

MORAL PHILOSOPHY AND PHILOSOPHY OF LITERATURE

An early text by Mikhail M. Bakhtin from the 1920s entitled “K filosofii postupka” (Toward a philosophy of the act), was only published in Russia in 1986 in the volume *Filosofiia i sotsiologiia nauki i tekhniki: Ezhegodnik 1984-85*, edited by S. G. Bocharov (pp. 82-138).¹ This text is of great interest not only because of its intrinsic theoretical value, but also because it yields an understanding of the overall sense of Bakhtin’s research as it stretches into the first half of the 1970s. Furthermore, it is closely related to the first chapter of another text written during the early 1920s, “Autor i geroj vi esteticeskoj dejatel'nosti” (Author and hero in aesthetic activity), it too only published later — in 1979 — in the volume *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva*² (cf. Bakhtin 1979). However, this chapter was not published in a complete version; its first section was excluded having been considered too fragmentary and was only published in 1986 with “K filosofii postupka”, in the same volume. The connection between these two texts, “K filosofii postupka” and “Autor i geroj vi esteticeskoj dejatel'nosti” (and in particular the first section of the latter) is immediately obvious: both are part of the same research project where “Autor i geroj vi esteticeskoj dejatel'nosti” is the continuation and development of “K filosofii postupka”, and both privilege the same literary text as their object of analysis, the poem *Razluka* (*Parting*), by Pushkin.

¹ Translated into English as *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, 1993; and into Italian as “Per una filosofia dell’azione responsabile” (Toward a Philosophy of Responsible Action), first presented with other writings by Bakhtin and his Circle (in Bakhtin 1995), and subsequently completely revised and published as an independent volume (cf. Bakhtin 1998).

² This volume was translated into Italian in 1988 and also excluded the first chapter in question. This, however, has now been translated into Italian from Russian and published in a volume edited by A. Ponzio and P. Jachia, *Bakhtin e ...*, 1993, under the title “L’autore e l’eroe nell’attività estetica. Frammento del primo capitolo”. As to the English edition, included in the volume *Art and Answerability*, 1990, edited by M. Holquist and V. Liapunov, “mettere il russo, §§§ Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” has been published as “Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity” while the first chapter of this text is placed at the end under the title “Supplementary Section” (cf. Bakhtin 1990: 208-231).

Toward a Philosophy of the Act, which was only the beginning of a vast philosophical project designed to produce a volume in moral philosophy, consists of two large fragments: what is probably an introduction to the project (with a few initial pages missing); and a section entitled “I” as established by Bakhtin himself.

In the introductory fragment, Bakhtin considers the problem of the possibility of capturing the moment of “transitiveness” and “event-ness” (*sobytnost*) (cf. p. 1)³ of the act in its valuableness and unity of actual becoming and self-determination. As soon as the sense of such an act is determined from a theoretical — scientific, philosophical, historiographical — or aesthetic viewpoint, it loses its character of unique and self-determined event, a truly lived act and assumes a generic value, an abstract meaning. A division is created between two mutually impervious worlds: the world of life and the world of culture; and yet we exist in the first even when we cognize, contemplate and create, that is, when we build a world in which life is the object of a given domain of culture. These two worlds are united by the unique event of the act of our activity, of living experience, being the unity of two-sided answerability: answerability with respect to objective meaning, that is, with respect to a content relative to the objective unity of a domain of culture, which Bakhtin calls “special answerability”, and answerability with respect to the unique event-ness of the act, which he calls “moral answerability” (cf. p. 2-3). For unity among these two kinds of answerability, “special answerability must be brought into communion with the unitary and unique moral answerability as a constituent moment in it. That is the only way whereby the pernicious non-fusion and non-interpenetration of culture and life could be surmounted” (p. 3).

This is the same problem dealt with in what is generally believed to be the first writing ever published by Bakhtin, “Art and Answerability”, of 1919, that is, the problem of the relationship between art and life, with a solution perspected in terms that are similar:

The three domains of human culture — science, art, and life — gain unity only in the individual person who integrates them into his own unity. This union, however, may become mechanical, external. And, unfortunately, that is exactly what most often happens. [...] But what guarantees the inner connection of the constituent elements of a person? Only the unity of answerability. I have to answer with my own life for what I have experienced and understood in art, so that everything I have experienced and understood would not remain ineffectual in my life. But answerability entails guilt, or liability to blame. It is not only mutual answerability that art and life must assume, but also mutual liability to blame. [...] The poet must remember that it is his poetry which bears the guilt for the vulgar prose of life, whereas the man of everyday life ought to know that the fruitlessness of art is due to his

³ This page and the following refer to the English translation of Bakhtin’s *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, ed. by M. Holquist and V. Liapunov, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1993.

willingness to be unexacting and to the unseriousness of the concerns in his life. The individual must become answerable through and through: all of his constituent moments must not only fit next to each other in the temporal sequence of his life, but must also interpenetrate each other in the unity of guilt and answerability. [...] Art and life are not one, but they must become united in myself — in the unity of my answerability (Bakhtin 1919, Eng. trans.: 1-2).

