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## BAKHTIN, THE THINKER



## BAKHTIN, O PENSADOR

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### Resumen

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La obra de M. Bajtín inaugura un nuevo paradigma para la investigación en ciencias humanas. Su propuesta supera la lingüística del siglo XX y propone un nuevo marco para los estudios literarios. Las aproximaciones que ha recibido su obra limitan considerablemente su alcance al equiparlo a los modelos hegemónicos. Varios de sus mayores comentaristas han conincido en una interpretación en clave neokantiana de su obra, una lectura muy discutible.

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### Resumo

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A obra de M. Bakhtin inaugura um novo paradigma para a pesquisa em ciências humanas. Sua proposta supera a linguística do século XX e propõe um novo marco para os estudos literários. As abordagens que sua obra tem recebido limitam consideravelmente o seu alcance ao equipará-lo aos modelos hegemônicos. Vários de seus mais importantes comentaristas têm

coincido em uma interpretação em chave neo-kantiana de sua obra, o que constitui uma leitura altamente questionável.

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## Entradas para indexação

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**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Bakhtin. Dialogismo. Antipositivismo. Dogmatismo. Relativismo. Neokantianismo

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## Texto integral

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The belated appearance of Bakhtin and his Circle in the literary speculation of the West has produced a paradoxical phenomenon. The enthusiastic fervor with which his theories have been received, not only has generated thus far a Journal dedicated exclusively to his theoretical works, an international association of scholars from diverse disciplines, dozens of congresses and symposia and thousands of publications but also has produced not just one but many Bakhtins. No other modern literary thinker has provoked so many different interpretations. Not even Walter Benjamin, with his peculiar way of writing has been the object of such a number of controversies despite the fact of presenting a more conflicting ideological profile. References as disparate as Marxism and Judaism live peacefully together within the image universally accepted that has been formed by his critics and followers over the years. And yet in the case of Bakhtin who lacks the artistic pretensions, who makes every effort to communicate his ideas in the clearest possible way, and achieves it, who carefully explains his methodological construct and his ideological premises, who avoids ambiguity and all form of unintelligibility, he has, nonetheless, set off the most unlikely of controversies. Indeed, it was recently stated that [on] "est loin de désigner un corpus homogène" of various works that appeared over a period of time (F. Schuerewegen, 107)<sup>1</sup>.

At the present, the studies on Bakhtin have not advanced beyond the preliminary, and somewhat sterile task of pointing out what binding relationships there exists with other modern thinkers, as these attempt merely to identify and determine the content and scope of his contributions. To date, the ideological relationships that have been indicated have all met with unequal success. Moreover, the abundant, and often unchecked, labeling to which he has been subjected has undue limits to his dialogism. Thus we find in Holquist and Clark a Neokantian Bakhtin, via the Marburg School. These scholars utilize such a label in a very flexible way since it is their understanding that Bakhtin is much closer to Kant than to the Neokantians and Neokantianism. Their understanding, however, does not exceed a mind/world relationship<sup>1</sup>. Nina Perlina, on the other hand, takes the Neokantian label more seriously, as she establishes Bakhtin's close ties not only with Hermann Cohen, the representative of the School of Marburg, but also with Martin Buber. Of course, she is not alone in pointing out Bakhtin's relationship with Buber; yet she deserves to be mentioned for having taken on such a task in a most serious way<sup>3</sup>. Ann Shukman, instead, has stressed Bakhtin's

Christianity, which she understands as being half *Kulak* Calvinism and half *Stranniki* radical sectarianism. In the prefaces to Tolstoy, where Todorov has seen the more Marxist Bakhtin, she sees rather veiled reference to the advent of God's Kingdom<sup>4</sup>.

