunisian newspaper, entitled *Leaders*, with no humour connotation it seems. On January 15, 2012, I saw the following title: “The former Tunisian diplomats: Tunisia should express itself in a single voice and its diplomacy should be implemented by professionals.” There is certainly the comic aspect or for weeping, it is the same thing, there is no doubt, related to the return of those who have momentarily remained silent. Coincidentally, there is also the issue of the journalistic generic: it cannot be the exhaustive class of all former Tunisian diplomats. It is a bit like when we say after a vote: “The French have decided that...” or “France has decided that...” We know very well that it is not a real whole. Should one content oneself with the common linguistic mechanism of adaptation of the meanings of words with each other? Or should one get back to the fact that this “collective” has after all a reality through the institution? Or else recall that generic discourse is but a moment of a discourse (or of a practice)? And discourse might clarify later, for example: “But the level of abstentions is getting higher and higher.” It is not so much a matter of truth or error but a matter of level of approximation which seems to be sufficient or not to such receiver.

Anyhow, reading this assertion was an event, a shock for me. And at the same time, I replace it in a theoretical field, the one which, in my view, seems to be at the heart of Sartre’s *Critique of Dialectical Reason*: Since there has been the trigger and

then the collective unrest of the “merging crowd” or of the collective movement, there is the return of “seriality” or the former order of things: That of the Tsarist civil servants who did not emigrate, they became the thoracic spine of soviet power or, anyhow, they contributed to its establishment, like the revolutionaries who became bureaucrats. Here again, there is the need of the historians’ work: How did the new dominant class get constituted? As a matter of fact, this presumes also the change of concept of “class,” since the new Soviet ruling class was not a “class” in the sense whereby the holders of the means of production used to form a “class.” Isn’t there a common fate of the notions: Having to get modified each time they get applied? Here, it seems to me that one could introduce a parallel between individual history and global history, together with the contrast between the irruption of the new and the return to order, even if it is not in a thoroughly identical manner. There would be here a kind of historical scheme, updated every time in a different manner. Moreover, each one of us has certainly, a sort of stable character, of “recurrent style” which might recede into the background at the time of the event, an encounter or a disaster, and reappear (slightly modified?) later. The danger of the “diagnosis” is obviously the fact of being happy with this recurrent generality while neglecting the specificity and, particularly, the imperceptible evolutions. Not to mention the violence that the specialist’s judgment might provide.

4.3 “Dialogism,” Heterogeneity of the “Subject” and “Double Envelopment”

Our heterogeneity, by intersecting with the heterogeneity of the viewpoints, brings forth a multitude of outlines, of perspectives which, in my view, cannot refer to an intersection of already constituted disciplines. Are solitude modalities the object of psychology, sociology or of...? Anyhow, we can never decide between what is rather more specific and between what is rather more or less shared. We are rather on the side of resemblances, of family likeness.

Could we not take Voloshinov’s observations on psychoanalysis as a starting point? However, rather than getting aligned with his assumption of a unilateral determinism according to which our current relationships with the other (an analyst or just as well a “common interlocutor”) would constitute the truth of the supposed “psychic apparatus,” should one speak of “double envelopment”? It would be the

relationship with the analyst, or with the others in general, which gives an enveloping shape to the underlying relationships between our intimate meaning-strengths and our attempts to say it to ourselves, meaning-strengths about whom we never know which representation we will be capable of giving to ourselves. This does not prevent the fact that in our exchanges, be it analytical or other, a form of “other consciousness” might develop, possibly a therapeutic one, (this is another issue, which leads us to a second pole, that of historicity). However, isn’t there “double envelopment” inasmuch as it depends on our mode of perception, of the relationship we have with this objective framework that it might act upon us?

However, this way of living the situation is in itself difficult to identify. One could speak of dialogue in us between what emerges spontaneously and what might be reflection. Or else we could speak about the never ceased dialogue between body and speech or between what we live, our “favourite fictions” and the more or less elaborate personal theory that we make out of all this.

In any case, it seems to me that depending on the intertwining of these dialogues that we can say we are in a situation of interpretation.

If “dialogism” bears a meaning, it is precisely because what seems evident to me might be questioned, that “reason” is a process of correction, it cannot be possessed. Just as we cannot focus absolutely on what science is “ideological,” perhaps “impure,” for example in the choice of what it gets interested in and of what it neglects.

This is how each notion might always be re-examined. And firstly, *dialogism* is a too big word. Indeed, the meaning of the word is clear in the refusal of a thought viewing language as existing alone or of speech in the sole speaker or author. Furthermore, there is the overwhelming dialogue between what is spoken and the unspoken, then the outer dialogue between two or several interlocutors, with all its varieties; the dialogue with absent authors, with the dead whom we have also known, the modalities of our dialogue with ourselves, the relationship between the ways how our speech, our acts and our way of being are received and how we imagine this reception. All this certainly comprises analogies, correspondences, but it is not purely and simply “dialogism.” Or else as it would be unreasonable to presume that men are reasonable by nature, one could evoke a “dialogism of reason”: The one which

sometimes, when all is going well, makes reason emerge amongst us... However, there is no super-subject to say that we are indeed dealing with rationality.