On one hand, therefore, “special answerability”, relative to a given domain of culture, a given content, a given role and function, delimited, defined, circumscribed answerability referred to the repeatable identity of the objective and interchangeable individual; on the other hand, “moral answerability”, “absolute answerability”, without limits, alibis, which alone renders individual action unique; answerability of the single individual that cannot be abdicated. The connection between these two kinds of answerability is that between objective, repetitive, identical meaning conferred by the domain of culture in which action is objectified, and the unrepeatable self-determination of being as a unique and unitary event, activity in its entirety and complexity though not decomposable or classifiable. Here Bakhtin anticipates the criteria used for the distinction between “theme” and “meaning” particularly important in his conception of the sign to which he dedicates an entire chapter in the volume of 1929 signed by Voloshinov.

The act of our activity, of actual experiencing, says Bakhtin, is therefore “a two-faced Janus” (p. 2) oriented in two different directions: never-repeatable uniqueness and objective, abstract unity. My answerable activity as a unique individual, wholly identified in a given moment and in given conditions is absolutely indifferent, “completely impervious” (p. 4) to the latter. The moment of unique event-ness in which judgment is an answerable act or deed of its author is absolutely *indifferent* to theoretical meaning, and therefore remains entirely outside thought as generally valid judgment. The theoretical veridicality of judgment does not explain how that judgment is the ought of thinking; vice versa the ought cannot ground the theoretical veridicality of judgment; the moment of theoretical veridicality is necessary but not sufficient for it to become an ought-to-be: this is why Bakhtin refuses Rickert’s conception of *the ought* as the highest formal category, and citing Husserl affirms that the assumption of theoretically valid judgment as the ought cannot be derived from it, but rather can only be brought in from the outside. With respect to the ought, to the concrete act of its assumption, theoretical veridicality, says Bakhtin, only has a technical value. This is also true of all that is aesthetically, scientifically, morally significant: all such meanings have a technical value given that none contain ought in their content, this is to be traced instead in the unity of my unique answerable life as it is manifested in the uniqueness of answerable choice. The connection between objective, abstract, indifferent validity and the never-repeatable uniqueness of a standpoint, of a choice cannot be explained in terms of theoretical

knowledge, thanks to an abstract theoretical subject, a gnoseological consciousness, precisely because all this has formal, technical validity indifferent to the answerable act of the single individual. Particularly important are Bakhtin's considerations on the autonomy of what is technologically valid, governed by its own immanent laws, acquiring a value of its own, power and dominion over the life of the single individual once it has lost its connection to the live uniqueness of answerable activity. "All that which is technological", says Bakhtin, "when divorced from the once occurrent unity of life and surrendered to the will of the law immanent to its development, is frightening; it may from time to time irrupt into this once-occurrent unity as an irresponsibly destructive and terrifying force (p. 7).

Bakhtin insists particularly on the alien character of the singularity of life as "answerable, risk-fraught, and open becoming" (p. 9) in the world of constructions by theoretical consciousness, its abstract *being* "lightened" of historical existence, determined as something unique and never-repeatable: absolute estrangement concerning the world as the object of knowledge in which everything finds a justification, except for the singularity of the existential position and of respective answering action. Insofar as by principle it is accomplished, finished, given, theoretical Being is *indifferent* to "that which is absolutely arbitrary (*answerably arbitrary*)" (p. 9), absolutely new and creative concerning unique life intended as continuous answerable activity, theoretical being "is indifferent to the central fact — central for me — of my unique and actual communion with Being" (p. 9) and of my "moral answerability", mine absolutely. And although the "unity-uniqueness" of my life-act remains alien to the indifferent theoretical consciousness, such unity-uniqueness is the foundation of the latter "insofar as the act of cognition as my deed is included, along with all its content, in the unity of its answerability, in which and by virtue of which I actually live — perform deeds" (p. 12). Therefore, says Bakhtin,—

Once-occurrent uniqueness or singularity cannot be thought of, it can only be participatively experienced or lived through. All of theoretical reason in its entirety is only a moment of practical reason, i.e., the reason of the unique *subiectum*'s moral orientation within the event of once-occurrent Being (p. 13).