But of all the Bakhtinian critics, Todorov is certainly the most eclectic. If in 1981 he proposed Kantian roots for Bakhtin thinking and underplayed his Marxism, a belief widely shared by most European critics of the time, in 1986, in opposition to the Kantian and Christian characterizations by Holquist and Clark, he would propose the double influence of Marx and Heidegger -a rather extreme consideration, if there ever was. And while there are critics who like Ponzio views Bakhtin as a Semiotician, there are others who continue to see in his Marxism either a justification for dismissing him or a reason for his vindication -Allon White or Pierre Zima.

But the one belief that almost all of them share -including those who still maintain a Marxist reading of his works- is his relativism, that is to say a Bakhtin compatible with the certainties of our time. By relativism, Bakhtin and Voloshinov mean the spontaneous ideology of our time, that is governing the creation and ideological interpretation of the twentieth century<sup>5</sup>. And Bakhtin has been the first to point this out, but this has not delivered him from suffering its consequences. In order to consider the ideological limitations of our time, in order to not project these limitations onto other stages of History, it is necessary to gain a position beyond those limitations. That is what Bakhtin achieved, proposing a theoretical-literary base able to renew modern literary thinking. When a thinker menaces to surpass the boundaries of his time it usually happens that he is greatly misunderstood -even if silence turns into a grand apotheosis of success. The effort for understanding the thought of his time will try to bend it and give it the order, which it had encouraged to abandon. This happens with Bakhtin's work.

Many of the efforts that have been made in order to establish Bakhtin's relationship with other thinkers and underscore possible strains in his thought are actually attempts aimed at reconciling his views with the thinking of our time, adapting them to ideas and diagrams which are more familiar to us. Such an attitude, a common reaction to everything new, poses the real danger of altering the nature of Bakhtin's thinking. Some critics have asked themselves what would have happened if Bakhtin had been known to the West in the twenties; what kind of linguistic and literary theories would we have today if Bakhtin's ideas had not lay dormant for a half a century. It is a legitimate question, for it is not often that in the history of thought an ideological product may remain unknown for fifty years and still retain its early freshness when it finally appears. But, perhaps this question should be posed in a different way, if we are to judge by today's reaction to the ideas of Bakhtin. And, absurd though it may seem, the question to be raised should rather be, are linguistic and literary theories now ready to assimilate Bakhtin? The answer usually given today seems to be a Bakhtin immersed in Relativism.

Vadim Kozhinov, Bakhtin's legal executor, has already called attention to

the tendency for interpreting his study on Dostoevsky from a relativistic point of view. The usual interpretation of this critical work stresses the fact that in Dostoevsky's world everything is *relative and equipollent*. Because his characters have their own "idea" and "truth", they have been considered as possessing equal rights as the author. Kozhinov explains that this is not exactly what Bakhtin meant, moreover such an interpretation does not agree with Bakhtin's thinking as a whole<sup>6</sup>.

But it is not just his essay on Dostoevsky that is interpreted in a relativistic key. It is the whole Bakhtinian thought. Proof of this general relativist interpretation is given unwittingly by Holquist and Clark. In their *conclusion* (347-350), these biographers of Bakhtin relate a telling anecdote that may shed a great deal of light on Bakhtin's way of reading a story. As Bakhtin lay dying, after rejecting the religious services of an orthodox priest, asked to be told his favorite story, the tale of the first story of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, that is, the one that tells the deeds and ultimately the death of a rogue called Ser Ciappelletto. It is the story of a dreadful rogue who, on his death bed, manages to deceive the hosts that took him in as well as a holy monk with a false confession, to the point that after his death he is venerated as a saint and becomes Saint Ciappelletto. The interpretation given this story by Holquist and Clark is that "God works in strange ways, his wonders to perform" (347). The ambiguity of this saying is explained in relativistic terms: nothing is completed, no word is ever the last, and there is no ultimate conclusion that comprehends all possibilities. Such statements, if not others quite similar to these, do appear in Bakhtin's writings, but with a distinct meaning. With regard to Ser Ciappelletto, it is very unlikely that Bakhtin would have given such an interpretation. An interpretation more in tune with the Bakhtinian method would have explained it differently. In the first story of the *Decameron* we find a clash between two worlds. On the one hand the gullible and rigid discourse of the holy monk represents the old medieval, monological word that does not allow for any deviation, that is to say for any fault or doubt, regarding his utterances. On the other hand, the new word is the word of Ser Ciappelletto -who lies with impudence-, a novelty who can be extended to the narrator's word that dares to harbor doubts as to whether Ser Ciappelletto has gone to heaven or to hell. Their word (meaning Boccaccio's and Ser Ciappelletto's) ridicules the old word, precisely the word of those people who could swear to the holiness of the rogue and find it quite easy to venerate him as a saint. Undoubtedly, Bakhtin must have enjoyed the way in which Boccaccio had totally disregarded the seriousness of the tale by steering his narrative toward laughter which is, after all, the result of a prank that was ultimately played on the old ideological rigidity. The clash between the two worlds is presented by means of a carnivalized aesthetics fully achieved through the simplicity of the tale and the narrator's pointed comments.