When I reach an odd number and the first of “figures of dialogue” (7 or 11?), I will be happy. However, others surely think that it is more rational to seek the unity of the concept...

Nonetheless, in my view, as mentioned above, if something which we could call “dialogism” might make sense, it is because there is always an unstable balance between community (without any community, there would be no possible dialogue) and heterogeneity (we cannot dialogue if we all repeat the same thing). Likewise, it is necessary that, somehow, the other should be constitutive of us, but no abstract model can be given to it before the concrete figures it might assume. Although there are indeed “dialogues of the deaf” or dialogues of too much consensus, of self-celebration of the group, but, “we” have reasons not to call it “dialogue”... This would illustrate, as a matter of fact, that there is a curious dialogue between “the idea that we have of ‘a true dialogue’” and the empirical reality of encountered dialogues...

4.4 A Return on “Narrations” and “Notions”

4.4.1 Event and Forms of Repercussions, Memories

Even if narration, undoubtedly “rearranges” more or less what has been lived, it might remain a manifestation of the event in the fashion of what is imposed upon us, even if we do not know well how to go about thinking of it. Thus, I remember – memory might arrange things – having gone to receive communion (I was in a religious school) although I had not made my first communion, so as to go after a colleague with long blond hair whom I admired a lot and being surprised that the host did not have any effect on me. It is this surprise which strikes me. Indeed, the expectation of a “real” effect was naïve. However, I can imagine that everyone might recall remembrances, for example, of surprise to the experience of not feeling anything during a mourning event or being hit by a flow of parasite ideas which “are totally unrelated” during the ceremony. Or, on the contrary, everyone certainly remembers having been suddenly overwhelmed by the irruption of an image or “idea.” Instead of hypostatizing “the

affective,” one could wonder “what are the conditions when receiving communion ‘does something?’”. However, above all, it seems to me that in these narrated memories, there is an irreducible aspect to the sole development of notions, like the one of “revelation.” Could we not then speak of “dialogue” between experiences (or “remembrances of experiences”) and notions?

4.4.2 Narrating the Myth and Modifying it

I bring here the example of a film I have recently seen on television: The Greek film *Strella, a Woman's Way* (Panos H. Koutras, 2009) which, in my view, shows what could be the “resumption modification narrative” of what is also something like a myth-concept: incest prohibition. We see the world from the viewpoint of a nearly fifty-year-old man who leaves prison, makes his way a bit randomly, settles in a poor hotel and starts looking for a son about whom he no longer had any news. In the corridor of this hotel, he is called from the door of a neighbouring room by a woman whose aspect shows that it is rather a transsexual person. We see later that she is a singer who improves her earnings through occasional work as a prostitute. They make love (the transsexual reveals that she is undergoing transformation, combining big artificial breasts and a rather residual man’s penis). The film becomes then expressly a dialogue between the alternate viewpoints of one and the other. Slowly they fall in love with each other until the discovery that the son he is looking for is no one else but “her.” I skip the events. Anyhow, not only there are sexual acts that are against the “law,” but, he/she also confesses that exactly for having found his/her father, she had followed him when he left prison. She wanted only to get in touch with him. However, sexuality has done its work. And then, the author’s exotopy, if we might say, leads to an unexpected conclusion: a “family party” with the presence of some friends, happy for being together with the reconciled couple of the father and his son or his daughter.

Besides the remarkable ‘performance’ of the two major actors, all this could be the pure object of a theory on the possibility of happiness despite the fault. Or else like in the original myth, Oedipus’ “fable,” illustrates the fault committed in ignorance, then the moment of revelation. However, here there are three different forms of dialogue (which we will join or not, it does not matter, under the name of “dialogism”): The

author's relation to the tradition of Greek tragic myth which he takes over-modifies, the variety of clarifications of the "drama" through the perspectives taken alternately by the two heroes and then the different manners how such a narrative (or such image, event or speech) resonate with us. Adding to that exactly, getting back to the first Bakhtin, the irreducibility of the kinds of existence. In effective moral life, it would certainly have been a dramatic problem. From the point of view of "sociological science" we could speak of evocation of a sub-set of society: the community of transsexuals who play "the fool" in great humour. Here, contrarily to dramatic tradition, there is an unexpected transformation in a *happy end*, in the enveloping "good humour" of the work, which can show, lead to think in fiction without worrying about the plausible. At the same time, one plays with the image of fatality to transgress it blithely.

However, above all, this "marginal" work expresses for me how much the cultural world and particularly the world of fiction is constitutionally woven of heterogeneity, and, somehow, multiplied in relation to that of reality in the strict sense.