Bakhtin demonstrates the uselessness of attempts at recovering the unity-uniqueness of action-life whether through the forms of the reductionism of theoreticism, on the basis of which it is reconducted to the categories of a given cognitive field and thought in biological, psychological, sociological, economical terms, etc. (the reductionism of theoreticism, observes Bakhtin, is nothing less than "the inclusion of the large theoretical world within a small, also theoretical, world", p. 13); or through the philosophies of life and a certain tendency to aestheticize life, of which Bakhtin considers the most important to be the

philosophy of Bergson. Bakhtin's critique of the Bergsonian notion of "intuition" — the notion of *empathy*, participative cognition, which in art is directed toward the individual, through which one enters the interiority of an object to coincide with what is unique in it — anticipates his critique of the concept of "empathy" designed to play a central role in the Bakhtinian conception of the otherness relationship from "Author and Hero" through to his writings of the 1970s. The concept of identification, which remains fundamentally theoretical, despite its aestheticism, leads to the illusive belief of being able to overcome the extraneousness, "*transgredient character*" (an expression present in Bakhtin's subsequent writings of the early 1920s and which plays a central role in the delineation of the concept of extralocality), uniqueness, otherness of the situation as from which the act of identification comes about: the concept of identification, as identification with the other involves, says Bakhtin, the loss of uniqueness of the unique place which I occupy in the world and presupposes, therefore, the assertion of the inessential character of my uniqueness and of the uniqueness of my place. Bakhtin makes a point of distinguishing between pure identification as a theoretical-aesthetic notion and "answerable act/deed of self-abstracting or self-renunciation" (p. 16). Pure empathizing is delusive for it cannot be achieved; if this were possible, it would involve the "impoverishment" of the relational situation, since "instead of two participants there would be one" (p. 16), and because of the discontinuance of my unique being and therefore as my not-being, it would also imply annulment of my consciousness rather than a cognitive modality. On the contrary, in self-sacrifice the uniqueness of one's being in the world is fully achieved and the world in which, from one's own unique place, the act of sacrifice of self is chosen responsibly, is not at all the indifferent world of theoretical consciousness and of aesthetic intuition. Therefore, aesthetic identification cannot enlighten us on the uniqueness of being in the world manifested when we take a stand, in answerable action. Rather, says Bakhtin,

The entire aesthetic world as a whole is but a moment of Being-as-event through an answerable consciousness — through an answerable deed by a participant (p. 18).

If neither theoretical cognition nor the aesthetic grasp the unique event-ness of answerable action in the context of the uniqueness of being in the world, this is because they must both fundamentally abstract from the place occupied by the observer, from his uniqueness as interpreter, from his otherness and also from his uniqueness, never-repeatability — otherness of what is observed following his reduction to the status of object. Contemporary philosophy has always drawn nearer to the ideal of scientificness, but because of this it has become a philosophy of domains of culture and of their specific unity, and always less able to

account for unitary and unique Being-as-event in life-action. According to Bakhtin, this explains the attraction exerted through a contrast mechanism in the field of philosophy — in spite of their shortcomings — by historical materialism with its aim of leaving the more abstract theoretical world to build a world with room for the performance of deeds that are determinate, concretely historical and as active and answerable as possible, as well as by philosophical conceptions that, evoking the Middle Ages or Oriental philosophies, place the question of wisdom at the center of their interests. As much as they are different and opposite, Bakhtin evidences the common methodological limit to both these philosophical tendencies insofar as they both fail to discriminate between “what is given and what is set as a task, what *is* and what *ought* to be” (p. 20).

Bakhtin’s assertion that theoretical reason and aesthetic reason are both part of practical reason should not lead us to believe that he was a follower of Kantianism. Moral philosophy or “first philosophy”, as he sometimes called it, which describes Being-as-event as answerable action, that is, the question of answerable action cannot avail itself of the Kantian conception or of the Neo-Kantian revival even though they do consider the moral problem to be particularly important. Bakhtin accuses the formal ethics of Kant and the Kantians of theoreticism, that is, of “abstracting from my unique self”: there is no approach to a living act performed in the real world (p. 27).