Obviously, Holquist and Clark's interpretation reveals a defect, which stems from a simple and general explanation applicable to any literary text produced by western culture. In fact, in the history one can always find an unfinished discourse. It is precisely such an obvious remark that invalidates their interpretation. The fact that this explanation opens the final remarks supports our thesis that they interpret Bakhtin in a relativistic key<sup>7</sup>.

And yet, in spite of the plurality of interpretations of Bakhtin's thought, there is one aspect with which all scholars are in agreement, namely the relevance of his critical acumen, an aspect of his intellectual activity that has hardly received any attention. His critical judgment is not based on individualism, or on any other known ideological form. It is rather a critical thinking based on new and solid ground, which does not elude any of the great-unresolved problems of western culture. In the early works of the Bakhtin Circle: *The Formal Method in the Literary Scholarship* (written by Pavel Medvedev), *Dostoevsky's Poetics* (written by Bakhtin), *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* and *Freudianism* (written by V. N. Voloshinov), the object of study is relativism. Later on, what may be called a second stage, a new theme makes its appearance, namely totalitarianism, or rather authoritarian dogmatism as can be seen in his *Rabelais and His World* as well as in the second version of *Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Relativism and dogmatism happen to be the two ideologies of our time: relativism in the West and dogmatism in the East in its Stalinist manifestation and, more recently, in the Arab world under the banner of Islamic fundamentalism.

### *Relativism*

In Bakhtin's work there is a severe criticism of western relativism. The ideological environment constitutes a profound categorical unity, the unity of culture, for Bakhtin and his Circle. All cultural activity and creativity acquire its coherence upon the ideological environment. This environment channels the creativity, and at the same time, limits and even cuts it. A thinker is able to overcome the boundaries imposed by his time, only with a profound ideological effort. In the twentieth century, such boundaries are those relativistic individualism imposes. Relativism means a generalized tendency towards the distrust of the truth, the values, the future and, in short, the ideas; and, in positive meaning, a reassertion and primacy of the material and an extolling of the present. In the final paragraph of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* the author calls attention to the "alarming instability and uncertainty of ideological word. Verbal expression in literature, rhetoric, philosophy, and in humanistic studies has become the realm of *opinions*, (...) This stage in the vicissitudes of the word in present-day bourgeois Europe and here in the Soviet Union (...) can be characterized as the stage of *transformation of the word into a thing*, the stage of *depression in the thematic value of the word*" (158). The importance of Bakhtin's work does not lie in his pointing out "the general far-reaching subjectivization of the ideological word-utterance", but in showing, at the same time, the content and the discursive form which a relativized speech will adopt.

Throughout his work, Bakhtin highlights the importance that vital time - that is the passing of time- and sex have for relativism. In *Freudianism* and "Beyond the Social", Voloshinov gives an explanation of the importance of such topics. After explaining how vitalist values (the organic, corporal, sexual) polarize the thinking of our time, he notes that we are able to see how "the basic ideological

motif of Freudianism is by no means its motif alone. The motif chimes in unison with all the basic motifs of contemporary bourgeois philosophy. A *sui generis* fear of history, an ambition to locate a world beyond the social and the historical, a search for this world precisely in the depths of the organic -these are the features that pervade all systems of contemporary philosophy and constitute the symptom of the disintegration and decline of the bourgeois world" (Freudianism, 14).