4.5 Multiple Considerations on Narration and Heterogeneity

Thus, one might wonder whether the cultural elaboration of the works as well as of our vigil life do not obey a logic that is homologous to the one proposed by Freud for the dreams. It is not the violent dichotomy of the evident content told by the dreamer, or latent content developed by the analyst. However, just as there are diurnal leftovers in the dream, there are events in vigil life, encounters of men, women, etc. And each of these found realities is immediately reshaped by our ways of perceiving, our expectations, our refusals, everything which stems from something else than from the encountered reality itself. In summary, a heterogeneous complex of concerns, habits, reasons to get closer or to go away, like seeing the same landscape differently depending on where we are standing. We are not in an overview position in relation to our variations of "point of view." We are stuck. Or else there is no "point of view" (if one should keep the quasi metaphor of "point of view") without "movement," be it quick or slow, in relation to which we can more or less become aware. Adding to that the fact that in both cases, we perceive the "point of view" and the "movement" far

more on the objects, the people, the situations with whom we relate than through an examination of our very way of seeing.

In this respect, we could recall that our manner of thinking, reacting is certainly characterised by the fact that the different dimensions, that of doing, of feeling and saying might or might not be in agreement or might get in conflict, but they will never be identical. In my view, we find here something which is similar to what Bakhtin has presented, except that the emphasis is probably placed far more on the perpetual game than between these ways of being. This happens in relation to other fundamental heterogeneities, and firstly that of the present and of the different types of absence, particularly considering that the heterogeneity peculiar to a subject gets somehow multiplied with the other sources of heterogeneity: that of the contrasted groups to whom we belong or are opposed to, that of the moments in life, of distinct societies in space or in time. And one could somehow multiply this heterogeneity by the one which is continually expressed in the modalities of our ways of grasping this complexity of others (or a group of others).

At the same time, “life is not necessarily complicated” irrespective of heterogeneity. There is no need that we understand perfectly the meaning of a gesture, speech or action of the other in order to know how to react (relatively) in an adequate manner. And it happens to us to “behave in a simple manner” (!). After all (I have already mentioned it), the *infans* does not know what makes his parents behave in one way or another. However, it is in most cases, prematurely capable of distinguishing when a threat is true or it is a joke or how far the *infans* can go provoking. One is dealing with skills which are not much related to an explicit knowledge. Just as we do not know what is exactly “to understand perfectly” and we do not need it, we do not know what is exactly to explain thoroughly (and we do not need it either). Indeed, a more or less scholarly knowledge might become integrated to our “lived world.” At a particular point in time, we would wonder whether shakiness relates to fatigue, emotion excess of coffee, a nascent physiological disorder. We could possibly consult a neurologist. And these commonplace or scholarly explanations are not enough to account for the way how we live this shakiness in anxiety, by neglecting it or... We cannot anyhow separate completely a homogeneous level of the lived experience which is distinct from that of science-technology (as illustrated by the role of medical research

or media changes in our everyday life). Just like the “inner world” of what is felt is not necessarily separate from our ways of being or acting in the “common world.” Or like such or such religious, political or scientific discourse, as well as the words of love, orders or words of contempt that we have received or that we receive in the mix, the heterogeneous object which we might call after Voloshinov “ideology of daily life.”

Furthermore, all this occurs in time and in variation / permanence. From this standpoint, the discourse of the individual and about the individual can only be narrative. Even if it is clear that Politzer’s effort has remained programmatic, his attempt to distinguish the narrative from individual drama and from resorting to a timeless legal science remains legitimate in my opinion. However, at the same time, the situations repeat partially. Hence the conflict: Either we isolate generalities and we make driving forces out of them, or we run the risk of considering only the specificity of such life or such story. The issue would be perhaps of wondering to what extent the notions help or not to grasp the meaning of a story or end up disrespecting it. However, this certainly depends on our mode of comprehension. Some “love” to back up notions, others prefer to tell...

4. 6 What to Say then About “Psychology(ies)?”

It seems to me that it would be unreasonable for wanting to find a unified response. There is necessarily tension-distance-conflict (once more, I prefer to avoid using “contradiction,” a too logical term and also with a very heavy past) between what strives to be science, what is practical in terms of relationship towards the other, a narrative clarification of the life of someone who tells about himself. It seems to me that we can avoid the phantom of the *Brave New World*, of the moment when everything could be resolved by a practical science of good management. And contrarily, together with all that can only be clarified by means of a mode which could be called “literary” or quasi literary: the dialogue with the other or the dialogue with oneself from the narrative of oneself (confession) or the narration of the other.

Anyhow, an aspect of “human sciences” seems to be that the one who writes (thinks?) is always implied in what he or she writes, independently of his or her praiseworthy efforts towards objectivity, if the aim is to seek de-centering.

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I present here some “direct” and “indirect” references. The reading references directly related to the themes addressed, in my view, do not pose any problem (except for their gaps, particularly the almost absolute limitation related to “francography”). The other part is fully partial as it brings only encounters I might have had, events of my culture.

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Received September 12, 2012

Accepted May 06, 2014