The philosophy of the answerable act, says Bakhtin, can only be the phenomenology, the participative description, of this world of action assumed not as contemplated or theoretically thought out from the outside, but rather from the inside in its answerability. Though connected with Husserl’s phenomenology, the approach just described is substantially different given that it proposes the otherness relationship centered on “moral answerability” as against the *noesis-noema*, subject-object relationship. From this point of view Bakhtin’s attitude toward Husserl’s phenomenology is similar to that adopted by Emmanuel Lévinas (cf. Ponzio 1992, 1994, 1995). The indifference of theoreticism is superseded by what is understood by the *unindifference* of participating in the world uniquely, never-repeatably and unreplaceably, by “*my non-alibi in being*”. As regards the condition of unindifference — which does not ensue from a theoretical admission, but which is the condition of my interest, desire, cognition, action, in which my uniqueness is simultaneously already given and actively set by myself, in which I am passive and active, determined and answerable —, we find that dogmatism and generic hypotheticism, absolute determinism and the abstract conception of freedom as void possibility, objectivism and all forms of subjectivism and psychologism, void rationalism — where logical clarity and abstract consequentiality are separated from answerable consciousness and act as obscure and uncontrolled forces —, and the irrationalism complementary to it, are all superseded:

“rationality”, says Bakhtin quoting Nietzsche, “is but a moment of answerability, a light that is ‘like the glimmer of a lamp before the sun’” (p. 29). Language itself lives in relation to participative thought and action, and the word which is not an abstract word from the dictionary, nor subjectively casual, becomes a live and “answerably-significant” word in relation to them. We already have clearly expressed considerations on language in this early paper which were to be developed in Bakhtin’s subsequent books as well as in the two volumes by Voloshinov and in articles by the latter (cf. Voloshinov 1980). It is in relation to the uniqueness of action that the word, says Bakhtin, manifests itself in its fullness, not only in terms of *content-sense*, but also as *expression-image* and from an emotional-volitional viewpoint as *intonation*. Unindifference deriving from the connection with answerable action orients words and makes possible the comprehension of objects, their living experience: to speak of an object means to enter an interested, unindifferent relationship with it, so that the uttered word cannot avoid being intonated. But all that is experienced is intonated and even the most abstract thought, insofar as it is concretely thought, has a volitional-emotional tone, and if an essential tie were not established between content and its emotional tone, which constitutes its actual value, a given word would not be uttered, a given thought would not be thought, a given object would not enter living experience.

In Bakhtin’s view, the unindifference of answerable action establishes a connection between culture and life, between cultural consciousness and living consciousness. When this is not the case, cultural, cognitive, scientific, aesthetic, political values rise to the status of values-in-themselves and lose all possibility of verification, functionality, transformation. Bakhtin observes that this is part of a Hobbesian conception with clear political implications: to absolute cultural values there corresponds the conception according to which the people choose one time only, renouncing their freedom, surrendering themselves to the State after which they become slaves to their own free decision (cf. p. 35). In his subsequent research Bakhtin was to amply demonstrate how all this contradicts constitutive popular resistance to “State truth”, the irreducibility of “non official ideology” to “official ideology”, the character of popular culture whose capacity for innovation and regeneration in relation to dominant culture was to be the object of study in Bakhtin’s monograph on Rabelais. Insofar as it belongs to “class ideology”, State truth, says Bakhtin in one of his subsequent annotations “From Notes Made in 1970-71”, encounters at a certain point the unsurmountable barrier of irony and degrading allegory, the carnivalesque spark of allegorical-ironical imprecation which destroys all gravity and seriousness and never dies in the heart of the people. In a passage from *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin returns to the problem of the abdication of answerability, as political answerability, when he refers to political representation which in the attempt at relieving oneself of political answerability often loses —

both in whoever attributes it and in whoever assumes it — the sense of one's roots in unique, personal non-alibi participation, and consequently becomes void, specialized and formal answerability, with all the danger that such loss of roots and of sense involves (cf. p. 52).

In *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin refuses the concept of truth, inherited from rationalism understood as formed of general, universal moments, as something that is repetitive and constant and as separate and set against the individual and the subjective. Vice versa, as says Bakhtin, the unity of real consciousness acting answerably must not be thought in terms of continuity, at the level of content, of principles, rights, the law, and even less so of being: this clearly being a critique of all forms of dogmatic absolutism, including the ontological. No being or value is identical or autonomous, a constant principle, separate from the live action of its identification as that being or value.

As regards the critique of ontology (extensible to Heidegger's ontology) as an important moment in the Bakhtinian refounding of "first philosophy" as "moral philosophy", the following passage from *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* is particularly significant:

Participation in the being-event of the world in its entirety does not coincide, from our point of view, with irresponsible self-surrender to Being, with being-possessed by Being. What happens in the latter case is that the passive moment in my participation is moved to the fore, while my to-be-accomplished self-activity is reduced. The aspiration of Nietzsche's philosophy is reduced to a considerable extent to this possessedness by Being (one-sided participation); its ultimate result is the absurdity of contemporary Dionysianism (p. 49).