Some theorists are self-designated relativist – Feyerabend, Nelson Goodman and others. Frequently, relativism is identified with other labels that are also relativistic in the Bakhtinian sense – vitalism, excepticism, nihilism, etc. B. Herrstein Smith, who claims herself as a relativist in critical theory, gives a definition of relativism that it closes on Bakhtinian conception:

At the most theoretical level, the relativism exhibited by this study is not a "position," not a "conviction," and not a set of "claims" about how certain things -reality, truth, meaning, reason, value, and so forth- really are. It is, rather, a general conceptual style or taste, specifically played out here as (a) a conceptualization of the world as continuously changing, irreducibly various, and multiply configurable, (b) a corresponding tendency to find cognitively distasteful, unsatisfying, or counterintuitive any conception of the world as fixed and integral and/or as having objectively determinate properties, and (c) a corresponding disinclination or inability to use terms such as "reality," "truth," "meaning," "reason," or "value" as glossed by the latter objectivist conceptions (Smith, 151).

However, she opposes relativism to objectivism. Relativism conceives its own conception of the world as contingent product of many particular systems interacting at a "particular time and place". Objectivism founds on the conviction of not contingency of its own conceptualizations. In Bakhtin, the idea of relativism opposite to authoritarian dogmatism and critical individualism is a historic definition, not an analytic conceptualization.

Mistrust for ontological truth opens the way for certainties based on experience, that is to say relativist truth; that same mistrust for truth in the future as well as in history, makes the central orientation of today's thinking withdraw into itself, into the present, the corporeal since one's consciousness cannot longer be trusted. This in turn translates into obsession with aging, with material well being and with sex. Indeed, the slogan of all relativist seems to be: stop the time.

To this ideology of mistrust, which places all its hopes on the here and now while forgetting what tomorrow may bring, Bakhtin opposes an affirmative thinking, a recovery of an ideology without any temporal barriers: without the existence of either first or fast word, there are no boundaries for a dialogical

context that goes back to an infinite past and is oriented as well towards an infinite future. That ideology means a recovery of ontological truth, of faith in history, in short, a vindication of utopia, the utopia of the Great Time, the time of the resurrection of meaning.

### *Criticism of the Dogmatism. Monologism and Dialogism*

At this point the question one raises is whether such a utopia is a Marxist utopia. For this answer we need to introduce another consideration. And that is that a critique of relativism can be made, and it has been made, from two quite distinct standpoints: from an authoritarian dogmatism or from a dialogic position. Bakhtin's critique of relativism necessarily excludes authoritarian dogmatism. Dogmatism, being monological in nature, is radically antidialogical. In his first work, *Towards a Philosophy of Act*, Bakhtin expresses his doubts regarding Marxism as cultural theory:

the [...] methodological sin that historical materialism commits: a methodological indiscrimination of what is given and what is set as a task, of what is and what ought to be (1993, 20)

The Marxism trap consists in placing at the same level two worlds that do not intercommunicate: the valid world of theory and of theoretized culture, and the once-ocurrent Being-event of life.