My "non-alibi in being" implies my uniqueness and irreplaceability, it transforms void possibility into answerable real action, it confers actual validity and sense to all meanings and values which would otherwise be abstract, "it gives a face" to the event which is otherwise anonymous, it causes neither objective nor subjective reason to exist, but each one of us to be right in his/her own place and to be right not subjectively but answerably, without the possibility of interpretation as a "contradiction" if not for a third, disembodied, non-participating consciousness and in the perspective of abstract, non-dialogic dialectics, which Bakhtin was to explicitly call into question in "From Notes Made in 1970-71". "Non-alibi in being" relates to the other and not in terms of indifference with a generic other, both as examples of mankind in general, but as concrete involvement, a relationship of unindifference with the life of one's neighbour, one's contemporary, with the past and future of real persons. An abstract truth referred to mankind in general, such as "man is mortal", acquires sense and value, says Bakhtin, only from my unique place, as the death of my neighbour, my own death, as the death of an entire community, or as the possibility of elimination of the whole of historically real humanity.

And, of course, the emotional-volitional, valuative sense of my death, of the death of an other who is dear to me, and the fact of any actual person's death are all profoundly different in each case, for all these are different moments in once-occurrent Being-as-event. For a disembodied, detached (non-participating) *subiectum*, all deaths may be equal. No one, however, lives in a world in which all human beings are — with respect to value — equally mortal (p. 48).

Bakhtin insists particularly on the inevitability of involvement with the other — with the concrete other, and not with an abstract other self, theoretistically conceived as abstract gnoseological consciousness — implied by being answerably participative in the world from the uniqueness of one's place: to be answerably participative is also apprehension for the other, who compels me answerably; answerability of the deed is above all answerability for the other, and my uniqueness is the impossibility to abdicate such answerability, not being replaceable in it, to the point of abnegation, of self-sacrifice which my "answerable centrality" alone makes possible thereby becoming "sacrificed centrality".

One may also attempt to escape from this kind of non-alibi answerability, but even attempts at unburdening oneself testify to its weight and inevitable presence. All determinate roles, with their determinate, special answerability, do not abolish but simply specialize my personal answerability, says Bakhtin, that is, my moral answerability without limits or guarantees, without an alibi. Detached from absolute answerability, special answerability loses sense, becomes casual, technical answerability, and having become mere representation of a role, action, technical performance, as "technical activity" it is de-realized and becomes illusion.

Bakhtin characterizes contemporary crisis as the crisis of contemporary action which has become technical action; he identifies this crisis in the separation of action, with its concrete motivation, from its product, which consequently is emptied of sense. This interpretation is similar to Husserl's phenomenology, particularly as developed in *Die Krisis der europäischen Wissenschaften und die transzendente Phänomenologie* (published posthumously in 1954). But in Bakhtin, differently from Husserl where a certain theoreticism persists, sense is not conferred by the intentional consciousness, by the transcendental subject, but by answerable action as expressed by the uniqueness of non-alibi in being in the world. For Bakhtin a philosophy of life can only be a moral philosophy. Furthermore, Bakhtin emphasizes how separation of the product from the answerable act, of the technological-scientific apparatus from concrete motivation, of culture from life, not only implies to weaken the product, a loss of sense in the cultural world become autonomous dominion, knowledge emptied of sense, but also degradation of the act itself which isolated from the meanings of

culture, impoverished of its ideal aspects, descends to a low degree of biological and economic motivation: outside objective culture, the act appears as mere biological subjectivity, an act-need. On considering this aspect, Bakhtin refers explicitly to Spengler, underlining his inability to reconduct theory and thought to action as necessary aspects incorporated in the latter: on the contrary, the deed is opposed to theory and thought. The value placed by Bakhtin is that of unitary and unique answerable action distinct from technical action with its special answerability (cf. p. 56).

Moral philosophy must describe the “concrete architectonics” of the actual world of the performed act as a unitary and once-occurrent act or deed, the basic emotional-volitional aspects of the latter’s construction and their mutual arrangement. The aspects of such architectonics in the light of which all values, meanings and spatial-temporal relationships are constituted and arranged are characterized by Bakhtin in terms of otherness. They are: “I-for-myself, the other-for-me, and I-for-the-other” (p. 54).

All the values of actual life and culture are arranged around the basic architectonic points of the actual world of the performed act or deed: scientific values; aesthetic values; political values (including both ethical and social values); and, finally, religious values (p. 54).