However the first stage of Bakhtin's thought -Voloshinov and Medvedev's books- reclaims dialectical materialistic principles. It should be pointed out that the critique of intellectual relativism by the formalists was shared also by the official Marxists. The result of this common concern can be seen in his *Freudianism*, in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* and in *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship*, three studies that compete with the incipient linguistic school of Nicolai Marr and with the mechanistic literary sociologism of Sakulin and others. By the end of the nineteen twenties, I, should add, the political situation in Russia took a turn for the worst, toward Stalinist terror, a political reversal that claimed Bakhtin as one of its first victims. It is not surprising that Bakhtin and his Circle still could not see the need to abandon Marxist beliefs at that time, in spite of the ominous signs of dogmatism being revealed by official ideology. The fact is that the political battle had not yet been decided. This confluence with Marxism is more than a masquerade used in order to publish, as many critics believe in Russia. Bakhtin seems to explain it when he writes in 1919:

What is important for us, however, is that it (historical materialism) does accomplish its departure (from within the most abstract theoretical world and its entry into the living world of the actually performed answerable deed), and that is what constitutes its strength, the reason for its success (1993, 20).<sup>8</sup>

Returning to the abyss separating dialogism from dogmatism, Bakhtin condemns the innate tendency, contained in utopian thought, toward Monologism and, with it, the incapacity to separate its premises from those of traditional European idealism. The monistic principle of rationalism, that is to say, the affirmation of the unity of being, is transformed in idealist thought and in dogmatic thinking into the principle of the unity of consciousness. And the unity of consciousness which now substitutes the unity of being, will unavoidably change into the unity of a single consciousness, regardless of what metaphysical form it may acquire (consciousness in Kant; absolute I in Fichte; Absolute Spirit in Hegel; normative consciousness in Scheler; or class consciousness in official Marxism). But opposite to such a general single consciousness one finds the plurality of real individual consciousnesses. From the point of view of the general consciousness, the plurality of consciousnesses is accidental and superfluous. All that is true is part of the unique context of the consciousness in general and lacks individuality. The individuality that distinguishes one consciousness from the other lacks cognitive relevance since it involves the psychic organization and the limited nature of the human being. In fact, error is the only principle of individualization of which idealism and dogmatism are capable. For the dogmatics, all that is true will fit within the boundaries of one single consciousness and, in principle, one single consciousness and one single mouth are sufficient to contain and fully express all cognition; for this reason there is no need to have a multitude of consciousnesses. Nevertheless, Bakhtin point out:

the single and unified consciousness is by no means an inevitable consequence of the concept of a unified truth. It is quite possible to imagine and postulate an unified truth that requires a plurality of consciousnesses, one that cannot in principle be fitted into the bounds of a single consciousness, one that is, so to speak, by its very nature *full of event potential* and is born at a point of contact among various consciousnesses (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 81)

This is the point where Bakhtin departs from the official Marxism as well as from the vulgar utopia and the great European rationalist tradition. A departure which will become a principle generating, a new way of thinking that is both old and rigorously new<sup>9</sup>. Let us examine three central problems of his thinking, focusing on the ideological sign, the aesthetic and science.



## *The ideological sign*

The foundation of each criticism, namely the criticism of relativism and that of authoritarian dogmatism, is based on the differentiation from types of possible relationships in the world. These are grouped by Voloshinov-Bakhtin into three main types of relationship: 1) relationship among objects; 2) relationship between subject and object; 3) and relationship among subjects (individual, personal relations: dialogic relations among utterances, ethical relations, and so forth). To explain his concept of dialogism he uses the following quotation from Marx:

The essence of man is not an abstraction inherent in each separate individual. In its reality it is the aggregate of social relationships (*Freudianism*, 15).

Scientific currents in line with relativism and dogmatism have depersonalized and reified the latter type of relationship which constitutes the object of human sciences or, as Bakhtin would say, ideological sciences. Bakhtin's rebellion against relativism and dogmatism begins first of all with his rejection of the reification that the ideological object has been forced to undergo, because such a reification would break up the dialogic process in total disregard for the specific character of the subject, for its totality and answerability, and for the inexhaustible meaning of an utterance which is by nature inconclusive and open-ended.

For this reason, Bakhtin directs his criticism towards the conception of the ideological object as it appears in the various currents of the ideological science. There the ideological sign is reduced to a simple thing (reified), to a physical (as in materialist mechanicism) or natural (as in naturalist positivism) body, or to an instrument of production (as in the utilitarian positivism or in certain Marxist currents, such a structuralist Marxism). Things and instruments of production, however, do not express or reflect anything for they lack meaning. Today, the most widely spread version of the ideological sign offers the same reified profile in all the areas of human science, be it a consumer good, an object of pleasure or of suffering. A consumer item possesses an external purpose and for this reason its organization and his physical form are fashioned to that purpose.

The ideological sign is for Bakhtin a hybrid of specific material reality and meaning. Regarding the specific material reality, the world of pure and atemporal forms is too small. With regard to meaning, it is advisable to explain the term in Bakhtin words: "With meaning I give answers to questions. Anything that does not answer a question is devoid of sense for us" (*Speech, Genres and Other Late Essays*, 145). This means that the world of sense cannot be found outside the world of the dialogue, of communication and understanding. To what extent can meaning be discovered and commented upon? Bakhtin asks. Only by means of

another meaning -is his reply- It is only possible to have a relative rationalization of the meaning (in the scientific analysis) or an in depth exploration by means of another meaning (in the philosophical-artistic interpretation). The interpretation of the senses can be not scientific -no with the meaning which this term carries today-, but it can be fully cognitive. Therefore, if the image of the ideological sign could be restored in its material integrity and in its meaning, we will be able to perceive it in its full dimension and, therefore, to receive it according to its rightful evaluation. Only when free from the pessimism that comes with the fragmentary vision of the sign and of its ideological consequences, that is to say, from relativism and authoritarian dogmatism, we can finally look back into the past.

Only from these premises we will be able to understand the three fundamental types of ideological exchanges: ethical, aesthetical, and cognitive exchange. Here Bakhtin takes up again the classical Kantian division, which has prompted Todorov to affirm his Kantian roots. Let us examine the question of Bakhtin's relationship to Kant and Hegel and consequently the problem of aesthetics.

### *Formal Aesthetics*

The arguments in support of Kant's influence on Bakhtin certainly do not stop there (especially in the article "The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art"). Further argument in favor of Kant, and one that more than any other has misled many scholars, is his vindication of formal aesthetics. In opposition to Schelling's and Hegel's aesthetics of content, he reaffirms Kant's and Herbart's formal approach. Of course, he rejects any relationship between the formal method (specifically the one proposed by the formalists) and formal aesthetics. In Bakhtin's view, formalism is based on the aesthetics of the material, which is unable to account either for the content or for the architecture of the creation. Moreover, formalists tend to confuse the aesthetic object with the external work.

With regard to Hegel, the most important difference that Bakhtin finds between the ideological and the artistic object is the total integration of meaning and the concrete material reality which are given in art but not in other ideological systems, and has that relationship more deeply and organically. The total integration of meaning and matter, translates, without doubt, the Hegelian concept that "art has to harmonize these two sides [content as idea and form as configuration of sensuous material] and bring them into a free reconciled totality" (*Introduction to Aesthetics*, 70). But from this premise each thinker draws a different conclusion. For Bakhtin, the integration of meaning and matter cannot blur the distinct aspects of the artistic object: namely the ideological content, the material (verbal material in literature), the aesthetic architecture, the image of author and the role of the reader. Hegel, obsessed with proving the presence of the absolute idea in art, tears dawn and monologizes this diversity which happens to

be the one that give life to the work of art. By conceiving the artistic beauty as a representation of the absolute -not an interpersonalized but rather a monologized absolute- Hegel's main concern is to show how the parts are separated from this concept, how the content of art is formed by the idea which is represented under a specific and sensible form. In short, there are only two parts: the idea and its sensible representation and its product, which can only be one, a aesthetics of the content, in other words, of the idea.

Returning for a moment to the subject of Kant's influence in Bakhtin's aesthetics, the best criterion in dealing with this question is to pay attention to Bakhtin's attitude towards the central core of Kant's thought: that is the transcendental method, by which one thinks of time and space as *a priori* forms of sensible knowledge and reason. Bakhtin's method is the very opposite, for it conceives time and space as indispensable dimensions of any signic experience. In fact, without concrete time-space expression (Bakhtin would say *chronotopic*) not even the most abstract thought will ever be possible. For Bakhtin there are no *a priori* forms, but rather material meaningful dimensions of the ideological utterance (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 258).