In the part entitled “I” following the introduction to *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin, starting from the unique place which each one of us occupies irreplaceably, he concretely deals with the architectonics of the uniqueness and volitional-emotional unity of the world considered as a non systematic but concretely-architectonic whole from an axiological and spatial-temporal viewpoint: such a unity is arranged around a unique participative and unindifferent center, the center of value represented by each one of us in our non-alibi answerability. This kind of architectonics could not be understood if actualized by the same subject around which it is organized, if belonging to the same self and therefore to the discourse of the “confession” genre or of any other genre of direct discourse which as such is incapable of developing a global vision. Nor is comprehension possible from a cognitive viewpoint which is neither emotionally nor evaluatively participative; which from an objective, indifferent point of view is incapable of *comprehending* what it describes and which would therefore end up impoverishing the latter and losing sight of the details which render it living and unfinalizable. Nor can it be based on empathy which would also be an impoverishment, if this were possible, insofar as it would reduce the relationship between two mutually external and non interchangeable positions to a single vision. According to Bakhtin interpretation-comprehension architectonics presupposes the other, both different and unindifferent, but reciprocally participative. Consequently, there are two value-centers,

myself and the other, the two value-centers of life itself around which the architectonics of answerable action is organized and arranged. And these two centers of value must remain reciprocally other, the architectonic relationship between two others must remain from a spatial-temporal and axiological viewpoint, and the viewpoint of the I must not dominate. As an example of such a vision Bakhtin analyses the architectonics of art in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, specifically verbal art, literature, which is organized around the center of value represented by the single human being in its uniqueness, irreplaceability, precariousness and mortality. With respect to the latter, such expressions as earlier, later, as yet, when, never, late, already, it's necessary, ought to, beyond, farther, nearer, lose their abstract meaning, says Bakhtin, and are charged each time with a concrete sense as regards the emotional-volitional situation of this participative center. Bakhtin develops and specifies such statements in "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity":

My own axiological relationship to myself is completely unproductive aesthetically: for myself, I am aesthetically unreal. [...]. The organizing power in all aesthetic forms is the axiological category of the *other*, the relationship to the other, enriched by an axiological "excess" of seeing for the purpose of achieving a transgredient consummation (Bakhtin 1920-23, in Bakhtin 1979, Eng.: 188-189).

Bakhtin finds that the architectonics he intends to analyse with his moral philosophy or first philosophy is ready in literature: the otherness of the center of value of this architectonics considered from a transgredient, extralocalized point of view, and which in turn is unique and other. This is the author/hero relationship in the sphere of the literary text.

Every part of an artwork may be considered as a reaction of the author to a reaction of the hero toward an object, an event: *reaction to a reaction*. The relationship of the author, of art to life, is indirect, mediated by the hero. In life too we encounter situations formed of reactions to reactions: but here the human reacted to as well as his reaction are assumed in their objectivity, and the reaction to the reaction is also objective, it expresses a standpoint and is functional to a given context, a given aim. On the contrary, on an artistic plane the hero's reaction is represented and is no longer objective, but objectified, distanced from the author-man, it is his own reaction. The distinction between "objective" and "objectified" as well as the related distinction between "author man" and "author creator" play an important role in Bakhtin's conception and can in fact be traced throughout the whole course of his production, from his early writings of the 1920s to his later writings of the 1970s. The reaction to life, to the hero, is no longer provisional or functional to a practical or cognitive end insofar as it is objectified. A unitary reaction to the totality of the hero's world is essential

to the artwork. This reaction is distinct from cognitive and practical reactions, though it is not indifferent to them; it gathers all the single cognitive and emotional-volitional reactions and unites them in an architectonic whole. For it to assume artistic value, the author's unitary action must evidence the resistance of reality, of life, which finds expression in the hero, the resistance of what is objective with respect to its rendering, to its objectification; the author's unitary action must evidence the hero's otherness and his extra-artistic values, it must therefore begin from a position of extralocality — in space, time and sense — as regards the hero, specially if autobiographical. Differently, as in the case of autobiography, the author's unitary action assumes confessional tones devoid of artistic value. In all this we clearly find traces of Bakhtin's critique of Russian Formalism which was to be systematically developed in *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, 1928, signed by Medvedev.

In the part entitled "I" of *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*, Bakhtin analyses a poem by Pushkin, *Razluka (Parting)* in his effort to clarify the architectonic layout of the aesthetic vision. Subsequently, he was to focus on the relationship between "author and hero in aesthetic activity" producing a long paper with the same title in which the first chapter, as mentioned above, begins with an analysis of the same poem, developing considerations which had already been made in the final part of the fragment now at our disposal. This is particularly interesting to the end of understanding the direction in the development of Bakhtin's research. We shall not stop now to examine this part (but refer the reader to our comment in the Italian edition of "Fragment from the first chapter of 'Author and Hero'", cf. Ponzio-Jachia 1993). Here we shall simply say that Bakhtin identified the type of architectonics he wished to analyse in the viewpoint of literature, but, in fact, what was intended as an example ended up holding his attention for the rest of his life so that the viewpoint of literature became his main focus.