Bakhtin's notion is quite far from Kant's principle "The beautiful is that which pleases universally without a concept" (*Critique of Judgement*, § 9). For Bakhtin, rather, aesthetics is not the domain of the free play of the imagination, where it is possible to find pure forms of "conformity to law without a law; and a subjective agreement of the imagination and understanding -without such an objective agreement as there is when the representation is referred to a definite concept of an object" (*Critique of Judgment*, § 22). It is, instead, a discourse that is characterized by its receptivity and its links to life. Life, meaning in this case knowledge and fact, is inside and outside of art. The aesthetic form transfers the reality of life to another plane where it rearranges it in a new way by individualizing, materializing, isolating and giving it a totality without canceling in it that which is known and valued. The aesthetic activity does not create a new reality (unlike knowledge that creates nature and unlike fact, which creates society). Art elevates pre-existing reality of knowledge and fact. And this is what the goodness and generosity of aesthetics is all about: it is as if nothing were ignored.

In art, we recognize and remember everything. In knowledge we do not. Precisely because of this, the element of novelty or of liberty has such a great meaning in art. Moreover the act of recognizing and remembering, however, endows the particular with meaning allowing it to surpass its materiality to come part of the unity of culture: an isolated meaning would be a *contradictio in adiecto*.

And, whereas in Kant there are no rules for perceiving beauty, nor a science of beauty, Bakhtin believes it possible to overcome the methodological discordances in the study of aesthetics, not so much by creating a new method, but by providing philosophical bases, in a systematical fashion, to key concepts which will enable us to understand the phenomenon and originality of art within the unity of human culture. In addition, he believes that poetics, systematically defined

must be aesthetics of the artistic verbal creation, in close dependence on general aesthetics. That means that modern literary science only needs to acquire a philosophical foundation in order to solve its current antinomies.

### *Science*

Bakhtin's confidence in reconstituting a literary science without abandoning the old method or without any other effort than what is needed to prop up the conceptual foundations of literary theory, appears today rather naive. He himself was already pointing out in 1924 that until now "researchers feel confident only when they are moving on the very periphery of verbal art" (1990:261). Almost 70 years have passed since this statement was made and today's neopositivists are reviving the factual study of the literary phenomenon precisely at its periphery. Scientific atomism still offers a good deal of resistance in abandoning its positions. On the other hand, hypostatic visions floating on atemporality are converting linguistics, which should not go further than its status as an auxiliary discipline, into a scientific paradigm, and are even turning it into the original trunk out of which poetics has issued. The orientation towards the material (in our case, verbal) of the literary object is in both cases (positivism and antipositivism) what constitutes a barrier for the type of investigation aimed at exploring the interaction among the various facets of the aesthetic sign. This orientation towards the material creates in positivist thought an affinity with the empirical science, a current that at present represents a major trend in literary studies. The minor current is also oriented towards the material in as far as it is constituted by pure forms, it receives strength from its affinity with the alternative scientific model in the domain of the ideological sciences: in other words from its antipositivistic strand.

Bakhtin's dialogical method has been, until now, contumaciously reduced to one of these two scientific approaches: positivism and, above all, antipositivism. There are even attempts being made at reconciling the dialogic spirit with the various alternative variants of the old bipolar option, namely the post-structuralistic alternatives originating from radical relativism.

In short, those who try to reduce Bakhtin's ideas to already known scientific paradigms, which at result are to a certain extent the dominant ones, are ignoring the profound meaning of his contributions. And it is not a question of having been a precursor in pragmatics or semiotics, not even of having offered another vision, no matter how revolutionary, of the novel or of literary genres. It is a question, rather, of the most elaborated proposition of a new paradigm known to us: which we can safely call the paradigm of the full meaning. This paradigm, unlike that of the positivists, antipositivistics and post-structuralists, originates from a radical criticism of relativism and of its direct opposite, totalitarianism. His criticism presupposes a new attitude towards the truth, towards empirism, idealism and dogmatism. His paradigm founded on a conception of the ideological

sign that does not follow the present tradition, postulates a type of aesthetics that surpasses all reductions to material or to content which have marked the various aesthetic proposals up to the present. Bakhtin proposes, in essence, another model of ideological science, which has entered into struggle with the two basic prevailing models as well as with the attempts to find alternatives to these models from a radical relativist position. In short, we are dealing with a system of thought which, in spite of its thematic diversity, has underlying profound unity, it offers a new method, dialogism, and a new horizon for the ideological investigation, the horizon of the Great Time.

## Notas

<sup>1</sup> In this respect G. S. Morson and C. Emerson have said: "He has been described as structuralist and poststructuralist, Marxist and post-Marxist, speech act theorist, sociolinguist, liberal, pluralist, mystic, vitalist, Christian, and materialist" (Morson and Emerson, 4). K. Hirschkop (195-212) provides different data for the different interpretations of Bakhtin. For a broader perspective of the debate on the readings of Bakhtin see Vauthier 2007.

<sup>2</sup> K. Clark and M. Holquist have given an accurate characterization: "Neo-kantianism was a widespread phenomenon that contained under its umbrella several philosophies that were highly varied in their concerns. Kant was the starting point for them all, but the aspects of Kant's work on which each Neo-Kantian philosophy chose to focus, the language it used, and the answers it provided were different" (57).

<sup>3</sup> N. Perlina writes that: "One can find Bakhtin in Buber and Buber in Bakhtin in every philosophical premise of their writing" (26).

<sup>4</sup> This interpretation has prompted a division of Bakhtin's thinking into markedly delimited stages as recognized by: "A great watershed, of course, divides the essays and philosophical works of the early 1920's, written in the pre-Leningrad years, and the writings of the later 1920's (including the Voloshinov and Medvedev works)" (Shukman 140).

<sup>5</sup> In *Marxism and the Philosophy of the Language*, they explain that: "the conditions of verbal communication, its forms, and its methods of differentiation are dictated by social and economic prerequisites of a given period" (123). So they distinguish four possible tendencies in the dynamic interrelationship of reported and reporting speech: authoritarian dogmatism (in Middle Ages), rationalistic dogmatism (in the 17th and 18th centuries), realistic and critical individualism (end of the 18th and 19th centuries) and relativistic individualism (the present period). These four tendencies are also the conditions of all type of ideological exchange and ideological creation. Relativism is the weak phase of individualism; the strong one is the critical individualism in the 19th century. Relativism weakens the individual authority and its truth exists only within the boundaries of the individual. Since each individual has, or can have his own truth.

<sup>6</sup> V. Kozhinov, "Algunas palabras acerca de la vida y la obra de M.M. Bajtín", prologue to the Spanish edition of Bakhtin (1984), *Problemas de la poética de Dostoievski* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1986), 7-13.

<sup>7</sup> Even Todorov (1986) pointed out Holquist and Clark's success in the purely historic-documentary sphere, but called attention to their relative failure in the ideological interpretation on Bakhtin.

<sup>8</sup> B. Kagarlitsky, leader of the current non-communist left wing opposition, indicates in his book *The Thinking Reed*, the influence which Bakhtin had on the clandestine circles of the opposition which from the left-wing position fought the bureaucratic regime, by putting forward democratic program and keeping up, at the same time, their criticism of eastern relativism.

<sup>9</sup> It is old because this kind of thinking has its roots among others in Socrates, The Greek theatre, Dante, Saint Francis of Assis, Dostoevsky and Marx. It is new because of its recent and not very clearly formulated its expansion has been hindered by the present currents of thought, all of them monological in nature.

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