Another important point is that Bakhtin initially approached the aesthetic vision through the lyrical genre in which he had originally identified the relationship of dialogic otherness among different points of view — in the case of Pushkin's poetry the dialogic dialectic between the author's context and that of the two protagonists, between the author-hero and the heroine. All this undermines both the mistaken interpretation that Bakhtin did not sufficiently consider the lyric genre; as well as the misunderstanding about his conception of dialogicality: for Bakhtin dialogicality is a question of *degree*. Contrary to those critics who have wrongly interpreted Bakhtin as having perspected a rigid opposition between absolutely monological genres, e.g. lyric poetry, and dialogical genres, specially the "polyphonic" novel (as identified in the works of Dostoevsky), for Bakhtin dialogicality is always present in the artistic word characterizing different genres in different degrees.

Furthermore, his belief that “first philosophy” or “moral philosophy” (whose foundations he critically analyses) is centered on the uniqueness and unreducible otherness of being, requiring not a direct, objective vision of the “I”, of the subject, but an indirect and objectified vision where the viewpoint of “other” (as developed in literary writing) is central, gives us an insight into what he means by “metalinguistics” (as this term is used in *Dostoevsky*): the living dynamic reality of language cannot be understood by studying the direct word, nor by linguistics when it abstracts from the internal dialogicality of the concretely oriented and specifically intonated word. *Toward a Philosophy of the Act* states the premisses that were to guide Bakhtin throughout the whole course of his research. As he demonstrated in a paper of 1952-53, “The Problem of Speech Genres”, discourse genres may be divided into *primary* or *simple genres*, the genres of everyday dialogue, and *secondary* or *complex genres*, the literary genres which instead render and objectify everyday, ordinary, objective dialogical exchange. As a component of secondary genres, dialogue in primary genres is pictured so that it loses its immediate connection with the real context and with the aims of everyday life and, therefore, its instrumentality and functionality. The word *leaves its monological context* in which it is determined in relation to its object and the other words forming its context, and enters the context of the word that pictures it. This is the complex context of verbal interaction with the author who objectifies and renders the direct word in the form of indirect, direct and free indirect discourse and their variants (discussed in part three of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Voloshinov, 1929, now available in a new Italian edition translated directly from Russian, cf. Voloshinov-Bakhtin 1999). Bakhtin maintains that the complexity of dialogue may be studied through the pictured word and its internal dialogization, found in the secondary discourse genres of literature — specially the novel — which evidence aspects of dialogue that do not emerge in primary, simple, direct, objective discourse genres. Such a study is particularly interesting, as Bakhtin 1952-53 maintains, when the object of analysis is the *utterance* considered as the *cell of dialogic exchange*, and not the *sentence* or *proposition*, the utterance as the cell of *the system of language*. (The latter is an abstract concept reviewed by Bakhtin in the light of his critique of “abstract objectivism” in language studies, on these aspects see Voloshinov's 1929 volume as well as his 1928 paper on tendencies in linguistic studies, It. trans. in Voloshinov 1980).

A one-sided orientation toward primary genres inevitably leads to a vulgarization of the entire problem (behaviorist linguistics is an extreme example). The very interrelations between primary and secondary genres and the process of the historical formation of the latter shed light on the nature of the utterance (and above all on the complex problem of the interrelations among language, ideology, and world view) (Bakhtin 1952-53, Eng. trans.: 62).

Bakhtin's text on the philosophy of the answerable act sheds light on the itinerary which led him to his 1929 monograph on Dostoevsky. According to Bakhtin, Dostoevsky's "philosophy" must not be identified with the specific conceptions and standpoints of the heroes in his novels or with specific contents. On the contrary, Bakhtin finds traces of the architectonics theorized in his paper on moral philosophy in the overall structure of Dostoevsky's works, which he describes as organized according to the principle of dialogicality. This is what Bakhtin was alluding to when he says, "to affirm someone else's 'I' not as an object but as another subject — this is the principle governing Dostoevsky's worldview" (Bakhtin 1963, Eng. trans.: 11): a statement which also becomes clearer in the light of a paper on Dostoevsky by Vjaceslav Ivanov (1973). In Dostoevsky's "polyphonic novel" the character is no longer described by an "I" and assumed as an object. On the contrary, the character itself is a center of otherness and organizes its world in this perspective:

Dostoevsky carried out, as it were, a small-scale Copernican revolution when he took what had been a firm and finalizing authorial definition and turned it into an aspect of the hero's self-definition. [...] Not without reason does Dostoevsky force Makar Devushkin to read Gogol's "Overcoat" and to take it as a story about himself [...]

Devushkin had glimpsed himself in the image of the hero of "The Overcoat," which is to say, as something totally quantified, measured, and defined to the last detail: all of you is here, there is nothing more in you, and nothing more to be said about you. He felt himself to be hopelessly predetermined and finished off, as if he were already quite dead, yet at the same time he sensed the falseness of such an approach. [...]

The serious and deeper meaning of this revolt might be expressed this way: a living human being cannot be turned into the voiceless object of some secondhand, finalizing cognitive process. *In a human being there is always something that only he himself can reveal; in a free act of self-consciousness and discourse; something that does not submit to an externalizing secondhand definition.* [...]

The genuine life of the personality is made available only through a dialogic penetration of that personality, during which it freely and reciprocally reveals itself (Bakhtin 1963, Eng. trans.: 49-59).

This is the direction of Bakhtin's research from his early writings to his 1929 monograph on Dostoevsky: on delineating the principles of his prolegomena to a philosophy of responsible action for the refounding of philosophy, he discovered the possibility of their full expression in literary writing. Such a possibility is determined by the fact that literary writing is able to transcend the dimension of identity and the limits of the difference-indifference relation, to varying degrees, depending on the literary genres or subgenres in question, and, therefore, to delineate the architectonics of otherness in a perspective that is participative and unindifferent. Such an orientation is also present throughout the research of

the members of the Bakhtin Circle (as evidenced, for example, by the collection of writings published in *Bakhtin e le sue maschere*, cf. Bakhtin *et alii* 1995). On the basis of this initial interest in the philosophy of responsible action, Bakhtin develops an interest in the philosophy of literature, where *of literature* is a subjective genitive: the philosophical worldview which literature, verbal art, makes possible, and not a philosophical view to which literature must be subjected.

Surprisingly, Bakhtin's most recent paper, of 1974, "Toward a Methodology of the Human Sciences" (in Bakhtin 1979, It. trans. 1988; Eng. trans. 1986, pp. 159-172) insists on the same question, proposed from the very beginning of his research. This paper, which was written on the basis of materials developed by Bakhtin toward the end of the 1930s or beginning of the 1940s, returns to the problem of the impossibility of applying categories proper to the subject-object relationship to the human world. When dealing with human expression the criterion is neither the "exactness" of knowledge, nor philosophical "rigour", in the Husserlian sense, but the "profoundness of answering comprehension".

Most interesting is the fact that at the beginning of this paper, after describing dialogic-active comprehension as the highest level of sign comprehension, Bakhtin should refer to the "symbol" recalling an encyclopedic entry by S. S. Averincev ("Sinvol", in *Kratkaja literaturnaja enciclopedija*, vol. VII, Moskva 1971), who collaborated with Bakhtin in addition to editing his writings. Using Averincev's conceptualization of "artistic symbol", Bakhtin focuses on the connection to the image upon which the symbol "confers *depth* and sense perspective" (cf. Bakhtin 1979, It. trans. 1988: 375). The symbol implies a "dialectic correlation between identity and non-identity". In the symbol, adds Bakhtin citing Averincev, "there is 'the warmth of a mystery that unites', juxtaposition of one's *own* to the *other*, the warmth of love and the chill of extraneousness. Juxtaposition and confrontation" (cf. *ibidem*). Bakhtin insists that sense in the symbol-image requires relatedness to another sense and interpretation not on the basis of its closest con-text, but rather of a remote context, a distant context, which opens identity to alterity. It is clear that such considerations are closely connected to those made by Bakhtin in his text on the philosophy of responsible action.

In an essay entitled "Allegoria e metodo della conoscenza in Bachtin and in Benjamin. Due note e una parentesi" (in Ponzio-Jachia 1993: 43-56), Romano Luperini underlines a possible connection between the Bakhtinian concept of symbol and Ricoeur's, maintaining that it may be associated to the notion of "allegory" as understood by both Bakhtin himself as well as by Walter Benjamin. Particularly interesting is the fact that Luperini evidences the essential features of the Bakhtinian conception of interpretation beginning from the concept of "symbol" as analysed by Bakhtin in his 1974 paper, but which, as we have shown, had already been clearly delineated in *Toward a Philosophy of the Act*. These features include:

Bakhtin's surpassing of traditional approaches of the subjectivistic and idealistic type, and of the objectivistic and scientific type; his critique of positivistic, neo-positivistic, and historicist positions as well as of dogmatic Marxism; his refusal of reducing interpretation to a simple encounter between two consciousnesses, to a "fusion of horizons" *à la* Gadamer, which annuls distance and mutual extralocality among texts in the historical *continuum* and in the linearity of tradition.

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